

In Search of Voices

Questions, comments, and opinions on architecture
and design in late 20th century America.

by
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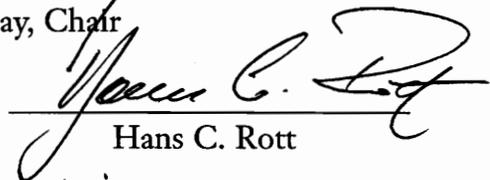
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Abstract

Through a series of examinations of new and renovated buildings, interviews with architects, clients, and planners, and studies of design-related issues at a wide range of scales, the author seeks to develop a critical voice through which to contribute significantly to public and professional discussions of design across the nation.

Dedication

To Pat, for countless sacrifices and unflagging support.

Acknowledgments

During my years at VPI, I was privileged to know many faculty whose commitment to their beliefs and compassion for students were models of inspiration. For their challenges, insights, and kindnesses, I want to thank Olivio Ferrari, Sal Choudhury, Guenther Lehmann, Robert Dunay, Greg Hunt, Hans Rott, Gene Egger, Dennis Kilper, Donna Dunay, Rudy Hunziker, and Leonard Currie. And beyond the confines of Blacksburg, many thanks to the editors who have had the good sense to give me a little work.

Introduction

Modern journalism is full of voices – voices that run the gamut from critical to reportorial, coolly objective to passionately opinionated. This is no less true for the architectural journalist than for other word-smiths whose work appears in newspapers or magazines, be they sports writers, investigative specialists, or reporters covering city hall.

My own career as a journalist had its beginnings on an aggressive staff of aspiring reporters who toiled for the sheer pleasure of it at *The Daily Tar Heel*, the student-run newspaper at the University of North Carolina. But at a campus paper in the mid-1970s, there was a surfeit of breaking news. Mostly we wrote about cutthroat campus politics, arcane changes in school policy, and the rich array of characters who invariably populate a college town like Chapel Hill. Later I worked part-time at the local town paper and then landed my first full-time job in Charlottesville. During those formative years, the voice in my writing was constrained by tight deadlines and a strict dedication to principles of basic newswriting. Stories were limited to the basic facts and direct observation. Opinion was strictly off-limits.

New opportunities arose in Fort Lauderdale, where I joined a thriving daily paper that could afford to hire a variety of specialists. In one corner of the newsroom was a staff of five writers who did nothing but craft feature stories on what seemed a wonderfully unlimited range of topics. I was fortunate enough to become one of them. There I

enjoyed more freedom and infinitely more column inches to fill – not to mention an editor who stressed good writing. We enjoyed a luxury, namely time, to develop stories in more depth than the daily news writers, so in many cases the narrative voice became more authoritative, more informed, and more colorful. And the writing got better.

After spending four years in Blacksburg pursuing a longstanding interest in architecture, I veered straight back into the arena of print journalism. First stop: Hartford, Connecticut, where I had written to propose a new position for an architecture critic at the very moment that the paper was seeking to hire one. There I was anointed the resident expert on a subject others knew very little about. My task was to penetrate the crusty academic shell around the subject of architecture and find ways to bring its lofty ideals (and sometimes lofty language) to a level that could be understood by a lay audience.

At the newspaper I often played the role of reporter, adopting a posture one step removed from the subject and relying on objective observation and information-gathering to tell the story. Opinion in those articles was limited to the material bracketed by quotation marks and containing the voices of others. Thus, in a story that told how oblivious Americans were to Le Corbusier on the 100th anniversary of his birth, it was the voice of critic Kenneth Frampton which attacked American planners' "cannibalistic" view of Corbu.

Writing for the newspaper also offered the opportunity – accompanied by the clear label of "opinion" – to attack bad decisions and lobby for better ones. As a contemporary critic, I had license to make strongly negative remarks about any building that deserved it, not through gratuitous criticism but honest commentary. If a building was horrible, as a newspaper critic I was free to say so, simply because a newspaper doesn't require an architect's endorsement or cooperation to publish stories. The relationship between writer and subject isn't always so unclouded at other types of publications.

At *Progressive Architecture* magazine, the rules changed again. Critical remarks were often encouraged in the brief essays that accompanied the photo layouts, although if the criticism was too sharp the architect might telephone the author to complain (as Philip Johnson did on at least one occasion). But, in the late 1980s, the harshest criticism of the American trade journals was mostly implied: the worst buildings simply never got published and the best ones were generally praised with a smattering of soft-pedaled reservation. This approach tended to typify the magazines' deference to the "star architects." To do otherwise would have risked chasing the most sought-after designers over to the competition.

Returning to Virginia in 1989 to launch a new design magazine was viewed by me and others as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. My

fundamental charge as editor of *Inform* was to create a magazine that would raise public awareness of good design. How I did that was my choice. But with that task came another change in voice. Because of *Inform's* intent to reach a general audience, an editor could not assume that his readers possessed any background in the subject. So the voice became instructive – careful to approach the right issues, but without rising over the heads of novices or insulting the intelligence of the thousands of professionals who also received the magazine. In a way, this narrative voice returned to that of the newspaperman, although the freedom to be openly critical of buildings was constrained by the fact that the major backers of the magazine were the same architects who were the most likely targets of the criticism.

During my tenure at *Inform*, I also served as a contributing editor to two national magazines. The articles I wrote for *Architecture* magazine were developed in essentially the same context as those I had written earlier for *P/A*. On the other hand, articles appearing in *Historic Preservation* (now renamed *Preservation*) were written to appeal to a general reader, and so the style was less academic, the tone less critical, and the jargon nonexistent.

Contained in this volume are 25 articles of mine that appeared in print between 1987 and 1997. In order to vary the pace and texture of the collection, I chose not to present the pieces in chronological order. Except for minor adjustments, most of them are reprinted verbatim as first published. On occasion the lengthier manuscript submitted before editing is included here, especially if significant passages were cut to meet the often-rigid space limitations of magazine layouts. I should add that each of these articles represents a single point in time in my own understanding of architecture and how best to communicate it. Much as a designer evolves in his thinking, so too does a writer. Today I might take issue with some of the remarks reprinted here.

What I hope the student of architecture may find of value in this collection is twofold. First, as readers encounter the shift in voice that occurs from one article to another, I hope they become more attuned to those transitions and can more easily recognize them when they appear in print (or, increasingly, on the video monitor). Second, I believe this collection voices an optimism about architecture. Part of the crisis experienced by the architectural profession in late 20th century America is that the general public has a one-dimensional image of architects. This group of essays and articles illuminates the enormous breadth of a profession that holds great potential to serve the interests of a diverse public. That is the strength of architecture. That is its beauty. And therein lies its relevance in a world that forever seems to be flying out of control, rather than seeking solutions through the discipline inherent in good design.

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Buildings of Spirit

Japanese architect Tadao Ando designs buildings with feeling and sensitivity by manipulating light.

No one in America builds quite like Tadao Ando, a Japanese architect who designs with light the way other architects use masonry and wood. This quiet but forceful man has made a name for himself internationally by forsaking the temptation to capitalize on his fame and insisting instead on creating buildings that communicate to people's primal senses and collective memories.

"Architecture today is pretty monotonous," Ando says. "I believe that architecture should include culture, regional culture, local culture. And I want to express my architecture in that context."

Speaking through interpreter George Kunihiro, a New York architect, Ando was interviewed in New Haven, where he is a visiting professor at Yale University's School of Architecture. Ando says that to look at the superficial qualities of his work, one sees building materials used in a way that's typical of Western countries. "But when you experience them, you sense their spiritual quality," he says.

His buildings are created in the spirit of *wabi*, a cultural idea that elevates unostentatious refinement and seeks beauty in coarse, plain materials. Among his house designs are many reinterpretations of Japanese tea-ceremony architecture developed in the 16th century. That spirit is reinforced especially in the treatment of light. Shafts of sunlight, for example, penetrate the roofs of his houses and pass along pristine walls in a chronological trajectory. He calls them "houses for

light-watching.” This emphasis on the passage of time, reinforced by views into enclosed courtyards, creates contemplative spaces.

Ando’s attempts to retain a connection to Japanese tradition take many forms. “There is the visible tradition of the sort Michael Graves uses – the connection between post-modernism and classical architecture. And there is the invisible aspect as well to tradition. It’s this invisible connection, something that accumulates in one’s memories, one’s experiences through growing up, that comes from heritage.”

Often in his buildings Ando opts for experience over convenience. His design for terraced housing along the precipitous slope of Mount Rokko in Kobe encourages residents to climb stairs – up to 10 flights of them – to get home. “Although an elevator is provided, I want the people to climb the 10 stories on foot,” says Ando. “The way the landscape is revealed or hidden and the effect of light and shadow were carefully studied in the design of the stairway in order to make the climb enjoyable. The panorama expands as one climbs.”

Ando, 46, finds great humor in his distinction as visiting faculty member at Yale because of his own distaste for formal education. While still a teenager, he discovered that architectural education in Japan amounted mostly to a lot of reading. “I thought, if that’s the case, then I can do it myself. I don’t need to go through an educational system. So in six months I read four years’ worth of books.”

His self-education from 1962 to 1970 included extended periods of travel to study buildings in Europe, the United States, and Africa. In 1969, he established his architectural practice in Osaka, which remains his home.

From the beginning, Ando’s stoic architecture drew the respect of his peers. His first building commission, the Azuma Row House, received the annual award of the Architectural Institute of Japan. His is an architecture of primordial parts: earthwork, wall, courtyard, floor, roof, and room. It is an architecture that bows to nature, which is Ando’s way of trying to compensate for the loss of the pantheistic relation to nature that once pervaded Japanese domestic life. In a 1982 essay he addressed the changes that swept Japan after World War II, observing that “overly dense urban and suburban populations made it impossible to preserve a feature that was formerly most characteristic of Japanese residential architecture: intimate connection with nature and openness to the natural world.”

Intimate is the key word here, because Ando encloses nature in his buildings. “Such things as light and wind only have meaning when they are introduced inside a house in a form cut off from the outside



Fig. 1. Tadao Ando

world,” he says. This is not the tamed, artificial nature of house plants and hanging ferns that so often are used to counter otherwise sterile conditions. Instead, this is nature allowed to exert both its true volatility and subtlety, supporting the belief that the indivisible world of man and nature is constantly announced in barely perceptible ways.

In his introduction to a volume of Ando’s work recently released by *Global Architecture*, a series of monographs on important architects, critic Kenneth Frampton says Ando’s relationship to nature “seems close to the idea of *yugen* in Japanese poetry, wherein the ineffable makes itself felt in everyday life through such things as a touch of rain or a sudden unexpected breeze or a growing heaviness in the air, or the palpability of twilight or the premonition of dawn; above all, perhaps, the mist that rises from the breath in winter.”

These are among the experiences to be had in the courtyard of his Azuma Row House, where in all seasons occupants must cross an uncovered atrium to pass from the living space to the dining room, or from the ground floor to the bedrooms upstairs. Even in urban Japan, where everyday crowding and deprivation are beyond the comprehension of most Westerners, this is a challenging arrangement at best.

“I am interested in discovering what new life patterns can be extracted and developed from living under severe conditions,” Ando writes. “Furthermore, I feel that order is necessary to give life dignity. Establishing order imposes restrictions, but I believe it cultivates extraordinary things in people.”

So strong is his reputation at home for producing buildings of thoughtfulness and fine craftsmanship that Ando’s clients include other architects. Ando’s residence for architect Hirotaka Kidosaki, whose itinerant professional life prevented him from closely supervising his own house, incorporates a courtyard and terraces within the strictly contained cubical volume of the dwelling.

True to form, Ando used concrete surfaces in this house that are sensual, not forbidding. Mixed with a bluish sand, the concrete dried with a silvery finish. And the polyurethane-coated plywood molds produced walls with a satiny surface. Such quality comes with enormous effort. According to one report, 250 workers pitched in on the first-floor construction, 210 on the second, and 90 on the third – a team size that is unheard of in residential construction. Fortunately for those paying the bills, much of the labor force was made up of volunteers who simply wanted to work on one of Ando’s buildings.

In this way, Ando represents the increasingly rare breed of architect who is as involved in building as he is in design. His slow and deliberate way of producing churches, theaters, commercial buildings, and houses resists the tendency to treat buildings as simple commodities from which to reap a handsome profit.

This article first appeared in the December 5, 1987, editions of The Hartford Courant.

Little Ado About Corbu

On the 100th anniversary of his birth, the architectural genius Le Corbusier remains widely unknown and little understood.

Perhaps it is the destiny of genius to be misunderstood. For on the 100th anniversary of his birth, when we might have expected fitting tribute to one of the architectural masters of the century, the voices of praise for Le Corbusier were noticeably few.

That was the case in America, at least, when October 6 slipped past with none of the fervor that's sweeping Europe for this acknowledged master of Modern architecture. European newspapers and magazines splashed the bespectacled architect's face across their covers. France issued a Le Corbusier postage stamp. In Paris, the Pompidou Center opened its largest exhibit ever to commemorate the anniversary, outdoing in scale the ambitious spring exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery, seen by more than 87,000 visitors.

Other events were staged this year in Stockholm, Barcelona, Venice, Zurich, Frankfurt, Athens – even Ankara, Turkey, and Rio de Janeiro – while in the United States this preeminent thinker, builder, and city planner continued to suffer an enormous public relations problem. Small exhibits of his architecture and sculpture appeared at the Museum of Modern Art and the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard. Both were brief and largely overlooked. A traveling exhibit of photographs and drawings, narrow in scope and lightly publicized, made its debut October 16 at Roger Williams College in Bristol, Rhode Island.

So, particularly in light of the attention lavished on architect Mies van der Rohe during the 1986 exhibition of his work at the Museum of Modern Art, America's tribute to Le Corbusier has been paltry. Once an architect of widespread popularity, his Modernist, anti-decorative principles are now repudiated with equal vigor.

Where have you gone, Corbu?

"I would say the reactionary climate in this country is responsible for the passing over of Le Corbusier, or rather the scarcity of attention being paid him," says Kenneth Frampton, professor of architectural history at Columbia University and author of *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. Frampton attributes the oversight to the popularity of recognizable historical elements in Post-Modern architecture.

"The attitude in [American] offices is to favor this cannibalistic treatment of history," Frampton says. Indeed, the contemporary use of classical columns, porticoes, pediments, and the like run counter to the preachings of Le Corbusier, an idealist who struggled to create forms uniquely suited to modern life and building methods.

Impact felt around the globe

Often credited – along with Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, and van der Rohe – for ushering Modern architecture onto our everyday streetscapes, his impact was felt around the globe. From his houses, apartments, and public buildings in European capitals to his designs for whole cities in the world's poorest nations, Le Corbusier left a mark broader than any architect who ever lived, although he designed but one building in the United States.

With his sudden death in 1965 at age 77 while bathing along the Riviera, Le Corbusier left behind a legacy of work spanning a range from the rational, mechanistic projects of his youth to the more sensual, nature-based forms that emerged in his mature years, such as his chapel at Ronchamp, France, built in the early 1950s. Somehow, in both cases, the poet prevailed.

Born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret in the Swiss watch-making town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Corbusier developed into a young man of tremendous visual insight, recording the world around him in pencil sketches, sculpture, paintings, and words. After periods of travel and a series of brief apprenticeships, he settled in Paris in 1917. There he first used the pen name Le Corbusier, after one of his ancestors. For a time, he continued signing his paintings Jeanneret, eventually adopting Le Corbusier in all his artistic roles.

In 1923 he published the French version of *Towards a New Architecture*, translated into 18 languages and described by some critics as the most influential architecture book of the 20th century. But really it was more about modern culture. In it, he revealed the sources of

his inspiration outside the field of architecture: works of engineering, American grain elevators, and objects of motion such as ocean liners, airplanes, and automobiles. These were the things that served as visual prototypes for Le Corbusier's new aesthetic of architecture, and he served as its chief evangelist.

A 'machine for living'

His vision produced buildings that evoked a lyricism many architects strive for but don't attain. One of his early achievements, the 1930 Villa Savoye near Paris, exemplified his "five points of architecture," which were freestanding supports (he called them *pilotis*), a free plan, terrace roof, free façade, and ribbon windows. While none of these elements was invented by Le Corbusier, he synthesized them into a single organism or, as he called it, "a machine for living."

His use of horizontal bands of windows across an entire façade was an innovation allowed by his experiments with moving the supporting structural members to the interior of the house and away from the walls. Flat roofs, built at various heights, created a place for outdoor living spaces and rooftop terraces, features he incorporated into even his large-scale housing projects. These were amenities, he believed, that all classes deserved.

His social conscience led Le Corbusier to tackle theoretical designs for entire cities, in which he believed he could conquer the problems of inadequate housing, traffic congestion, foul air, and lack of open space. The message was seductive and taken to heart, especially among the generation of architects who studied and practiced just after World War II.

Le Corbusier's ideas on city planning were widely appropriated. Even today, many blame him for the modern city's ills. "His view of the city and what the city ought to be was destructive," says Vincent Scully, professor of art at Yale University. Scully criticized in particular Le Corbusier's introduction of freeways through the city center in his theoretical Radiant City, a plan that also created separate levels for cars and pedestrians. "His work was done with a painter's freedom. It did exactly as it pleased," Scully says. "But architecture is different. It relates to the world of the city, the action-world that we inhabit. And that kind of pictorial freedom is destructive to the city as a whole."

Still, the popular turnabout on Le Corbusier's urban theories does little to detract from the contributions he amassed, including:

- His struggle to discover Le Modulor, the ideal scale and proportions for humans. He believed this system could be transferred into buildings' dimensions to be in harmony with the people who used them.
- His search for new ideals for architecture and a redefinition of its social mission, beginning with a design in 1914-15 for low-cost

Dom-ino houses (which created a pattern that could be carried on infinitely, like dominoes) and culminating in the Unite d'Habitation of 1952 in Marseilles, which incorporated rooftop recreational facilities and an ingenious staggering of floor plans that allowed each apartment a double-height living room.

■ His planning of Chandigarh, the capital of the Indian state of Punjab, and design of the principal buildings there.

Only one building in U.S.

Despite his remarkable international influence, Le Corbusier managed to build only once in the United States – his Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts built at Harvard in 1963. Why wasn't he more successful in America? "When he came here in '35, it was at the low ebb of the Depression. And that was not an opportune moment for Corbusier to get commissioned for the kinds of things that he expected – skyscrapers and housing projects," says Mardges Bacon, a Trinity College associate professor of fine arts and American studies who recently received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study Le Corbusier's 1935 visit to the United States.

"It would have been highly unusual for an American government housing administrator to hire a foreign architect, a Swiss-French architect, to do large housing projects in America during the 1930s. That was something Corbusier didn't understand very well, and he was very bitter about the lack of commissions."

Rice University architecture professor Richard Ingersoll is organizing a 1989 exhibit on Le Corbusier's relationship to the United States, an event some predict will be the largest American tribute to him for many years. Ingersoll insists Le Corbusier was too contradictory a character to be understood by America, and so his legacy may long be a matter of discussion and debate.

"He left us two things: one good and one bad," Ingersoll says. "The good are people like John Hejduk, Peter Eisenman, and others like them who have been able to thrive on his formal investigations and formal research. The bad effect is the legacy he left for planners, the Radiant City mentality, which allowed in the '60s a ruthless attitude toward urban redevelopment. I don't hold him personally responsible, but many planners and institutions saw fit to use his ideas as a basis for what they did, whether or not he was correctly interpreted.

"But, third, Le Corbusier had a range of investigations, of interests, which architects today are not willing to accept. And I think his lifetime research should lead to questions that architects are not asking. The question of what to do with the automobile in the city is still the most vital question of urbanism. If we accept his answer we are doomed, but we should not avoid asking the questions."

This article first appeared in the October 21, 1987, editions of The Hartford Courant.

A Monument for Media

**In his House of Books, Images, and Sounds,
Mario Botta reconstructs the continuity of an urban plan.**

Forever cast in the shadow of neighboring Lyons, the satellite town of Villeurbanne, France, has long suffered an uneasy self-identity. Its reputation as one of the 15 secondary cities that comprise the *communauté urbaine* revolving around Lyons has occasionally left it wanting a prominence of its own. Little wonder, then, that the 1983 campaign to erect a new city library took the form of an international competition, with the winning result by Swiss architect Mario Botta certain to enhance the city's renown.

Even the early competition schemes revealed the purity of Botta's architectural language and his clarity of vision, manifested at Villeurbanne by a boldly striped façade cleaved at its center by a symmetrical slot. The power of the image was all-important to Botta, who sought to create for Villeurbanne a symbol, a kind of flag unfurled along the main highway to and from Lyons. (In the end, the building's profile was so strong that it became its own logo, imprinted on small square badges worn by library staff for identification.)

Botta's charge was to create a library for the 1990s, a multimedia institution to be known as the House of Books, Images, and Sounds. But in addition to providing an adequate container for the library's collection of books, magazines, videotapes, videodisks, CDs, and lithographs, Botta faced awkward site constraints. The given site was a gap between two existing buildings, one starkly Modern and the other

flamboyantly eclectic. Their clashing styles were one problem; more troubling still were their severely nonaligned façades. “My goal was to reconstruct the continuity of the urban plan,” Botta says, a notion that began to suggest an organization for the overall project.

First he introduced the main body of the building, an infill element that, in plan, takes the form of a narrow parallelogram. From the front of that volume Botta extended what he calls the “visual façade,” a wedgelike form rendered in stripes of limestone in the final construction. The alignment of those two forms created an axis along which a series of elements – lobby, reception area, staircase, atrium, and semi-circular volume – are placed.

It is the circular atrium, rising like a stepped cone to a narrow lantern on the roof, that casts a spell over visitors to the House of Books. The same space makes this building a watershed project for Botta. In his words: “There is a strength of light here that I never experienced before in my buildings. For the first time, I succeeded in playing with and controlling the light. For me, that was a departure point.”

The opportunity to discuss the atrium is, for Botta, the opportunity to invoke the themes of his architectural forebears – Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn. “In the darkness, there is no architecture. Without light, there is no space,” Botta says. His tendency to wax poetic is understandable after one has experienced the circular lightwell, a soaring space that derives rhythm and scale from the segmented drums that compose it and the openings cut into them. Other elements within the building are designed in deference to the lightwell, so that at every point in the library the curved atrium wall functions as a common orientation point.

The governing idea was that visitors entering from the urban space would, with one glimpse of the lightwell, comprehend the whole building. On one level, it’s a conscious effort to avoid the trap of Modern architecture, whose interior spaces, in Botta’s words, too often become a labyrinth of corridors requiring signs to direct building users.

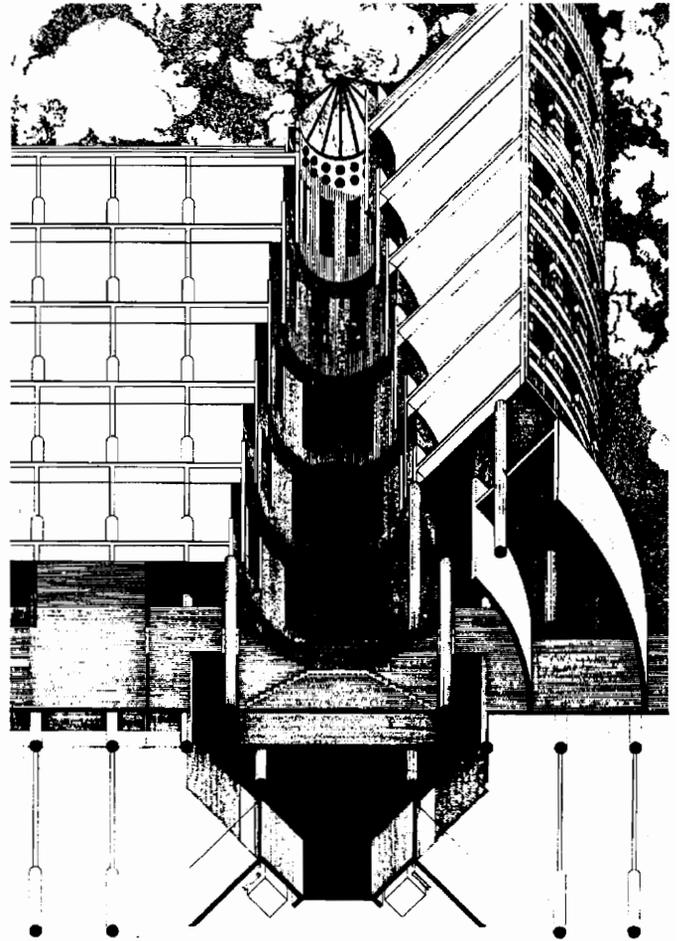


Fig. 2. Axonometric cross-section, House of Books.

His goal here was to be self-evident. Likewise, it was Botta's intention that the façade reveal something about the building's interior space. "The hole on the inside is actually an answer to what is on the façade," he says. "It's exactly the opposite of the Post-Modernists, the people who make façades and have nothing in the back. Here you not only have a façade, but you have a series of events one after the other."

Botta explains the semicircular form in the rear as a response to the open and somewhat unsightly asphalt courtyard behind the library. Placed along the library's axis, the curved form begins to uplift the left-over urban space that functions primarily as a parking lot today. Interestingly, it wasn't until the external form of the building was largely decided upon that Botta began to consider in detail the placement of functions within it. "I didn't want the function to determine the image," he says. "So I preferred to answer to the city with shapes and forms, and then put the required functions into the given floors."

As one of the *grands projets* designed and built under partial sponsorship of the French government, the House of Books received national attention in October when President François Mitterrand delivered its formal dedication. Yet even before the much-promoted public inauguration, membership at the library had, in six months, exceeded the goal for the first year of operation, an accomplishment that delights the library's administration. Lectures, films, and small-scale performances now presented at the library are the foundation of a wide-ranging cultural program that has sprung up in Villeurbanne. Which seems to suggest that within the context of the city's efforts to enrich its cultural life and extend its accessibility to all residents, the completion of the House of Books, Images, and Sounds has been of vital importance.

This article first appeared in the March 1989 issue of Progressive Architecture.

New South, New Square

Cesar Pelli anchors the corner of Tryon and Trade with a civically responsible NationsBank tower.

Over the past 20 years, Charlotte, North Carolina, has rapidly ascended from trucking capital to New South financial center. But one quality of the burgeoning city has remained constant: the importance of The Square. Unlike civic spaces in most American cities and towns, however, The Square in Charlotte is not a green space for pause and celebration, but an intersection of two prominent streets, Tryon and Trade, that forms the spiritual heart of the city. It was once a crossing point for two Indian trails.

High-rise offices on three corners of the intersection pull back from the street or incorporate small plazas that bear little resemblance to one another. Unlike these precedents, the new NationsBank complex, designed by Cesar Pelli & Associates, accepts the historic crossing and its intensive pedestrian activity. To complicate matters, the original scheme comprised the bank tower, a hotel (later scrapped), and a performing arts center – each begging for a corner address.

Pelli's solution was to create a new public space in the heart of the block and funnel people toward it across a landscaped plaza from Tryon and Trade. Once inside the glass-enclosed courtyard, dubbed Founders Hall, the bank tower and performing arts center are easily reached. Shops, restaurants, a theater ticket office, and an executive health club surround the marble-paved atrium, injecting activity into the site and providing a backdrop for performances and receptions.

Adding the stores and restaurants was Pelli's idea, but the bustle they generate fits easily into NationsBank President Hugh McColl's vision for the bank as a stimulus for "uptown" Charlotte.

The bank headquarters is the centerpiece of the project and the city's dynamic new symbol. Sixty stories tall and 1.2 million-square-foot large, it easily dwarfs the surrounding office buildings in Charlotte's core. The tower's solid, Sullivanesque base is clad in dark granite, with glass doors set behind columns of green Vermont marble. From this heavy base, four gracefully bowed façades spring skyward into a slender tower with detailed, light-granite piers that accentuate its verticality. Notches cut from the corners of the shaft lead to setbacks at the top that culminate in a tiered forest of anodized aluminum rods. Unlike many building tops that seem arbitrarily plopped on a shaft, this crown seems to grow out of the lower stories' rhythmic piers. "It is one of the things that consumed most of my time," says Pelli, who considers the skyscraper one of his best.

Pelli carried the grand scale of the tower through to the bank's lobby, which exudes a sense of civic grandeur while stopping short of ostentation. Three murals by North Carolina painter Ben Long, all on the scale of Depression-era works, encourage the perception that this is public space containing public-inspired art. Sectional vaults suspended from the building's framework in the main lobby make for an unconventional, but refreshing, sculpted ceiling that lends brightness to the lobby, even on the gloomiest of days.

From the lobby, one can proceed to Founders Hall, which also can be entered directly from the plaza. More architectural than the typical suburban mall, less contrived than the festival marketplace, Founders Hall was designed to catalyze street life. At its south end, a circular platform provides a permanent stage for concerts, with built-in spotlights and sound equipment. Beefy columns clearly define the shoebox form of the space while shouldering the load of arching trusses that support the soaring glass roof. The hall exudes the character of an indoor park, reminiscent of Pelli's expansive winter garden at Battery Park City in New York.

What made the program for this site so unique all along is the incorporation of an ambitious theater complex called the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center. Wedged onto a narrow strip of land east of Founders Hall, the center testifies to Pelli's skill at solving architectural Chinese puzzles. The architect wove two theaters, a rehearsal hall, lobbies, dressing rooms, and other back-of-the-house functions into the narrow, 46,000-square-foot site by staggering and stacking the spaces. At street level, top billing is given to the 2,100-seat Belk Theater, whose lobby adorns Tryon Street with a lively curved glass-and-steel façade that upstages the somber bank exterior. A wall of

doors leads inside to the “parterre level” lobby, where patrons make their way around a three-level rotunda that siphons light from a glass dome overhead. Stairs pushed into the corner of the lobby offer routes to the orchestra and upper deck, which rises high and narrow in the manner of European opera houses.

“Here we tried to bring back the pageantry and ritual of going to the theater,” says Mitchell Hirsch, design team leader for the performing arts center. While the theater’s narrow proportions evoke a sense of intimacy, its domed ceiling containing 2,000 points of fiber-optic light lend it a sense of whimsy.

The more utilitarian Booth Playhouse, a 450-seat theater with exposed catwalks and concrete-block walls, is positioned on the balcony level of Founders Hall. While its lobby is easy to reach, its location seems just as likely to confuse first-time visitors. Indeed, if there is a weakness to Pelli’s scheme, it is an incomplete resolution of the site’s complex web of circulation. The roots of that complexity are many: a building site that slopes the height of an entire floor from front to rear; the need to stack the elements of the performing arts center; and the undeniable precedent of a second-story skywalk system that provides a kind of tunnel system connecting downtown buildings.

Although Pelli deftly tucked a smorgasbord of program elements onto the site, the multitude of theater and tower entrances, circuitous walkways, and changing levels steps over the boundary between richness of experience and loss of control. In addition, an awkward competition exists between the delightful plaza on The Square and Founders Hall. Like two sisters vying for the same beau, each wants to be the center of attention. Ideally, the plaza should perform a secondary role and let the atrium play the lead, and in functional terms, that may be the case. In a formal sense, however, they are too much alike.

From an urban perspective, these are minor drawbacks. The NationsBank complex is a phenomenal asset to Charlotte and a consummately responsible work of architecture. And, because it is a building for its citizens – and not for tourists – the quirks of NationsBank will be quickly mastered by the city’s natives. Furthermore, the complex is user-intensive, with an overabundance of service functions that could have dealt a death blow to the exterior of the building. Pelli also went to extraordinary lengths to articulate the façades of the complex’s retail mall and theater – two building types that too often result in monumental blemishes on the landscape.

In that sense, NationsBank, Founders Hall, and the Blumenthal Center are good neighbors to Charlotte. While local gadflies may bemoan the fact that the city’s historic center didn’t receive appropriate design expression, they may also be the first to acknowledge a proper urban square has finally been created in the city.

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Garden Fortress

Rafael Moneo's museum for the Miro Foundation responds angrily to the disregard for an enchanting landscape.

Rafael Moneo seems to have sketched his first ideas for the Pilar and Joan Miro Foundation with a touch of rage. The building parti is the first clue: the architect envisaged a long shaft attached to a jagged, fortresslike volume that withdraws behind a shallow moat. Any doubt of Moneo's anger is erased by the architect himself. "The gallery's volume ignores its surroundings, or better, responds angrily to the neglect and disregard implicit in the constructions on the once-attractive hillside," he asserts.

Unquestionably, the new Miro museum and study center on a hillside above Palma de Mallorca, Spain, is as much a pointed commentary on profit-driven decimation of the landscape as it is a loving tribute to the artist whose work it celebrates. In the process, the emotions sparked in Moneo by the commission have generated what seems, by far, to be the most expressive of this architect's works. Though characteristically restrained in construction and detail, its dynamic planning and site design concepts produce a structure of enormous vitality.

Construction of the Miro Foundation was fueled by Pilar Juncosa, the artist's widow, who wanted to fulfill Joan Miro's desire for a gallery to protect and preserve his work, while establishing a center where scholars and artists might pursue their work in the same cross-disciplinary manner as the late painter. The foundation's location – overlooking the Bay of Palma and the Mediterranean – was a natural

choice, because the center rests just a few steps away from the house where Pilar and Joan Miro lived for more than a quarter-century until the artist's death in 1983.

Occupying a portion of the site is Miro's studio, designed by fellow Spaniard Jose Luis Sert and completed in 1956. Moneo's intent was to incorporate the artist's studio into the site plan, while attempting to recover the lost presence of the sea – views now blocked by the area's overdevelopment. Moneo's strategy included transforming the art gallery roof into a suspended lake that returns to the site some sense of its former tranquility. He also placed a garden rich with native plants adjacent to the building. In time, the architect reasoned, the thriving garden will create a dense buffer against the site, establishing an isolated environment that separates the Miro Foundation complex from its surroundings and allows visitors to focus on the sculptures there.

The complexity of the building unfolds slowly to the visitor, who approaches on the street alongside a stone wall that largely obscures the Miro Foundation complex. A simple concrete threshold frames a view of the austere north façade and a linear plaza that funnels visitors the breadth of the site. A turn through the portal leading to the museum's entrance elicits the first surprise: a view across the glimmering rooftop pool, which Moneo calls "a small and broken hanging lake." Prismatic concrete skylights emerging from the sheet of water magnify the lyricism of this pool that meets the sky.

From this portal, one enters the small lobby and descends a concrete staircase, whose landing contains a bookshop. The route continues either to a temporary exhibits gallery or through a turnstile that guards the star-shaped main gallery. The first glimpse of the primary space is from a high vantage point – a moment of disorientation, rather than understanding, due to the gallery's fluid space and ambiguous floor plan. Moneo planned it that way, presenting a fragmented and inapprehensible spatial atmosphere true to the spirit of Miro's painting. The building is a composite of separate chambers that flow into each other, separated into discrete levels along connecting ramps and stairs, and broken into sections by freestanding walls.

Curiously, the fortresslike shape of the exterior visits no oppressiveness on the interior – only idiosyncrasy. Glowing translucent walls



Fig. 3. Pilar & Joan Miro Foundation in Palma de Mallorca.

of alabaster humanize the space with a warm light. The texture of stone floors is reassuringly genuine; concrete walls are warm in tone; and the patterned alabaster adds a sensuality that overrides the regularized strata of the poured concrete walls.

As a place for displaying art, the gallery maintains a proper neutrality in spite of its sculptural expressiveness. Focused display lighting makes up the difference where natural light is lacking. Moneo's idea of pushing clear windows down to floor level, allowing only fleeting glimpses of the garden outside but not the surrounding townscape, is a stroke of divine inspiration, if not mortal genius.

Offices and other primary spaces critical to the functioning of the complex as a resource for scholars are placed in the linear portion of the building. Outside the boxlike building, a covered porch made habitable in the Spanish summer by a *brise soleil* allows commanding views of the garden, the landscape, and the sea beyond. From this vantage point, one also enjoys a private view of the painted-tile mural by Maria Antonia Carrio, which fills one of the exterior walls – another tribute to the lively curiosity that led Joan Miro into experiments with many media.

From the sculpture garden, the visitor is confronted with a series of dynamic façades that project and recede, more embracing and quieting than they are repelling with their sharp points – and all in great contrast to the stark façade that the visitor first encounters. By fleeing from repetition and parallelism, Moneo has created a figurative masterpiece in the Miro Foundation complex that befits its namesake. “In the painter's oeuvre,” remarks the architect, “each painting is different, unique – as if each sought to capture an instant in time, one that would never be repeated. The discontinuous, fragmented, and broken aspect of the foundation's edifice responds to such a way of understanding the artist's work.” Such characteristics spring forth in this remarkable building in a way that challenges the sensibilities. As with the artist's work, the Miro Foundation engenders a response that is, at its least, enlightened and, at its best, epiphanical.

This article first appeared in the January 1994 issue of Architecture.

Beyond Convention

A new convention center at Walt Disney World is an expressive departure for Gwathmey Siegel & Associates.

It was not hubris for Robert Siegel to liken Gwathmey Siegel & Associates' new convention center at Walt Disney World to the 1950 United Nations Headquarters in New York City. In fact, Siegel's grand analogy was a clever stratagem: by asking his clients to picture the U.N. Secretariat slab towering above the General Assembly building, he believed they would comprehend why his design begged to be an expressive, even lyrical, counterpoint to Disney's 20-year-old Contemporary Resort Hotel.

Expressive it is. Deliberately free of the colossal animal sculptures, painted palms, and dwarfish atlantes that ornament the latest rash of high-profile Disney buildings, the 120,000-square-foot convention center creates a strong horizontal sweep against the vertical rise of the adjacent 1971 hotel. Its fragmented forms, arranged against a field of bold color, break daring new ground for Gwathmey Siegel, which in the past has looked to Modern materials that chromatically speak for themselves.

Disney originally commissioned the New York firm in 1988 to provide a revised master plan for the entire site. Not only did the entertainment company ask the architects to design a meeting facility, it wanted them to correct a vehicular approach to the hotel that was remarkably ill-planned, considering Disney's vaunted skill at moving people efficiently through its theme parks. Gwathmey Siegel fixed all

that. The new entry sequence directs visitors onto the site in front of the Welton Becket-designed hotel, where they drive across a wide plaza between a topiary bosque and the striped convention center to arrive at the hotel's new porte cochere.

The architects' early studies had explored the merits of keeping the hotel and the new meeting center separate. But Gwathmey Siegel reasoned that the site would be enlivened by linking the existing and new buildings and mixing the comings and goings of vacationers and convention-goers. At the same time, the juxtaposition would allow access to the hotel's meeting spaces for overflow functions. Therefore, the architects placed the convention center to the southwest of the hotel to define the tree-studded plaza, which breathes welcome life into the site and produces a lively graphic composition when viewed from the hotel above. The existing "Dixie cup" topiary trees were sacrosanct – Disney considered them vital to the hotel's image. Many more were added to reinforce the new site design, and they glisten at night with tiny white lights that illuminate the plaza.

Despite the fragmented treatment of its perimeter, the convention center form has an overall clarity that reflects a simple parti. The architects located the expansive main ballroom at the center, flanked the ballroom with meeting spaces in the two wings that run east and west, and stretched a north-facing lobby across the front of the building. At the entrance, a swooping canopy reads as an extension of the vaulted roof – a familiar form in Gwathmey Siegel's residential and institutional buildings – that shelters the lobby and main ballroom. Bubble skylights on the roof trace the main axis connecting two rotundas at the east and west corners, each of which makes a transition to secondary circulation paths leading to meeting rooms. Service functions are tucked to the south of the ballroom in a low-rise box.

Only after the center began to take shape did ideas begin brewing about the use of color to lend scale and visual punch. "When you really have no materiality, like stone or wood or steel or any of that good stuff that comes with its own colors," explains Siegel, "color becomes one of the few ways within a budget-driven project to make hierarchies. This whole project became one of how color and texture would help make spaces more interesting, create background and foreground, and enhance scale issues. Color was fundamental."

The firm's success in breaking the mold of monolithic exteriors – so common to the convention-center genre – is surpassed only by the richness of the center's interior. Whether one enters through the front canopy or the hotel connector, passage into the lobby is a delight, even for the most jaded veterans of the trade-show circuit. A soaring ceiling dotted with circles of natural light draws the eye to the ends of the lobby, punctuated by the bright and color-saturated rotundas.

Freestanding glass-block walls conceal ubiquitous banks of pay telephones, while adjacent bays contain crafted reception desks of stained white oak. Natural light is introduced liberally in these “prefunction” spaces, either through skylights, as in the rotundas, or through clerestories, which are used to great effect to splash light on the ceiling of the west corridor. A progressive diminution of scale takes place as one moves from plaza to canopy to lobby to meeting room – a perception that is reinforced by lighting, section, and floor pattern.

The system of self-ornamentation developed by Gwathmey Siegel, first suggested by the center’s striped and scored stucco exterior, becomes apparent on the inside. Throughout the building, a system of regulating proportions establishes geometric rules for all embellishments, including door heights, signage placement, and the dimensions of wedge-shaped uplights.

Outside and in, the cylindrical rotundas at the east and west ends of the lobby exert a strong force on the building. These passageways are fraternal twins – made of the same basic genetic material but visibly different. The west rotunda is a corner element that protrudes from the building mass; it is a place of repose, wrapped with stacks of frosted glass squares. Light fixtures in each opening produce a glowing façade at night.

The east rotunda, on the other hand, is positioned to accommodate active circulation. Piercing its center is a bridge floored in glass block and finished in porcelain panels, which serves as the second-floor access to an elevator for the physically disabled. In the context of the whole convention center, which is warm and inviting, the bridge and adjacent escalators convey a cool, industrial quality that sets them apart. While they succeed in providing the vital link between the center and the hotel, their form, color, texture, and detail evoke the disquieting impression that they have been applied and not integrated.

The architects’ most absolute victory over traditional notions of meeting center design takes place in the main ballroom. A large-scale diamond pattern in the carpet draws the gridiron-sized room into one unit, yet allows for easy subdivision into three smaller components without visual compromise. Likewise, the expansive faceted plane of the polished aluminum ceiling accommodates infinite room configurations, while reflecting the activity and lighting effects below in abstract form. “It took a while and a lot of model study,” says Siegel, “for people to get comfortable with the idea that this was not too austere to be a ballroom as well as an exhibition hall.” But, in fact, the room serves both purposes well. The ceiling grid accommodates flexible lighting for theatrical productions, allowing convention organizers to produce a full range of activities in the space – everything from elaborate trade exhibits to show-stopping extravaganzas.

Breaking the monotony of the ballroom walls is a series of gridded oak units that humanize the room and provide ambient light, acoustical relief, and thematic flair. Set within the gridded units are 4-foot-tall, backlighted transparencies reproduced from the conceptual artwork for “Fantasia,” preserved in Disney’s archives. Conceived and executed by photographer Elliott Kaufman, the images were selected for their abstract appearance, although, as Siegel observes, they are “literal enough that you know they have to do with Disney.”

That imperative – to create “something that has to do with Disney” – may pose the most difficult challenge in designing any project at Disney World. The pressures to remain thematically true to an entertainment agenda can render architecture that is strong on image but weak on content. Fortunately, in Gwathmey Siegel’s new meeting facility, meaning, as well as Mickey, prevails.

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Haymount: The Coming of a Brave Old World

The latest in a series of New Urbanist communities draws nearer to breaking ground on a rural Virginia site.

Bouncing along a dirt road in his four-wheel-drive pickup, John Clark hardly fits the role of visionary place-maker he may well turn out to be. Candid and unpretentious, the Washington, D.C., developer appears willing to stake his future on the success of Haymount, a planned 1,600-acre neotraditional town on the banks of the Rappahannock River.

What Clark preaches is an alternative to the sprawl of suburbia, which he characterizes as dehumanizing and autocentric. While some may attribute the national attention being given the project to its role in the trend that has renewed traditional town planning, few have criticized its aggressive social and environmental agenda. "I believe Haymount will be a step up the evolutionary ladder in terms of really delivering connectedness, a real definition of what the power of place ought to be," says Clark.

Resistance to the new town has sometimes been stiff. Local residents worried that an influx of 10,000 people will raise taxes by demanding more public services, and Caroline County officials were initially skeptical of Clark's desire to thrust an entire town onto pristine farmland, a move that required a reworking of the county's comprehensive plan. An adjacent landowner even tried to stop Clark by taking him to court.

But the ball rolls on.

Clark appears ever closer to turning the first spade of dirt on Haymount, which is designed on the premise that high-density development makes for better (and more environmentally responsible) living than typical suburban sprawl. Haymount is laid out in a series of neighborhoods, with 4,000 dwellings planned along narrow streets with sidewalks. In the plan, a civic green, town centers, and playgrounds are intermingled with houses, shops, and offices so that walking and bike-riding become desirable alternatives to driving a car. In the national context of new town development centered on access to mass transit, Haymount's glaring weakness is its distance – eight miles – from the nearest commuter rail stop. Clark counters with a plan to shuttle residents to the station and back. And he predicts in a few years Haymount will offer enough employment to allow most residents to work in town.

Clark made his first public relations coup in 1989 by engaging the services of Miami architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, who designed the Seaside resort town in Florida. His backing by the W.C. & A.N. Miller Company, an established development firm based in Washington, D.C., only lends further credibility to the project. But what has really won support for Clark is the appearance, backed by his relentless campaigning, that Haymount will be developed in ways that depart meaningfully from standard practice. Whether or not one believes that small-town characteristics will improve its residents' quality of life, Haymount is noteworthy for its ecological agenda. Its plan includes advanced water treatment methods, including constructed wetlands and other biotechnical means. A farmers' market and organic farm will set the example for sustainable agriculture in the region. And Clark says he will hire a full-time environmental manager to coordinate recycling efforts, educate residents, and protect the natural environment and wildlife. The community's landscape codes even mandate the use of native species on both public and private land. Under current plans, Haymount would actually *gain* trees.

Last spring, the community's native species nursery was begun with 5,000 plants, including rows of white-flowering dogwood, persimmon, papaw, and a variety of oaks. If and when Clark receives the final approvals – which he anticipates by October – work will begin immediately on the wastewater treatment plant and a 30-room inn, restaurant, and spa. “As we start the Inn, we're going to start building right away,” says Clark, who held an open house in May for builders who wanted to know more about how to get involved. Forty showed up at the metal barn that Clark constructed as his on-site headquarters. “There's tremendous pent-up demand for this.” The restaurant will be supplied by an organic garden developed on the site. “That is sustainable architecture – so that we can grow here and consume here.”

While he concedes he is going to make “a ton of money” if Haymount goes according to plan, Clark easily slips into philosophical musings about the project’s potential to rewrite the rules of land development. “What I want to do is evolve and go further in terms of our development as a civilization, our ability to behave in community. I think that the work that [developers] Robert Simon and James Rouse did is important. But I think neither Reston nor Columbia [their respective projects] could really succeed in the way that they envisioned, because local land use patterns called for economic segregation and separation of uses. As a result, Columbia and Reston are never going to be what they wanted them to be. And there were compromises that were made. I’m sure that there will be a compromise or two that I have to make that I won’t like, but I’m going to be a stickler about how I get there. I have been able to avoid economic segregation. I’m getting there on traffic. And I’m really careful about how people interrelate within the community.”

Fig. 4. Bird’s-eye view of town layout at Haymount.



Q&A:

“I’ve never believed I wouldn’t succeed.”

Editor Vernon Mays toured the Haymount site with John Clark and spoke with him about the ongoing challenges of the project.

Architects criticize the traditional – some say outdated – imagery you use to promote Haymount. How do you answer them?

Clark: I believe one needs to respect regional character. To the extent that Virginia is really driven by Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival, and Georgian housing, I think it’s appropriate that Haymount reflect that architecture. Now does that leave the architect the opportunity to be creative with how he delivers that regional vernacular? Yes, it does. Let me give a great example: Walter Chatham’s house at Seaside, which is a perfectly Modern building, respects the vernacular character that [developer] Robert Davis was looking for. And you can do the same thing here. I believe there is enough flexibility in the codes that a clever architect will find a way to build pretty damn near what he wants to.

How have environmental groups received your plans?

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation called this “the right plan in the wrong place.” Their position was that there should be no development at all on the Rappahannock River. What made this “wrong” was they felt if we were successful in getting the comprehensive plan changed, then other development would come along and the whole Rappahannock corridor would be broken wide open and there would be sprawl. Well, the fact of the matter is that large-lot zoning – the 10-acre zoning already in place – absolutely guarantees sprawl. But now the Rappahannock is set up as a resource-sensitive area. If the woman next door decided to develop her land, she would have to do all the same studies I have done. And she can only develop half the site. All those things are in place.

How will you get builders to join your architectural fan club?

That’s easy. I’m going to take my marketing dollars and give the money to architects, rather than to public relations people. I’m going to buy schematic plans. And instead of presenting to me as the client, I’m going to have these architects present their schematic design and a model in the form of public lectures. We’re going to take specific blocks of Haymount and do this along the way. And I can guarantee you that the magazines are going to publish all of that. And then I’m going to be able to say to the builders, “Gee whiz, fellas, I paid for the schematics. Finish the construction drawings, build the house. Use the reprints for a marketing tool.”

Some developers might not have had the stomach for the fight needed to get Haymount built. So far you have. Was there ever a point when you thought this is more trouble than it’s worth?

The truth of the matter is I didn’t know it was going to take me seven years. I’ve only been able to think about this in increments of “This is a problem I’ve got to deal with.” There’s never been financial pressure, which is always the thing that sours you. Are my partners concerned about their investment? Sure they are. Have there been times when we felt uncomfortable about the law suits? Absolutely. But I have never, ever believed that I wouldn’t succeed. I’ve always felt like this thing was going to happen, because there are so many places where it could have gone wrong, and it never has. And you know what? The law suits and all were very unpleasant, but they really worked to my favor, because time has been a friend of this project. It has allowed me to grow and get smarter. This plan has evolved to the extent that it’s gotten better.

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Demise of the Goodwin

Demolition of a longstanding landmark in downtown Hartford means a loss of continuity that degrades all our cities.

Maybe this story should read as an obituary: *The Goodwin Building, longtime fixture of downtown Hartford, died suddenly of maladaptation to late 20th century urban growth patterns. Once the darling of Hartford society, the Goodwin contributed perhaps the city's richest example of 19th century commercial architecture. She is survived by a few old friends and a rash of young, shiny upstarts.*

Say what you will about preserving the relic's façade, the Goodwin is gone. Stripped of its serpentine hallways and quirky rooms – disemboweled in almost every way possible – its loss further dwindles the already low number of in-town residences. For the moment, all that remains is a shell.

That's a trend these days, of course, scooping out the insides of old buildings, propping up the exterior walls, and filling the void with new construction. The replacement buildings often are of an entirely different scale than the original and usually in a style, too, that sings a different tune. In polite circles, the practice is dubbed "facadism." Less genteel folks call the procedure a "façade-ectomy."

Streetscapes in Boston and Washington, D.C., to name just two, are full of this type of development. Critics say it is sometimes done well, but just as often dismally. In Hartford, it is being carried out in a way that is physically destructive and aesthetically insulting to the brick and terra cotta original at Asylum and Haynes streets.

But the intent here is not to quibble about the low-rise luxury hotel and 30-story Goodwin Square office tower that will fill the shoes of the dearly departed. That complex is a topic for future discussion. The broad question raised by the Goodwin's demise deals with our current notion of historic preservation. Not everything old is valuable, so how do we choose what to save? And how do we save it?

Twenty years ago, the Goodwin – completed in 1881 with a lavishly detailed and richly textured façade – likely would have been leveled swiftly and effectively with hardly a peep from anyone. But America has enjoyed a change of heart; the desire to “buy new” and “build new” has been tempered since consumerism first took off wildly in the postwar years. A recent discussion in *Time* magazine charted the preservation movement's past decade of rising popularity across the country, from a regeneration of the town center in Lowell, Massachusetts, to the adaptation of former Los Angeles bank buildings into apartment houses. Has this renewed connection with the past been overlooked in the Insurance City?

Not entirely. Rehabilitation of the once-derelict Union Station, for example, signals the kind of turnaround that cooperation between government and business can foster. Community members, as well, rallied behind the facelift of the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Bushnell Park, even to the skillful refabrication of bronze archangels that crown its twin towers.

But somehow the Goodwin, for all the sentiment lavished on it by old-line Hartford residents, was abandoned by its larger constituency. Preservationists, notably the Hartford Architecture Conservancy and the Connecticut Historical Commission, put up a stiff fight. When the proposed Goodwin Square received city approval, most observers believed the old Goodwin would remain largely intact – until the demolition crew arrived. The great extent to which the wrecking ball did its job provoked a dispute regarding the original intentions of developers Michael K. Diamond and William A. Mogensen.

Afraid that the remaining façade would collapse, preservationists hurriedly negotiated a strict agreement regarding its salvation. But the Goodwin's wreckage already was accomplished. Had the city initially been more demanding and specific about the building's protection, the Goodwin still might be intact today. But placing stringent requirements on developers takes foresight and broad consensus. Neither was in place regarding the Goodwin.

Determining value

Before a building can be preserved, we must agree it is valuable. Establishing that value is a sticky question. One way of going about it is to look to the National Register of Historic Places. The National

Register documents significant buildings, though that listing is no guarantee of immunity from destruction. Nor should it be. One would be hard-pressed to argue successfully that each of the nearly 25,000 Connecticut buildings on the Register should be spared, even if it meant standing in the way of a city's growth. The decisions on preservation must be made case by case.

A building can be placed on the Register if it meets certain tests of qualification. Was the building associated with events that made a significant contribution to our history? Is the building linked to the life of a significant person? Doesn't the building embody distinctive characteristics? Is it designed by a master? Does it represent high artistic values? In 1975, the Goodwin Building, a hybrid structure built in three segments, and its 19th century neighbors on the same block of Asylum Street passed the test, securing their places on the list.

Was the Goodwin somehow special? In nostalgic terms, undoubtedly so. But nostalgia isn't a compelling enough reason to halt a building's demolition; a city is more vital than a dusty three-dimensional scrapbook. Still, the collective sense of worth that the old Goodwin earned among Hartford old-liners – nostalgic or not – lent it a value that isolated testimonials could not generate alone.

The Goodwin's architect, Francis Kimball, was not nationally renowned. But he made significant contributions to Hartford (executing some of the design and supervising the construction of Trinity College) and to New York, where his 1893 Manhattan Life Building rose as an example of early skyscraper technology. The Goodwin family wielded considerable influence locally. The Rev. Francis Goodwin, one of two brothers who commissioned the apartment building, is credited with suggesting the building's elaborate Queen Anne style to architect Kimball. The Goodwin Building itself – with an exquisite exterior surface modulated by projecting piers, brackets, moldings, and cornices – was a rarity in New England, though of a style made popular in 19th century England. Its wonderful details were made by the Boston Terra Cotta Co., one of America's leading suppliers of terra cotta products.

A question of balance

Some would argue that saving the façade is better than saving nothing at all. But what is being done in the name of preservation is not preservation. It is something closer to Disneyana. We are left with a TV image of history – just a few quick lines and a split-second image of what Hartford used to be. Such a fate for the Goodwin might have been more acceptable if downtown Hartford was crowded with 19th century commercial building stock. But the proliferation of 20th century office buildings has eliminated most of that. The Goodwin was

truly unique. It was not an anonymous façade lost in the crowd. It was a landmark.

Nothing will save it now, but by using the Goodwin as an example, we can anticipate which other treasures of the Hartford cityscape might face demolition. First to spring to mind is the Hartford-Aetna Building, the city's first skyscraper built in 1912 at Main and Asylum streets. Its fate remains a question mark in light of plans, still publicly vague, by Society for Savings to build a new office building on that block. For that matter, Society's 31 Pratt St. office, with its grand banking floor, may be at risk. Add to the list the 1898 Sage-Allen Building on Main Street, another prime development location.

In the dollars-and-cents equations that so often rule what stays and what goes from the aging cityscape, there is little room for consideration of values that are intangible and difficult to quantify. One of America's finest but least-known 20th century architects, Louis I. Kahn, spent the latter years of his career exploring this dimension of architecture, what he called "the unmeasurable."

For Kahn, architecture could not exist if the measurable were not allowed to meet the unmeasurable, if poetry were not allowed to touch science. Kahn wrote, "There is nothing about man that is really measurable. He is completely unmeasurable. He is the seat of the unmeasurable, and he employs the measurable to make it possible for him to express something."

No developer is going to buy that line, of course. It's too touchy-feeling. No vote-conscious city councilman is going to challenge the prevailing wisdom that an increased tax base takes precedence over factors that can't be plugged into a calculator. The sentiment that saves buildings like the Goodwin comes from the ground up. And without that grass-roots support, unmeasurable factors such as history, culture, and psychological comfort will never win out.

What faces Hartford, and every American city, is the thorny issue of balancing the vital economic need to grow with the equally vital psychic need to maintain some connection with our past, to somehow experience the continuity of time's passage. The tenuousness of modern life and its fast-changing nature beg us to hang on to at least a few pieces of our past. Otherwise, by destroying important buildings, we commit an act comparable to tossing out all the old photos of our grandparents.

Losses like the Goodwin may not be overwhelming in the isolated case, but bit by bit the manmade environment we build to replace comfortable old friends like the Goodwin make our cities more alien to us. Not until far down the road do we realize the whole matter has gotten seriously out of hand.

This article first appeared in the January 15, 1988, editions of The Hartford Courant.

Well-Chosen Words

From furniture designs to fashion showrooms, the work of Antonio Citterio makes a point to say the most with the least.

Antonio Citterio and partner Terry Dwan speak an architectural language unencumbered by adjectives and containing few verbs. Their cool, rational compositions veer toward essence, relying on a palette of zinc-plated steel, perforated panels, ascetic light fixtures, and neutral wall finishes. Only the necessities survive.

This reductivist manner yields a machine aesthetic of exquisite detail and crisply delineated space that approximates the spirit of orthodox Modernism without appropriating its language verbatim. “My approach is very sensual, in that it is a step-by-step process of feeling and discovery,” Citterio says. “It is a craftsman’s approach.”

Born in 1950 into Milan’s design-rich culture and reared under the influence of a father who was a carpenter and chair-maker, Citterio early on showed a facility for disciplined furniture design. His projects have grown steadily from a line of pens in 1977 to the large-scale renovations recently completed for Esprit in Amsterdam, Milan, and Antwerp. But, while the dimension of his work keeps growing, Citterio clings to his preoccupation with the details of construction. His manifesto, if he has one, is conveyed with mute reliance on the finished work to speak for itself.

“An architect can be an architect without being a wall-builder or bricklayer,” Citterio says in painstaking English. “We have decided to be bricklayers. That doesn’t mean being separate from intellectual

ideas, but the ideas we have are contained in the construction.” The germs of those ideas are evident in the work Citterio did with Paola Nava, his partner from 1972 – when Citterio received his architecture degree from Milan Polytechnic – until 1981. They designed products of surprising maturity, among them “Diesis,” a sofa whose fine leather cushions seems to float on a delicate, die-cast structure. The years with Nava afforded Citterio the chance to experiment on wood- and metal-working machines, building his knowledge of materials and modern methods of production.

Citterio went solo in 1981 and soon began a series of interiors projects: a shop for Mirabello, a gallery for historical records at La Scala, and a showroom for B&B Italia. Each was a warm-up for the six showrooms Citterio did in 1983 for Santini & Dominici shoes. Not unlike his Esprit projects, the shoe shops created a corporate image. Each was thematically related through similar materials, color schemes, and spatial concepts.

When discussing his work, Citterio is quick to note its double-sided nature: design and architecture. While he acknowledges their relationship, he consciously separates the two. His attitude toward building details, for example, grows from his tendency in product design to “celebrate the joint,” a debt he acknowledges to Carlo Scarpa. Yet, despite the industrial flavor of his recent architecture, Citterio also hastens to add that the work is not “high-tech,” a term he believes applies more to hackneyed imagery than to a philosophy of construction.

Today, Studio Citterio occupies a former factory in an industrial zone of Milan. Of the 16 people in the office, four are assigned to the “design” group, two work primarily on custom furniture for special commissions, and the remainder make up the “architecture” group.

Dwan, a California-born and Yale-educated architect, has been Citterio’s partner for two years. They met by chance in 1985 as she was job-hunting near the end of her tenure as a Fulbright scholar. Asked how, in her search for employment, she happened to stumble across Citterio, Dwan is interrupted by her business partner and now full-time companion. “Destiny,” Citterio offers, with a wry smile.

Despite her youthfulness, Dwan’s impact was felt quickly on the Esprit projects. Now the studio is designing a commercial complex near Milan, a wooden house in Japan, and a storage system for B&B Italia. Citterio also continues development, three years thus far in the making, of a seating series for Vitra. His insistence that the Vitra project will result in “a chair, not a machine to sit in,” reflects his ongoing search for archetypes. In that regard, he exercises the same philosophy – “demystification of the elements,” he calls it – whether the issue is an urban-scale problem, a building interior, or product design.

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Romantic Machine

Expansion of the operations center for Boston's mass transit system elevates a utilitarian building to a higher plane.

There's no denying that the Boston cityscape is vastly improved with the completion of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Operations Control Center by Leers, Weinzapfel Associates. Anyone familiar with the building's predecessor – a scaleless bunker that scowled at neighboring Dewey Square – realizes the city benefits immensely from the architectural disappearing act pulled off in the renovation and expansion of the existing five-story building.

But Leers, Weinzapfel's accomplishment goes far beyond cosmetic intervention. Despite its modest footprint, the Operations Center occupies an important edge of downtown Boston, overlooking a major transportation node and busy expressway.

As a study in massing, the 10-story building solves thorny contextual problems, especially its frontage on two streets with very different characteristics. Straddling a site between quiet High Street and busy Purchase Street, the MBTA center nods respectfully to its venerable masonry neighbors while displaying enough self-confidence to cast off the trappings of a previous age. On the High Street side, its skin-tight granite erodes in a low-relief pattern of modest grilles and suitably proportioned windows, creating a prepossessing play of solids and voids that is fitting for the canyonlike midblock site. On the opposite face, the scale change along Purchase Street called for a bolder expression. Here, cues from the adjacent 19th century buildings are

echoed back tenfold in a composition of overscaled black steel elements set against the foil of a light-colored stone grid.

The architects' choice of Stony Point granite for the public façades was just one of several design decisions driven by context. The mammoth steel cornice and industrial-strength balcony facing Purchase Street, for example, echo the steel supports of bridges crossing nearby Fort Point Channel. Other formal responses to context are visible in the Operations Control Center's rectangular posture and solidity, with rhythm, proportions, and groupings of façade elements that draw inspiration from the old masonry city.

After exploring schemes that would have created a collage of old building and new, the architects opted to develop a body-and-core concept that would unify the building. In doing so, they also chose to suppress any evidence of the original long-span structure and to organize the façades in ways that were internally consistent and legible as public buildings. A fortunate by-product of this approach was the opportunity to maintain a separation between the main volume and elevator/stair core to the east, which enabled the building to read more vertically to onlookers.

As each function was expressed floor-by-floor, horizontal layers emerged on the envelope. On the third and fourth floors, small openings mark the place where signal equipment is located. Expanses of glass near the top indicate offices. The absence of windows on the seventh and eighth floors denotes the location of the black-box control center. Past experience with a disabling fire also led the transit authority to insist on separate mechanical systems for each floor, a constraint that the architects turned into an asset. They placed steel grilles on the main façades of the building – intake on High Street and exhaust on

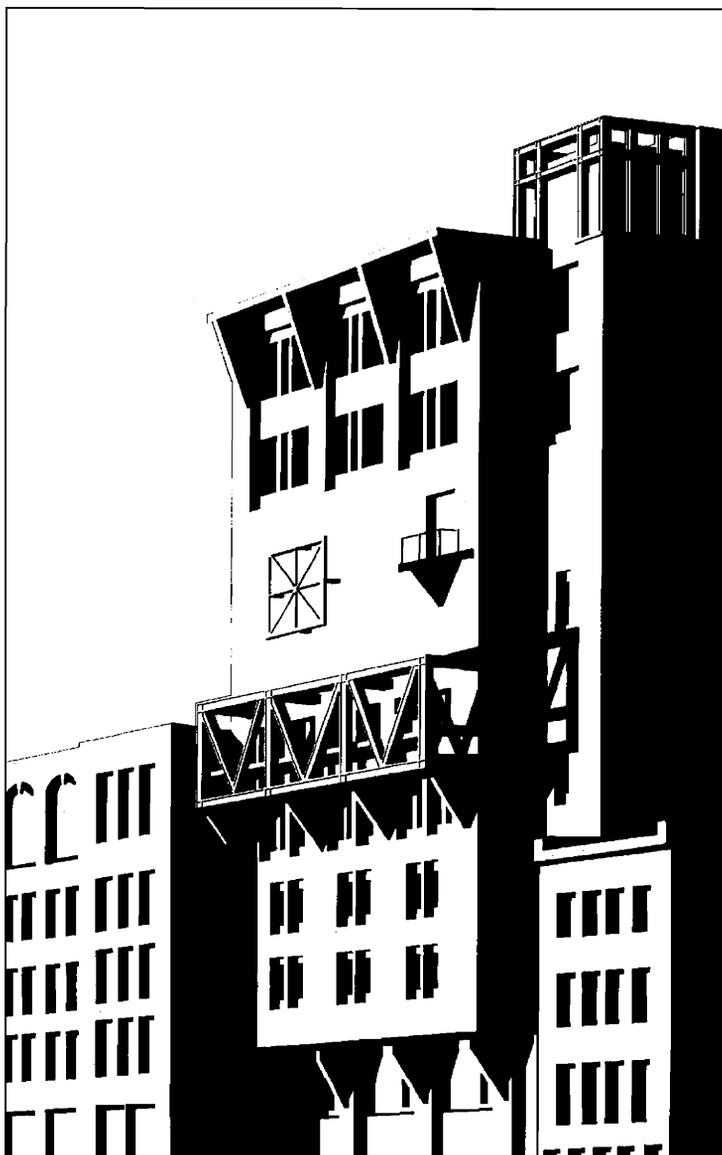


Fig. 5. MBTA Operations Control Center, Boston.

Purchase – and integrated most of them as window headers.

Leers, Weinzapfel interrupted the building's tripartite composition with a midsection zone known colloquially within the firm as the "zipper." Located at the fifth and sixth floors, the "zipper" echoes the attic stories of adjacent buildings and denotes the abutment of the old building and the new. This zone also houses the lunch room and locker rooms, functions shared by the building's varied employee groups.

From the glass-walled lunch room, one steps onto the husky steel-truss balcony, an overscaled industrial sculpture that dominates the Purchase Street façade and extends the cornice line of an adjacent 19th century building. "We were trying to deal with expressive elements that made a larger gesture to Dewey Square and brought the building forward," says Weinzapfel, noting that the building's structural columns and street wall step well back from the sidewalk to allow crane access to transformers in a basement-level pit.

Access to the entire building is restricted to MBTA employees, but a small lobby within the High Street entrance contains services for the public. Leers, Weinzapfel upgraded finishes, reconfigured spaces on the existing floors, and planned the upper floors. But the focus of their interior design was the control center on the seventh and eighth floors. As the nerve center for mass transit in greater Boston, the space was required to correct several deficiencies in the old third-floor control room. The Operations Center's emergency response capability was improved by isolating the noisy dispatching room from the managers, who must make split-second decisions during system breakdowns.

From inside to out, the MBTA Operations Control Center is a romantic machine, a commonplace utility building raised to a higher civic plane. As an artifact that is both elegant and rugged, this skillful urban infill testifies to the successes that contextual influences can generate if they are allowed to suggest, rather than dictate, architecture.

This article first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Architecture.

Riding the Wave

A hip approach to history doesn't hurt the popularity of the Delano Hotel, but some preservationists are grumbling.

Kee your eyes peeled for the overscaled Alice-in-Wonderland hedge, step through a break in the rustling sheer curtains, and enter the dream world of the Delano – a larger-than-life fantasy palace in Miami Beach, the city where fantasy is king. Trading off the still-burgeoning preservation movement in Miami Beach and its success in generating a tourist tidal wave, the rejuvenated Delano hotel is, at once, the hottest of hot spots in trendy South Beach and a thorn in the side of local preservationists, who have struggled for nearly two decades to bring the area back from destitution.

Located at Collins Avenue and 17th Street in the Art Deco district, this '40s-era hotel with the zig-zag façade was recently renovated in a decidedly anti-Deco style. And there lies the rub for preservationists. Developed by hotel impresario Ian Schrager, who made his reputation with the Studio 54 discotheque then cast his investor's eye toward boutique hotels in New York such as Morgan's, the Royalton, and the Paramount, the Delano makes a statement of individuality in a historic district that has drawn its appeal from a certain consistency of design. No one questions that the makeover by French architect Philippe Starck, known for outrageous antics such as entering press events astride a Harley-Davidson, is exquisite. But – in the process of the \$20 million renovation – the loss of the hotel's Deco interior and much of its signature ballroom has caused some grumbling.

“It’s a terrific project – don’t get me wrong,” says William Cary, historic preservation coordinator for the City of Miami Beach. “And it’s a first-class building. But in exchange for that, we had to make concessions to allow them to demolish portions of the building to create the open terrace in the rear. And the city allowed them to virtually demolish the entire original lobby. It had a spectacular geometric-patterned terrazzo floor and octagonal columns which picked up the exterior decorative motifs. We would never allow that to happen today.”

Charmed by the touch of Starck’s magic wand, the new lobby is a cut above those in most of the Art Deco district hotels. Divided into a sequence of four rooms by flowing 22-foot-high gauze drapes, the Delano’s public spaces are a treat for the imagination. Dark and soothing in contrast to the harsh glare outside, the rooms have an ethereal quality reinforced by a surprising use of materials, a deft manipulation of scale, dramatic lighting, and a random assortment of furnishings that range from a Charles and Ray Eames chaise to a Salvador Dali chair with legs shaped like ladies’ high heels.

Although frequented by the painfully hip, the hotel is host to a flood of curiosity-seekers who come in all stripes – young and old, denim to silk. They come to see and to say they have seen. “This is the place to be,” a man is overheard saying over lunch in The Blue Door, the hotel’s restaurant. “If you go to Manhattan, you want to be able to say, ‘I stayed at the Delano.’”

Starck is circumspect in his assessment of the results, noting only that a Deco design was out of the question without waging a frontal attack on the prevailing style. His tack instead: to reflect the essence of Miami. “Every opportunity we have to charm someone – to be a little bit irreverent, to be witty, to be humorous, to poke fun at ourselves, not to take ourselves so seriously – that’s what we think design is about,” he says. “The idea is to have a little bit of wit and whimsy about what we do, to make a little poetry, to be a little lyrical.”

But Starck’s muse disregarded many of the characteristics that were peculiar to the Delano lobby. Not only did he cover the signature terrazzo floor with wide-plank cherry underfoot, he walled off the flanking mezzanines, dismantled the bridge connecting them, and sheathed the hotel’s quirky octagonal columns with cylindrical covers.

“When the Delano went through the approvals process, the review boards were not looking into the interior significance as much as they would do today,” says Betty Gutierrez, president of the Miami Design Preservation League, the pioneering organization that, under founder Barbara Baer Capitman, firmly established the preservation agenda in South Beach. The league came out publicly against the changes proposed at the Delano, which was required to undergo architectural review because it sits within the boundaries of the overlapping

Ocean Drive/Collins Avenue Historic District established by the city and the South Miami Beach Historic District on the National Register. But local ordinances gave the city no authority over interior alterations. “They did demolish – they did change a lot of the interior,” Gutierrez says of the hotel’s owners. “So from that aspect we are not happy.”

Cary says he’s concerned that someone who is unfamiliar with Art Deco architecture could walk into the Delano lobby and mistake it for a restored original. “Our boards are very particular about that now. They don’t like for new architecture to be confused with early architecture. Nor do they like for new architecture to imitate Modern architecture. For new construction, they want it to be a representation of its own time. Miami Beach is a 20th century city. That’s what it’s recognized for architecturally, and that’s what they want to promote. Here, there’s confusion on that point.”

Another bone of contention at the Delano was the ballroom, whose angled wall mimicked the shape of the hotel’s sawtooth façade. The city’s planning staff recommended that the City Commission deny the hotel’s request to demolish a major portion of the ballroom, arguing that it made a significant contribution to the history and integrity of the entire building. In this case, a compromise was reached. While the disputed area was made a part of the outdoor terrace that stretches across the back of the hotel, a vestigial wall with intact window frames was left standing to serve as a reminder of the former grand room.

Given their preference, however, people in preservation circles would have been happier if the work had followed the course of the Hotel Astor, located eight blocks south on Washington Street, which was renovated and reopened at the same time as the Delano. Built in 1936, the three-story Astor is richly detailed with a first-floor façade of native keystone and a lobby clad in green-and-black glass panels. When the preservation league discovered that the owner was removing the luminescent panels, known as “vitrolite,” they fought to have the material saved and won. Recent successes at other hotels include the Raleigh, with its spectacular terraced pool and restored lobby, and the Ritz Plaza, where the owner removed unsympathetic additions and restored the lobby, dining room, and rear terrace. Now under review are changes to the National, next door to the Delano. Most of its dramatically altered lobby will be restored, although the city will accommodate changes needed for the hotel to function by modern standards.

“The beauty of our historic preservation ordinance is that it was custom-tailored to address successful preservation in an intense development environment in a resort community,” explains Cary. “It recognizes certain changes have to be made to bring buildings up to a contemporary standard that is attractive to a high-class tourist market, but that the essence of the architecture is the single most important factor.”

Schrager, however, made it widely known that his intent at the Delano was to rework the hotel in a manner that had “zero” to do with the polychrome precedents of South Beach. Nearby landmarks such as the Colony and Park Central hotels brashly display the exterior pastels that have become the trademark of South Beach. Not the Delano. Here, neutrality is key and the color scheme is white. White slip covers. White uniforms. White façade. White rooms.

Ironically, the absence of exterior color puts the Delano closer to historical correctness than many of its counterparts in South Beach. Originally white was the color scheme of most of the surrounding buildings, and color was used sparingly as accents. The widespread use of vibrant pastel pinks, turquoises, and lavenders – begun in the 1980s by interior designer Leonard Horowitz – are really an elaboration to jazz up the Art Deco buildings that had been painted in 1970s earth tones, says Randall Robinson, the league’s historic preservation director. “Leonard’s introduction of pastels was a device to generate interest in these buildings,” says Robinson. “As such, it was wildly successful. It is to the point now where people associate pastels with Art Deco, with Miami Beach and, practically, with Florida.”

To his credit, Starck did many things at the Delano strictly by the book. The exterior remains fairly true to the original, even though every window was rebuilt. The sizes of window openings were preserved and the decorative architecture features were kept intact. “They did a tremendous job in that regard,” says planner Thomas Mooney.

And even if the Delano, in the strictest sense, is not good preservation, it appears to be good for preservation in many ways. As the recipient of obscene amounts of publicity, the hotel has kept the media spotlight fixed on South Beach. And it doesn’t hurt that the hotel is wired into the network of celebrity culture. Calvin Klein, for example, is a poolside fixture and rock diva Madonna is part-owner of The Blue Door. So hungry is the celebrity press for tidbits on the Material Girl that the hotel staff is strictly forbidden from discussing her with guests, other than to acknowledge her restaurateur role.

The early success of the Delano, which has been fully booked often through the winter season, boosts other hotel developments nearby. Robinson credits the Delano with making the next-door National a much more attractive property than it had been all the years that the Delano was vacant. “It makes that oceanfront hotel district more attractive,” he says. And two blocks south on Collins, Loew’s is planning to incorporate the 200-room St. Moritz Hotel, built in 1939, into an 800-room convention hotel.

Those trends are complemented by the comeback of nearby Lincoln Road, the center of high-end retail shopping in the 1940s and 1950s, later converted into one of the country’s first pedestrian malls.

Derelict for more than a decade, the six-block-long Lincoln Road Mall is rebounding thanks to a \$16 million infrastructure improvement and landscaping program undertaken by the public/private Lincoln Road Partnership. By next year, the entire 15 blocks of Lincoln Road, including the portions still open to vehicles, will be improved with streetscape amenities. "And Lincoln Road is becoming something much more interesting and lively than it was in its first heyday, because its recent revival is based on culture and arts," says Robinson.

The best news for Miami Beach preservationists in 1996 is the City Commission's vote in February to expand the Art Deco district to include the area south of Sixth Street. The new Ocean Beach Historic District incorporates an area that the city had expressly omitted from historic designation until now because it was targeted in the 1970s as a redevelopment zone for high-rise apartments. "That was during the urban renewal years," says Cary. "So the strategy was literally to demolish buildings – and the city encouraged owners at that point to demolish buildings. Just between 1991 and 1996, we lost 81 buildings south of Sixth Street. You have to remember that, in 1976, historic preservation was really still just getting under way. Nobody had any idea of what the impact of historic district designation would be."

But Cary says he believes that investment trends got the attention of city hall. "Since the spring of 1993, 45 percent of all major new development projects that are underway have been in the historic district – which represents only 14 percent of the total land area of Miami Beach. One square mile out of 7.1 square miles has represented 45 percent of all new construction. So the impact of historic district designation and regulation has been extremely successful. That's one of the things that allowed us to extend the historic district to the south."

The addition finally adds the original tract of Miami Beach to the Art Deco district – providing, from a historian's point of view, the missing link in the continuum from the city's founding in 1912 through its maturation as a world capital of tourism. Passage of the Ocean Beach district, Cary says, "demonstrated the commission's commitment to preservation as a significant development tool. They clearly recognized that historic designation has played a paramount role in revitalizing the economy of the City of Miami Beach and the renaissance that has occurred over the past ten years."

And as for the Delano – well, success comes in many guises. Since the hotel's demolition and construction plans were approved in 1994, the city has altered its preservation ordinance to gain control over the renovation of a building's "public interior" spaces. Says Robinson: "We were able to leverage Philippe Starck and the Delano against preservation and get the [authority to control] preservation of interiors, which we didn't have before. And that's critical."

This article first appeared in the May/June 1996 issue of Historic Preservation.

In the Presence of a Gentle Giant

Harwell Harris reflects on a career that set the standard for a generation of Modern architects.

Harwell Hamilton Harris, a man of consummate dignity and reserve, sat barefoot in his famous living room and slowly ate a lunch of fruit and meringue pie. The minutes slipped by silently while his interviewer looked on, until Harris laid down his fork and raised his head. “What information can I provide you with?” he asked, as though at a loss for words.

Interviews, though, are nothing new for Harris, now 87, who was the darling of the architectural press during the peak of his career. His gradual entree to conversation reveals both his formal manners and aversion to self-promotion, even as the opportunities to promote himself dwindle to a precious few. For, in recent months, cancer has sapped Harris’ strength and slowed his stride to a tedious shuffle. Caretakers assist him day and night. Yet, despite his physical weakness and lapses in concentration, the chance to talk about his work was an invitation he would not decline.

It seems forever ago that Harwell Harris’ name frequented the conversation of students and practitioners of architecture: his theories and built projects circulated most during the ’30s and ’40s, when the seeds of Modern architecture were sprouting along the California coast. Perhaps little-known by today’s budding designers, Harwell Hamilton Harris once was, in his own way, a cult hero. As a young architect, Mason Hicks of Fayetteville, North Carolina, got excited

whenever he saw Harris' latest projects in a magazine. "They always caught me right in the middle of my stomach," says Hicks. "They, to me, were what I thought architecture ought to be."

When Harris departed the west coast for Texas in 1952, he left behind a legacy of houses that historians and critics now credit as one of the few true regional styles of architecture. They were beautiful objects, pure art, deceptively simple in form and texture but immensely complex in their sculptural manipulations of space. Friends say the buildings reflected the man who built them. "His work always had a simplistic commonality about it that made it pleasing," says Hicks. "But it's not that way at all. It's very sophisticated stuff."

Harris built a house for himself and his wife in Raleigh soon after coming to N.C. State to teach in 1962. Now, in old age, he is as delicate as the wooden frame that separates his soaring living room from the open-air garden room beyond. In many ways the residence is typical of Harris' earlier work: it is an essay in overlapping space, natural materials, and simple form. To achieve both economy and a structural logic, he generated the floor plan based on a system of standard dimensional units, a grid of three-foot modules. That was a technique he learned from his great teacher, Richard Neutra, who emigrated from Vienna in 1923 to work under Frank Lloyd Wright. In her monograph on Harris' work, author Lisa Germany pinpointed both the links and the break between Harris and his mentors from abroad. "Like the Europeans," she wrote, "[Harris] delighted in the freedom from the past that the Modern attitude made possible, but it was never enough for his buildings to be simply new and efficient. Nor was it necessary for them to be heroic. They had to be as warm as they were lean."

Reared in architecture in an era when realizing one's vision often required extreme persuasive skills or rank arrogance, Harris was exceptional for his gentle nature and humility. Born in Redlands, California, in 1903, he developed his interest in form

Fig. 6. Harwell Harris' residence in Raleigh, N.C.



first as a student of sculpture and painting. In classes at the Art Students League of Los Angeles, Harris studied under one of the founders of the Synchronist Movement, whose focus was to define form in space through the use of color. Harris' experience at making objects appear to recede or advance simply by manipulating their color became an invaluable tool in later years.

As a youth, Harris was unmoved by architecture. But that changed after a fellow student persuaded him to visit the Hollyhock House, a residence in Hollywood built for Aline Barnsdall by Frank Lloyd Wright. Filled with doubts, Harris went to the house and was awe-struck. "Frank Lloyd Wright was the one who aroused my interest in architecture," he acknowledges. "I still admire him above all others." But it was Neutra, with whom Harris apprenticed for five years, who left the more visible imprint.

Harris, though, was quick to stray from Neutra's example of International Style Modernism, a way of building that relied heavily on a cool aesthetic of steel and glass. While still in the formative years of his career, Harris designed a house that received immediate national attention. Known as the Lowe House, this modest residence made the most of natural redwood siding and roof shingles and introduced features that were Harris' own: bedrooms that opened to private gardens (which he intended as sleeping porches), translucent glass panels that gave privacy to the interior while admitting a soft light, and an almost exclusive use of indirect lighting.

The timeless qualities of his work made Harris a leader from the start. "He's one of perhaps four or five American architects of this century whose work I admire because of its thoroughness and authenticity," says longtime friend Frank Harmon, a Raleigh architect and professor at N.C. State. "Harwell's buildings are generally thought-built; that is, you can look at anything he has done and learn from it, because you know that it has been designed and built with great integrity. So often today we see buildings that are compromises in some way. The architect will say, 'The client wanted it this way, the budget was too small, the building inspector demanded such and such.' Or they are built to agree with a certain style. But Harwell didn't work that way."

Harris points to his Haven House (1939-40), which exploited the dramatic views afforded by a steep and difficult site, and English House (1949), a big-budget commission for a crippled painter, as his proudest accomplishments because "they best expressed the needs of the client." In the case of the English House, Harris created "a place where an ailing person could feel comfortable, a disfigured person could feel dignified, and a sophisticated connoisseur could feel uplifted," writes author Germany. After finishing the English House, Harris moved his practice to Austin, Texas, and assumed the directorship of

the architecture school at the University of Texas. The buildings he designed for Texas clients changed to accommodate the new location. They had sculptural brick exteriors, for instance, which helped protect them from the intense heat. After 10 years in Texas, he moved to North Carolina and began influencing yet another generation of architects with his own steady intensity.

Like the man himself, Harris' residence in Raleigh sits in quiet reserve along a busy residential street. Viewed from the sidewalk, its understated presence and compactness belie the fact that the building contains a professional office, one-bedroom apartment, and full residence. "I think it would work better as office only than as office and residence together," he says today, still maintaining objectivity enough to criticize the building he had inhabited for nearly 30 years. "But I have tried to make the plan of any building as versatile as possible, to make additions and changes when need arises."

Perhaps because of his personal qualities, Harwell Hamilton Harris was never widely canonized in architectural circles. Yet he is regarded correctly as one of the pioneers of American Modernism and, as such, has secured a place in the history of American design. "I think he is the ultimate gentleman – gentle man," says Frank Harmon. "He is almost a man of the 19th century; he is polite, considerate, and thoughtful. But at the same time he has the qualities that allowed him to persevere, to see that his buildings got built, to see that his buildings were something of beauty. So what I am saying is that he is both gentle and strong. Even in his illness, he is both gentle and courageous."

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Revealing Wright

Renovations to the original galleries of the Guggenheim Museum suggest the tenor of a forthcoming expansion.

For all the brouhaha that surrounded deliberations over the proposed – and now approved – annex to New York’s Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, surprisingly little was ever said about what was to happen inside the building. As it turns out, the program to provide new galleries, expanded administrative offices, and adequate technical services also frees the museum to wage an extensive restoration effort that will upgrade the Frank Lloyd Wright original. In the process, ad hoc changes made to Wright’s building will be stripped away. And connections to the 10-story annex will introduce new sequential and spatial experiences that allow the museum to be seen in ways never possible before.

“The whole idea of re-referencing the original building to the new is all in the spatial expectation, the revealing of Wright,” says architect Charles Gwathmey of Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects, the firm in charge of both the annex and renovation. In linking the old and new, Gwathmey has devised movement patterns that complement the circulation flow along the main spiral while providing new exhibition space in a museum that, despite its elegant form, is legendary for its indifference to its intended purpose: displaying art.

Two key elements of the interior work – renovation of the top level of the main spiral and the second-floor Thannhauser Gallery – were completed in 1987 to suggest to museum patrons (and perhaps to

detractors of the proposed annex) the spirit in which the entire scheme is to be completed. Skylights have been reopened, partition walls removed, and terrazzo molding replaced to recreate original conditions, where appropriate.

But Wright details are by no means sacred. A new vertical hanging wall, for instance, conceals the slanted original along the Thannhauser Gallery's curved northern end. And, in the same space, a drop ceiling that looks Wrightian (but isn't) is used to accommodate recessed lighting and, at the same time, allow the maximum wall height for hanging art. "We're doing some interpretation, but it's clearly in the spirit of this building," Gwathmey says. "I think our work has always been sympathetic to Wright in terms of the architectonic nature of the way we make space and the materiality of the low ceilings."

For visitors who arrive at the sixth floor landing of the Guggenheim's large rotunda, the absence of a barricade blocking the top loop of the spiral is a relatively new sight. Since the beginning, this has been private space – once used as a conservation laboratory, more recently as storage. Now it is valuable exhibition space. Not coincidentally, it also will create an easy connection in the future to the top gallery floor of the new annex.

One idea governing the annex design is to heighten the perception of the original fabric. Wright's triangular stairwell, for example, will become a sculptural element that is experienced from without, not only from within. Conversely, the lozenge-shaped staff-only stair in the existing northern wing will become a public stair – not only an object in space, but a volume one can enter.

Renovation of the original museum will begin following completion of the new annex. Among the tasks ahead are returning the floors to terrazzo throughout, installing UV-filter glass atop both the large and small rotundas, and rebuilding exterior walls to cure severe condensation ills. In time, the renovation will require closing the entire museum for at least a year. Demolition has begun on the enclosure of the 1969 Guggenheim addition, which was designed by William Wesley Peters of Taliesin Associated Architects and originally engineered to allow expansion to 10 floors.

Gwathmey admits he is struck by the irony of the controversy stirred by the annex. "In 1952, the same people who are complaining about our building were picketing the site and calling [the original Guggenheim] the most outrageous thing that had ever happened to New York." That sort of reaction makes him wary of what he calls "the blind preservation ethic." Gwathmey sees in the history of architecture ample proof that architects can simultaneously re-enrich, reconstitute, and save existing buildings. Early indications of his efforts to reinterpret and amplify the Guggenheim suggest he may be right.

This article first appeared in the April 1989 issue of Progressive Architecture.

Products in the Eighties: Reshaping Modernism

Designer and educator Katherine McCoy looks back on a decade of change in industrial design.

Once the envy of industrialized nations worldwide, American product design suffered a crisis of confidence during the 1970s. Faith in Detroit-made automobiles eroded along with trust in American cameras and coffee makers. While innovations in product styling and appearance took precedence over technology gains among many U.S. manufacturers, factories in Japan and Europe concentrated on churning out products that simply worked well and lasted a long time.

That trend reversed in the 1980s, which marked the reemergence of the designer in decision-making circles of many American corporations. Executives, conceding that smart design meant good business, turned to their creative staffs to simplify design, streamline manufacturing processes, improve quality, and cut costs. For an insider's view of product design in the '80s, Inform spoke with designer and educator Katherine McCoy of the Cranbrook Academy of Art. She is a former president of the Industrial Designers Society of America.

Tremendous changes took place in product design during the 1980s. What conditions preceded those changes?

McCoy: The '70s were a quiet time for American product design. The professionalism of the decade led to a corporate, functionalist approach. Industrial design requires an incredible amount of capital

investment by manufacturers. There might be \$5 million of retooling just for a small product, so it's really a make-or-break situation to introduce a new product. That kind of risk led companies to listen to marketing forces. So the rise of the MBAs may have actually blocked a lot of innovation by leading businesses to minimize their exposure to risk.

It's an extreme statement, but I have heard the Harvard Business School be blamed outright for the decline in quality of U.S. manufacturing. Is that attitude akin to what you are talking about?

Yes. Perhaps it is somewhat unfair, but the marketing orientation they encouraged was certainly a contributing factor, because marketing's way of studying a situation is typically to interview consumers about their preferences. And if a consumer is shown something he has never seen before, he will probably give a negative response. The Ford Taurus would have failed marketing studies – in fact, it did fail marketing studies – but Ford had conviction and took a chance.

What about the influence of foreign competition?

In hindsight, the best thing for industrial design in the U.S. as we entered the '80s was Japanese competition, because it shook up American corporations. Now, in fact, when you are showing a proposal to a client for a product and he starts expressing a cautious attitude, all you have to do is say: "Japanese competition." And they respond with something like, "Oh yeah, we've got to innovate, don't we?"

It sounds like you are crediting the Japanese with single-handedly shaking American corporations out of a sleep.

Well, yes, because the Japanese were successful in the marketplace. And their success was credited to their insistence on quality and detail, and to their willingness to risk long-term success on innovation. Frankly, Japanese industrial design and product design isn't that much different than American industrial design. The source of Japanese industrial design know-how is a West Coast school called the Art Center College of Design. What I'm saying is the Japanese had the same training and experience as Americans, but then they went home to a sympathetic corporate culture that wanted quality and innovation.

What other changes have come about lately?

There are two things worth mentioning. One factor was "Eurostyle," a term I really don't care for that was coined by home fashion magazines.

But here are these terrific, beautiful, Bauhausian products – like those Braun has been doing for 20 years – that were only sold to the intelligentsia in a few good design stores. Suddenly these products have become popular with Yuppies. And that has to do with the new market: the postwar babies. They are much more exposed than any previous generation. They have been to Europe. They are interested in gourmet cooking. They want the best of everything. And they are much more receptive to new product ideas in the consumer market. The other recent change is technology. All of a sudden there is a whole new world of smart products – microwaves, car dashboards, alarm clocks, wrist-watches. They all need programming. And personal computers are getting absorbed into the expertise of such a large segment of the population that people feel comfortable with more complex products.

So, in the context of all the general changes you have talked about, what have been the material results?

The main thing is just a big leap forward in the visual quality of product design. The whole vocabulary of form certainly improved.

I recall one writer describing the industrial designer's role as "making technology understandable." Is that a fair description?

Interpreting technology is a good way to put it. And certainly to demystify it and try to make it understandable. Also to humanize technology. So one of the theories that was born in the past few years, product semantics, looks at form as a language that communicates. Communication is a legitimate part of function. The Bauhaus interpreted function very objectively. Frequently it had more to do with structure and materials than any kind of psychological, metaphysical qualities. And actually marketing people always understood that objects do have psychological and spiritual values, it's just that they turned that to superficial ends. But anthropologists know this. They can interpret an entire culture from one artifact. It's really an anti-Modernist idea people are arriving at that, no, the whole world's objects shouldn't look like they were from the same culture. Why should they?

Let's return to the idea of product semantics. What's an example of a product that was developed with that in mind?

Well, there are not that many actually on the market, but there have been a lot of proposals. For instance, there is one that has been published widely. It's called the Phone Book. It's a telephone answering machine that is also a phone book, and it gives printouts of phone mes-

sages, and has a telephone. It has a number of different modes. As you go from one mode to another, you literally turn the pages that suggest an open book. So as you turn the page, you switch from the telephone book mode to the telephone answering machine mode. The form of the product suggests the activity and, in fact, helps effect the activity.

I think a lot of people who aren't aware of what designers do somehow see design as a superficial activity, in which perhaps the shape or color of an object is manipulated arbitrarily. They equate design with styling. What's wrong with that viewpoint?

Well, that is the level that industrial design actually had come to be relegated to in the '70s. Now, because of the issue of interpreting the machine for the user, many problems have to be solved. We typically ask users to bend to the machine. And that usually results in lower back pain for computer users sitting in office chairs and it results in safety problems. Industrial design makes products safe to use, it makes products productive and efficient, because a designer really studies the work patterns, the performance the product is going to facilitate.

I used to hear a lot about the term "planned obsolescence." Was that notion really a conscious strategy of the corporate culture or just a by-product of poorly made goods?

I think it was a very deliberate policy in the '50s in automotive design. New model changes were visual and involved superficial styling. There is plenty of obsolescence going on now, but I think it has more to do with all the technological innovation that's going on. No one needs to plan it anymore. You hesitate to buy a computer this week because next week there will be an even better one on the market.

What's one of your favorite designs of the '80s?

The Ford Taurus was the first auto lust I had felt in years. It's a slippery car. It's very close to an ideal aerodynamic form – the station wagon is. And this is the first station wagon that was the original form of the car. They adapted the sedan from the station wagon, rather than the other way around. Aerodynamics were assumed in the 1930s to be for speed, but this is a contemporary form of aerodynamics. Its object is fuel-efficiency and highway stability.

This article first appeared in the premiere issue of *Inforn* magazine, published in January 1990.

A Pole Barn with Panache

Jerry Wells combines modest materials and simple means of construction in a thought-provoking Shenandoah Valley house.

Jerry Wells has never been one to follow stylistic trends. So when he sat down to pen the first sketches of a weekend house for a Washington, D.C., client, his thoughts ran more along the lines of typical summer camp cabins — a kind of rustic Boy Scout pavilion with primitive facilities, a wood stove, and a large screened porch.

His client had other ideas. She loved the hiking and skiing in the woods surrounding Shenandoah National Park and often brought her son along to escape the noise of the city. But eight years of renting unheated cabins with outdoor privies was enough. She wanted physical, as well as spiritual, comfort on her 160-acre tract of forest and pasture.

Their compromise produced a spirited house that draws on the imagery and techniques of local tradition without sacrificing the architect's vision. In the case of Wells, a professor of architecture at Cornell University, that vision is influenced by decades of practice in the Modernist tradition and grounding in the theory of Le Corbusier. Knowing that, it is too easy to look at the telephone-pole underpinnings of the Shenandoah House and see *pilotis* rendered in the rural vernacular. But the overriding rationality of the building, the familiar rhythm of its sweeping window wall, and details such as the floor-to-ceiling panels that open to reveal screened vents all belie Wells' influence by early European Modernism.

His first task in designing this house was coming to terms with

a steep mountain site offering dramatic views of the Shenandoah Valley. Wells situated the house to block the view as one approaches through a clearing on the uphill side, likening the effect to “a thick wall or dam across the cascading site.” The experience of entry is all-important: A heavy sliding panel pulls back, yielding access to a door, and one steps through the stark façade, climbs a stair to the second floor deck, and confronts a 180-degree panorama of the valley floor and mountains beyond. (Better yet is the 360-degree view from a raised platform at the south end of the deck.)

Wells’ emphasis of one façade as an archetypal wall, solid and severe, stems from his notion of buildings as assemblies of independent parts that are free to be exaggerated or articulated according to their role in the overall scheme. The opposite face of the building is anti-theatrical: open, dynamic, all glass and air and exposed rafters. Likewise, he divides the roof into two parts – one a tilted corrugated metal roof that provides primary shelter from the elements and implies an orientation to the view, and the other a flat membrane roof that simply encloses the space.

Even though he is given to building in concrete, Wells says the sheer impossibility of getting a concrete truck up the mountainside forced him to look at alternative methods of construction. He settled on the idea of a “pole barn” because of its appropriateness to the setting and the fact that local contractors knew how to build one. Solid walls in the house are supported by 8x8 posts framed with 2x6 horizontal members, producing a substantially thick wall that “gives you some depth to play with,” Wells says. He uses that potential to greatest advantage in the dining room window that frames a meadow view.

From outside, the windows serve sparingly as compositional devices, at the same time conforming to a proportioning system made explicit by horizontal members that add relief and detail to an otherwise common wall. Says Wells: “If there were no tracery or small lines running around the building, it would be a scaleless monster.”

Formal play on the exterior was not as important to the client as achieving an unobstructed view of the valley from the living room. Wells delivered by designing a window wall using a series of vertical mullions that support floor-to-ceiling glass. “I’ve used these over and over again,” he says. “It started out as a cheap way to make a window wall and incorporate a little structure. But there’s something about the way it deals with landscape, so that the architecture and landscape participate compositionally with each other.”

A boxlike fireplace separating the living room and kitchen serves to cramp the already-tight space in this 1,500-square-foot house. Wells might have served his client’s needs for living area better by allowing the fireplace volume to protrude outside the simple planar wall and be

flush inside, even though that would have meant sacrificing the conceptual purity of his “dam” across the tumbling mountainside.

Such a move would have had a negligible effect on a house so self-assuredly untrendy as this one. “I’ve never gotten too involved in the ‘isms’ in the past 12 or 14 years,” says Wells. “It seems to me that the kind of stylistic biases people are expressing today get in the way sometimes of thinking about issues that are more fundamental for a house like this. It’s not up here on the mountain trying to be a high-style house. It’s trying to take advantage of the views and the light, and to be sensitive to trapping those things as best as it possibly can.”

This article first appeared in the July 1992 issue of Progressive Architecture.

Centre of the Earth

The Boyne River Ecology Centre earnestly practices the “green” philosophy it intends to preach.

Along tradition of teaching respect for God’s green earth through nature walks and well-meaning lectures wasn’t enough to satisfy the board of education of Toronto, Ontario, which had high expectations for the thousands of public school students who pass, week by week, through the Boyne River Natural Science School. The virtues of green architecture, the Toronto board reasoned, are best conveyed through first-hand experience.

They developed the idea for a new experiment in education: an ecology center that would embody up-to-the-minute principles of sustainability, low environmental impact, energy conservation, energy renewal, and healthy construction. The resulting Boyne River Ecology Centre, scheduled for dedication in June to coincide with the summer solstice, is a model of achievement for drawing on few resources and designing them to go a long way. “It was part of the initial concept of the building to reduce the consumption of energy as part of the strategy of conserving energy overall,” explains architect Douglas Pollard, of the Toronto firm Douglas B. Pollard Architects, who designed the building with mechanical engineer Greg Allen of Toronto.

The building’s segmented, 16-sided form draws on the traditions of Native Canadian lodges while providing a number of energy-related advantages. A round building is the most efficient to warm with a central fireplace, since heat radiates outward – though, in this case,

the infrequent need for a supplemental heat means that the fireplace serves a more ceremonial function. The rounded form also allows for an efficient amount of the building's perimeter to be earth-sheltered and the non-directional plan eliminates the necessity for corridors and space-consuming entry sequences. Visitors enter the building directly through a vestibule to the central circulation space, from which the labs and classrooms are reached.

The center's high performance relies on a thermally efficient glass-and-wood building envelope, which is dominated by the tempering effects of a large sod roof and an earthen embankment that wraps the northern half of the building. Below-grade insulation applied to the walls, floor perimeter, and footings greatly reduce thermal loss, while evaporative cooling of the sod roof and ground exposure of the concrete floor temper the building in summer. Most exposed surfaces are south-facing windows, consisting of triple-glazed, double low-E, gas-filled units with low-conduction edge spacers and insulated frames. Virtual airtightness is achieved with a structural air barrier, non-CFC foam insulation, gasket detailing, and good window seals.

Pollard emphasized natural materials. He selected interior materials for durability, low gas-emission characteristics, and an ability to be maintained with mild soap and water, which keeps indoor air healthy. The floor is linoleum, room partitions are clay tile, the structure is untreated timber framing, interior wood siding is finished with beeswax, paints are nontoxic, and exterior stains are water-based.

Because of the building's high thermal mass, large solar aperture, and high-performance windows, the center depends primarily on passive solar heating. A sunny vestibule/mud room on the east side of the building aids solar gain and provides a good space for drying wet boots. Abundant daylight enters through clerestories, transoms, and translucent ceilings in private spaces, such as restrooms.

The central fireplace provides backup heating. It receives combustion air directly from outside through pipes beneath the concrete floor slab. Passive cooling is achieved through metal screens on the outside of the building (someday to be draped with vines) and natural ventilation, aided by interior partitions that stop far short of the ceiling. Fresh air enters the building through the cupola and passes through an air-to-air heat exchanger, where it is warmed by outgoing air before being forced downward with high-efficiency fans to large perforated metal ducts on the classroom floors.

Pollard took full advantage of wind, water, and sun on the center's hillside site to generate a fully renewable electrical supply for the building. He placed a bank of photovoltaic cells unobtrusively behind the center, a small hydroelectric generator in a stream below, and a wind turbine atop a slender tower on the hill behind the center.

Electricity from each of the three sources is stored in large batteries secured behind glass where students can see but not touch. Diverse power sources are critical to center's year-round operation; when sun levels are lowest in the winter, wind levels are highest.

Task lighting constitutes the primary electrical need, with compact fluorescents controlled individually in each classroom. Larger fluorescent lamps illuminate chalkboards in the classrooms, and low-voltage halogen lights brighten circulation paths on the north side of the building. Motion sensors trigger restroom lights when someone enters; the rooms go dark when they're empty. The only other requirements for power come from high-efficiency fans in the heat exchangers and a small trickle pump used in the building's sewage treatment system. Rooftop solar collectors and radiators beside the fire pit take care of the limited need for hot water.

The most ambitious aspect of the ecology center is its solar aquatic waste treatment system, which releases cleaner water than it takes from the site. Isolated in a glass-enclosed space on the center's south façade, the waste treatment system is both a functional dividend and a key teaching tool. The brainchild of Massachusetts biologist John Todd, this living machine is designed to recycle 800 gallons of water each day. Raw sewage seeps through four sealed equalization tanks before being pumped into the tallest of 17 clear plastic cylinders arranged in a spiraling configuration. Gravity draws the water from cylinder to cylinder, then into an interior marsh for filtering and, last, to a display pond containing native plants and animals. As the water trickles downward through the cylinders, diverse ecosystems develop as each tank progressively supports increased numbers of bacteria, algae, protozoa, aquatic worms, snails, clams, and fishes – as well as aquatic plant life such as watercress and Canadian pond weed.

In addition to its eco-sensitive features, the Boyne River Ecology Centre exhibits a design sensibility that has less to do with backwoods simplicity than with city sophistication. Pollard challenged his client's preconceptions of a rustic building rendered in earth tones with a color palette that is rich with purples, greens, reds, and blues. Walls that enclose the recessed hearth are punctured with triangular openings and painted fuchsia. And playful forms on the floor, ranging from trees on a mountaintop to a sweeping bird that appears Inuit-inspired, are cut from ten shades of linoleum.

Pollard's contemporary expression is appropriate, considering that the students who come here are children of the city themselves. But while the surface embellishment of the Boyne River Ecology Centre reflects design attitudes of today, the real lessons to be learned from spending time in this humble place speak louder, and more profoundly, about the world of tomorrow.

This article first appeared in the June 1993 issue of Architecture.

Region's Tallest Building: The Best it Can Be?

A proposed 59-story office tower in Hartford moves ahead with large-scale design flaws and disregard for human scale.

Ideals are the stuff of art. And architecture, as art, has an obligation to strive for ideal achievements – to be the best it can be.

The Cutter Financial Center, the proposed Hartford skyscraper that lacks only city council approval before groundbreaking can begin, offers a wonderful opportunity to approach those ideals. It comes before the public with a potentially big budget and even bigger ambitions. Due to its towering size and central location, it will have an enormous impact on downtown Hartford and stand as a new symbol for the city.

As integral parts of the city, large buildings should offer people lively and accessible places to work, live, shop, and eat. But the Cutter building also should aim to represent Hartford and to take its place on the skyline as a landmark that people for miles around can be proud of.

That is the sentiment developer Anthony F. Cutaia appealed to in September when he revealed updated plans for “a signature for the city of Hartford.” The revised Cutter building, raised from 51 to 59 stories, suddenly was being promoted as the tallest in New England, surmounting Boston’s John Hancock building by 88 feet. Cutaia’s ideal, betrayed by his boyish grin, seemed to be celebrity for the building and, by extension, for himself.

Enter the architects. In their position as professionals, the designers from Russell Gibson von Dohlen Inc. of Farmington have loyalties to their client, Cutaia, to their home, Connecticut, and to

their calling, architecture. Their challenge is to balance the demand for speedy production and economy with often conflicting desires such as thoroughness and care. Their ideal is quality, tempered by an imposed urgency.

This combination of brassy client and profitable firm has produced on paper an architecture that sells. On one level, it is a welcome break from the abstract, scaleless glass boxes that have been visited upon American cities for two decades. It expresses itself with color and for once, Hartford, you can breathe with relief: It is not pink, but reddish-brown and white.

It has a profile that catches the eye and occupies it beyond a microsecond. But there lie its weaknesses, as well. The Cutter's octagonal roofs, blocklike towers, sculpted columns, turquoise terra cotta medallions, sweeping arches, flying buttresses, gold dome, and flaring wings all compete for attention – and dissolve the unity that is the backbone of well-conceived architecture.

This is a building without order, a composition of unrelated parts. With two decorated towers framing the Pearl Street entrance, the unfolding shaft thrusting skyward, and a rambling base that seeks a unified architectural expression for its mish-mash of functions, the Cutter building simultaneously speaks many languages. Its façade is an assemblage of arbitrary decorative elements and imagery from the Renaissance, Federal period, late 19th century and early 20th century – all intended to achieve a feeling of “Americana,” in the words of its chief architect.

But if its only faults were stylistic flourishes, the Cutter would be easily repaired. Regrettably, it is rife with unresolved conflicts of a conceptual nature. For example:

■ The Cutter is a skyscraper that makes pretensions to be small. The choice of a site bordered by Lewis Street, a quiet side street that contains the remnants of Hartford's mid-19th century brick town houses, forced Cutter's developer to contend with preservationists. In addition to Cutaiia's agreeing to restore the twin houses at 25-27 Lewis (an offer made in exchange for being granted additional floor area in its tower) and to save the façade of 31-33 Lewis, the designers responded to the context of Lewis Street by choosing to clothe their high-rise in reddish-brown and limestone-tinted bricks. While brick requires labor-intensive construction – and an enormous

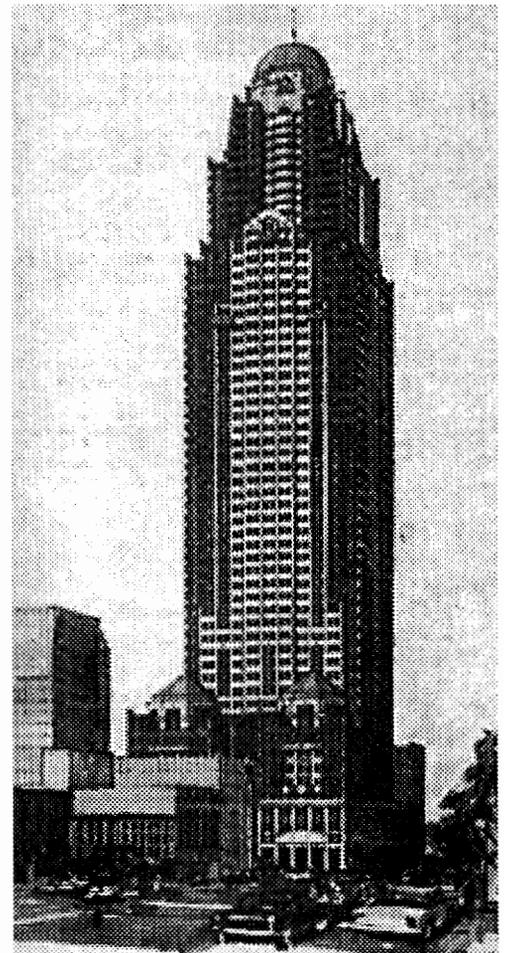


Fig. 7. Proposal for Cutter Financial Center, Hartford.

amount of it at this height – it is easy to justify on the basis of its sympathy to the small-scale aspects of historic Lewis Street.

Also, in designing a four-story Lewis Street façade for the Cutter and then pulling back the face of its tower 15 feet from that surface, the designers say they are preserving the street's residential scale. This claim is dubious at best, for the sheer presence of the Cutter tower will impose itself on people walking anywhere near Lewis Street. Neither the street nor the cause of good architecture is served here.

Further, the repetitive four-story façade spanning more than half of Lewis Street will not deliver the intimate scale preservationists are hoping for. The Cutter would be better off to state its purpose boldly and get on with the matter of being a skyscraper.

■ The Cutter, in places where it is overpoweringly horizontal, tries to be vertical. This problem stems from the nature of above-ground parking on the building's lower three floors. Parking decks, no matter how you slice them, are made by stacking horizontal layers. Yet designers have struggled from the beginning to camouflage this by applying eye-grabbing vertical elements to the façade. A similar conflict in the design of the strongly horizontal windows at the residential and office levels is addressed by inserting narrow vertical windows into the openings to lead the eye upward.

■ The Cutter is a building of competing façades that attempt, at the crown, to make amends. The building façades are designed in pairs, with opposite sides identical. Yet onlookers usually will view the Cutter from an angle where two sides will be visible, and both are doing separate things. That, in itself, might not be so objectionable if the building did not attempt to become omnidirectional at the top in order to accept the dome at its crown. This is another matter of split personality that warrants therapy.

■ Also of serious concern is the Cutter's height, which blatantly disregards the place it will occupy. Take a minute to stand away from Hartford's downtown and look at it. Imagine next to the already oversized CityPlace a building one-and-a-half times that size. That is the extent to which Cutter will dwarf its next-tallest counterpart, not to mention the rest of Hartford's modest downtown.

Still, airing these objections is not to say the Cutter is beyond salvaging. Since its initial public appearance in May, it has been improved substantially. For example, the original Cutter proposal had the parking levels clad in vertical glass panels. While in the tradition of giving individual functions their own expression on the building façade, it also gave the discomfitting impression of a massive brick building sitting atop a glass one. Those materials have been changed and the number of above-ground parking floors reduced from six to three, with six layers of parking placed below street level at considerable cost.

Parking has been removed from the Pearl Street façade, the main front of the building, and has been replaced with offices. In addition, the office parking lot entrance has been redesigned to allow more stacking, or backup, of cars to occur inside the building rather than in the city streets.

Architects lowered the height of the base, or podium, and increased the height of the shaft of the tower, which gives the building a more slender appearance. The transition point from office to residential use has been clarified on the façade, which simplifies the busy composition first submitted.

Last, the dome has been made fuller and more robust, and it has been raised higher on a drum that will make it more visible from downtown streets. While it could be criticized as a literal appropriation of a historic element, the gold dome is indigenous to Connecticut architecture and its use at the scale of a skyscraper is an interesting transformation. Representatives from Russell Gibson von Dohlen have acknowledged that the building has improved through the firm's effort to respond to suggestions from the city's design review board. Yet the implication at the most recent design review sessions was that it is time to stop getting better and start raising the steel superstructure.

That would be a mistake, for there are many issues left unresolved in the Cutter's design. The debate has been entirely too mild regarding a project of this magnitude. The architectural community, while freely opinionated in private conversation, has been publicly silent on the issue. And the design review board, by expressing in its favorable recommendation mostly misgivings about the number of parking spaces provided (too few) and traffic generated (too much) by Cutter, has absolved itself of its primary role, which is to speak forcefully on the aesthetic qualities of a proposal.

While not a design without merit, the Cutter Financial Center will occupy a place of such prominence in Hartford that it begs for more refinement. Because of its towering proportions, it would become a lasting symbol for the city and should project the strength and accomplishment to which its overpowering dimensions give it claim.

The city can afford to demand more. Rather than allowing personal and civic ego to erect New England's tallest skyscraper, wouldn't Hartford be better served by building New England's best?

This article first appeared in the November 9, 1987 editions of The Hartford Courant.

Tectonic Teaching

With honest materials and simple connections, The Shipley School is both a building and a teaching tool.

Like many academic campuses large and small, the grounds of The Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, grew over a century in deliberate, but largely shortsighted, ways. So by 1989, when Philadelphia architects Kieran, Timberlake & Harris were engaged to plan a new phase of expansion, the firm found a scattered collection of perfectly respectable, but rather anonymous, Neo-Georgian and 1960s Modern buildings. Reorganizing the school's upper campus became a primary concern of the master plan authored by KTH, and the firm's design for the West Middle School emerged as the first tangible step toward giving the ill-defined campus a new address, explains KTH principal James Timberlake.

The architects started by clearing the site, which was cluttered by service drives and blocked from the desired street entry by a tennis court. The tennis court was eliminated and replaced by a horseshoe-shaped driveway. More important, the resulting green space defines the campus edge and focuses attention on the property's old carriage house, slated for renovation as the admissions office. "It put a lawn, a presence, back on the street," says Timberlake.

In its form, the new school resembles nothing else on campus. But its materials palette grew from an analysis of surrounding buildings made of slate roofs, metal, brick, limestone, and wood windows. "We tried to point out that a durable palette of self-finishing materials

would keep maintenance costs low. And that the palette of materials was contextual." Beyond that, Timberlake says the decision to make the new building a teaching tool by revealing its tectonics made the selection of exposed, self-finishing materials a natural choice.

Moreover, the building extends a pattern of inquiry into the fabric of construction established by KTH in earlier work such as the Science and Technology Center at Rider College and the University Center at East Stroudsburg University. Among the many characteristics Shipley shares with the other two projects: dividing the program into simple repetitive units, fitting those units into a rational scheme of assemblage, expressing structural elements forthrightly, and developing a compatible but separate language for the infill enclosure.

At Shipley, structural walls are expressed as brick piers or large expanses of brick where the sides of classroom cells rotate 90 degrees at the west end of the building. Lightweight infill walls are essentially a slate roofing system modified for vertical application – a low-tech solution in keeping with the school's low-maintenance requirements.

But the patterning of the slate infill walls, while playful and energetic, is somewhat jarring and difficult to decode. This disparity occurs despite the fact that the staggered gear-tooth openings beside the structural piers result from a formal logic. Each classroom is expressed identically on the exterior with a central window and small casements at the corners; the zippered effect occurs where the alignment of classroom windows is broken at stair landings.

The three-story building is organized around the fundamental unit of the classroom cell, four of which are clustered around a gathering space on each floor. The 22-by-22-foot cell dimension sets the structural rhythm for the remainder of the building, with large program areas such as the science labs, computer room, and art room requiring the width of two cells. The structural grid shifts in the center to create a functional division between the clusters and specialty classrooms inside the building. As urban design, the resulting cranked floor plan accommodates a spreading of the play green to the north and subtle enclosure of the entry green to the south.

Insufficient program to justify a third floor created an opportunity for new expressions at the east end of the building, which contains the public entry and school offices. Benefiting most was the music room, whose high ceiling opens into a slotted skylight.

Beyond the architect's motive to teach children about architecture, there was further method behind the strict repetition of the structural bays, the studied simplicity of the lighting, and the organization of the individual classrooms. The clear ordering of the parts and absence of ambiguity is a settling counterpoint to the spirit of middle schoolers, where chaos reigns.

This article first appeared in the July 1994 issue of *Architecture*.

Harbor Master

The National Maritime Center in Norfolk, Virginia, symbolizes a progressive city eager to shed its Navy town image.

Part battleship, part oil rig, and part whale, the National Maritime Center in Norfolk, Virginia, challenges Jules Verne's larger-than-life fantasy of the sea. The blue-gray leviathan, moored downtown on the Elizabeth River waterfront, is a supersized hybrid of organic and technology-based forms that invites comparison but defies description. "Visually, it refers to all things maritime," asserts Mark Simon, principal of Centerbrook. "Yet they come together to make a very special place that is its own invention. It's science fiction."

The idea for Nauticus grew from a longstanding downtown development plan that called for construction of a regional tourist attraction. Interest quickened in the mid-1980s, when an oceanic center under the auspices of Jacques Cousteau was proposed. Norfolk eventually rejected the idea, but community leaders remained keen on creating a building that would symbolize a progressive city ready to shed its image as just another Navy town.

Nonetheless, water remains dear to Norfolk, which has prospered since colonial times because of its deep natural harbor. Maritime technology, shipping, marine science, and the U.S. Navy are so vital to daily life here that together they comprised the ideal subject for an educational and entertainment attraction celebrating Norfolk's strengths. Once that idea was agreed upon, the National Maritime Center Authority began a reprogramming effort with exhibit consultants Herb

Rosenthal & Associates and Centerbrook, which enlisted the ailing Charles Moore as design consultant.

Several schemes were considered, including a series of ship's profiles sliced like bologna, an amorphous curve hovering above the ground, and a design dominated by a giant portal framing views to the water. Ultimately, the final solution combined aspects of all three. "The building wanted to be a work of art," Simon explains. "But on the other hand, it is sitting on a real working harbor, so we used hard materials, like corrugated metal. It's a maximalist building."

Although it lies at the foot of Main Street, Nauticus is blocked from view by a 6-foot-high flood wall. The building occupies a site along a waterfront promenade extending from Ghent, a prominent residential neighborhood; past the Waterside marketplace developed by James Rouse; and concluding at Harbor Park, the city's new baseball stadium. Two public parks flank the Nauticus site.

These important site constraints were handled adroitly. Views of the harbor and between the two parks were protected by lifting much of the building into the air, like an upside-down wedding cake. And the riverfront promenade remains intact, preserved by building a new pedestrian bridge on the unprotected side of the flood wall. People walking along the bridge encounter the appropriately rugged volume of Nauticus, an undecorated shed which holds its own alongside the seagoing vessels that dock at its rear door. Yet at close range, the building is surprisingly humanized by the textured surfaces and protruding elements that help diminish its scale.

Hardwood gangplanks lead from the promenade to the ticket windows, passing between jumbo columns and above stepped reflecting pools and spillways – an approach meant to suggest boarding a ship or landing on an island. Given the vitality and scale of the building's exterior, one expects an equally dramatic entry. But the sense of anticipation created by the exterior is instead rewarded with a bland lobby, where visitors enter abruptly into the 77-foot-high Wonder Hall beneath a towering skylight. Rather than generating excitement, the structure's open core feels narrow and cluttered.

From the lobby, visitors step onto a 180-foot-long, sloped people mover that shuttles them up to the third floor, where the exhibits are concentrated. On the way, the ramp passes through sequential layers of asymmetrical portals in various pastel shades of green and blue, while windows in the south wall offer changing views of the river traffic and inner harbor. As first planned, this was the beginning of a single-flow circulation path through the exhibits – a strategy that was abandoned when a new director ordered additional stairs built to encourage greater freedom of movement between floors. While the change dilutes the simplicity of the design and crowds the space,

Nauticus staffers say the alteration was a functional success.

The 50,000-square-foot third floor is a loft filled with free-standing multimedia exhibits and hands-on displays. Doors on the west end open to an outside deck resembling a captain's bridge, from which visitors can watch ships moving through the watery gateway to the Chesapeake Bay. Inside, tucked into corners and behind curved walls, are small theaters showing brief educational films and a special theatrical stage set which simulates the experience of naval warfare. As the sequence of exhibits ends, visitors enter the 350-seat Nauticus Theater for a wide-screen presentation on the world's oceans. They then exit to the second floor, which houses a virtual reality exhibit and the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, relocated from former makeshift quarters on the Norfolk Naval Base.

The show continues outside on a 600-foot-long pier, where vessels ranging from square-riggers to Coast Guard cutters dock for public tours. The pier's dimensions and dockside services were specifically planned to accommodate an Aegis-class Navy cruiser, which is a regular attraction on site. Beneath the west end of the building is the Celebration Pavilion, a brick plaza that offers Nauticus a lucrative rental space for special events and ship reunions.

Although shortfalls in attendance have the Norfolk City Council debating an annual subsidy of \$1 million to keep the center running, Nauticus has captured the fancy of many. Down to the detailing of the terrazzo in the central hall – whose repetitive oblongs can be imagined as a flotilla of ships or a school of jellyfish – the building repeatedly invites viewers to ply their own imaginations about the mysteries of the deep. As a metaphor, it works.

This article first appeared in the December 1995 issue of Architecture.

Town Center

A sensitive response to the delicate fabric of Leesburg shows that an institution born of the people can serve them well.

Perhaps the best thing that can be said from the outset about the Leesburg Government Center is that it takes some looking to find it. Tucked among the two-story, 18th- and 19th-century buildings that form the historic core of a quaint Virginia town, the office complex is a testament to sensitive urban design and formal contextualism at its nonliteral best. The center's unobtrusive siting, small town poetics, and uncluttered streetscape have been lauded by juries at every turn: first by the panel that selected the scheme from among 201 national design competition entries in 1987, and later by the jury that honored it with one of the AIA's inaugural Urban Design Awards in 1992.

The kudos belong to Hanno Weber & Associates of Chicago, architects who produced a work of austere clarity from a competition brief overrun with complications. Among the hurdles were an oddly shaped site that already contained a motley assortment of buildings – some of historic value, some not – and an eyesore parking lot. Added to the problematic but highly visible site was a demanding list of objectives that focused on creating a symbolic town center by consolidating town offices without destroying the scale of a valued historic district. Other requirements included providing parking for 320 cars, maintaining pedestrian paths through the site, and creating new urban spaces.

The winning scheme successfully reconfigured the pieces into a simple composition that is artful and pragmatic, and recognizes the

importance of Market Street as a civic corridor linking the town complex with the Loudoun County courthouse a block away.

The stroke of inspiration is an octagonal tower that houses a ground-floor lobby and second-floor public meeting room. Conceived by principal Weber as an “object building” set apart from the street by a narrow green and framed by rhythmic façades, the tower’s prominence and heft render it the heart of the center. Its position in the center of the block also assigns it the role of linchpin around which the other elements are organized.

Grafted directly onto the tower is a three-story block of town offices, which reestablishes the street edge along the western side of the block and authoritatively anchors the street corner with a masonry façade carved in the chimney-form profile of nearby buildings. In other hands, the office block could have grown oppressively large, but Weber controlled its scale by introducing a gable roof with dormers, resulting in a building that appears only two stories tall.

To the east, opposite the block containing town offices, Weber designed a two-story arcade that mirrors the proportions of the office façade, screens the unsightly side wall of the adjacent Tally-Ho movie theater – one of the site’s precious givens – and defines one boundary of the center’s cozy town green. The arcade continues past the tower to create the edge of a second green at the rear of the site. Behind the arcade Weber concealed a two-level parking garage within the rising slope of the site and behind existing buildings. The garage’s rear façade – at the moment, an unarticulated mass of concrete – is in pitiful need of landscaping until the town’s plans materialize to lease development rights of the adjacent parcel.

For all the right-mindedness of the center’s buildings, the complex would be incomplete without its restrained open spaces. The front and rear courtyards serve a double mission, separating the office buildings, tower, garage, and adjacent structures and connecting them at the same time. The greens serve as places to meet, and more important, are integrated into town life by a variety of pedestrian paths. Most successful in this regard is the alignment of corridors and stairwells inside the parking garage with a pair of side alleys leading to Leesburg’s main street.

The intellectual treat of Weber’s urban design scheme is made all the more stimulating by his sometimes quirky architectural hand. Colonial Virginians, were they to return from the grave, would feel familiar with the forms used here, although their interpretation is contemporary. Modern influences emerge in the urban scale and spatial

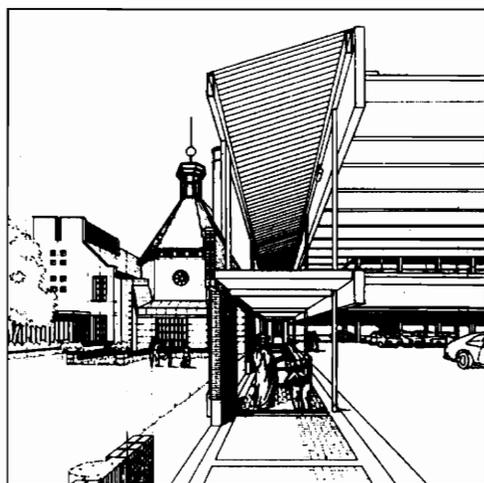


Fig. 8. Leesburg Government Center.

concepts of the plan.

Centuries of tradition in Leesburg inspired Weber to anchor other details in Classicism but render them with a contemporary twist. Engaged columns and architectural trim are handled like stone, yet are fabricated of salmon-toned precast concrete. Dormers are fabricated entirely from sheet metal, and square windows ring the pitched ceiling in the town council chambers. Public spaces inside the building are replete with moldings and mullioned windows, but the moldings are sleek, simple curves, and the mullions secure translucent glass partitions separating corridors from office space. And there's no Chippendale here: Custom-designed cherry furniture in the offices is elegant, but typified by straight lines and clean joinery.

Despite budget constraints, the architect's restrained colors, well-considered details, and judicious application of high-grade materials conspire to give the Leesburg Government Center a feeling of importance and permanence. As a bonus, Hanno Weber's perceptive response to the delicate townscape reinforces the notion that an institution born of the people can, in turn, serve them well. And for once, the platitude fits the place.

This article first appeared in the February 1993 issue of Architecture.

What Nott?

The problem for Union College was not whether to restore the Nott Memorial, but what to restore it as.

In the history of American campus planning, tiny Union College in Schenectady, New York, holds its rightful place among the giants of academe. Founded in 1795, this small liberal arts college quietly boasts an architectural pedigree that traces back 182 years to a visionary French architect. Still, until recently its signature building – the quirky but self-assured Nott Memorial – was as much a source of embarrassment to college boosters as it was a source of pride.

“Stones were literally falling,” recalls architect James Alexander, a principal in the Boston architecture firm of Finegold Alexander + Associates, which restored the building. “To someone who knew that this was the centerpiece of campus, the condition was rather shocking.”

Twelve-foot-long two-by-eights were bolted to the bulging stone walls to prevent their collapse. Fingerlike scars, the remnants of vines, wrapped around the building, which was blackened by one hundred years of soot. The polychrome slate roof was spotted with patches of tar. “Plus a ring of trees that made a kind of skirt had been planted around the building,” says Alexander. “It was almost like the building had a tutu, but no legs.”

Now those problems are only memories. During the college’s 200th-anniversary celebration in February, alumni gathered to rededicate a rock-solid Nott Memorial, the symbolic heart and soul of Union College. “Because of its age and its tradition, this college has never

really had a grand space, a christened space, a chamber that inspires awe and wonderment,” says Dan West, the vice president for college relations. In that regard, the dedication was a defining moment in the long and labored relationship between this oddball building and the venerable institution that owns it.

In its infancy Union College was a laboratory for many of the liberal ideas fermenting in American higher education in the early 19th century. It was a nonsectarian institution, formed from the union of the local Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and Anglican churches. In 1804, after three short-term presidents had served the college, Union filled the post with a dynamic young preacher named Eliphalet Nott. Stanford University architectural historian and Union College graduate Paul Venable Turner writes in his book *Campus* that, “Nott brought to the job unbounded optimism, energy, and a combination of religious fervor and patriotism that had transmuted his childhood Calvinism into a millennial faith that America was to be the ‘new Zion.’” Unbounded, indeed. Nott stayed on the job sixty-two years – a record for college presidents that still stands.

He was popular, too, and attracted more students than Union could handle. In 1806 Nott began buying land in order to move the college to a hilltop overlooking the town. Six years later, foundations were laid for two new buildings. But their progress halted when, in 1813, Nott was introduced to Joseph-Jacques Ramée, a French architect and landscape designer trained in Paris.

Nott wasted no time in hiring Ramée to give form to his idea of a place where students would be “separated from the great world.” Ramée’s surviving drawings show a group of buildings arranged to form a courtyard with a cylindrical structure resembling the Pantheon in the center. Ramée’s plans reveal clear connections to European designs of the period, including the simplified classicism of the architecture and the three-sided courtyard that recalls a French *cour d’honneur*, writes Turner. It is interesting to speculate how these intellectual currents may have influenced both Ramée’s work and the somewhat similar design by Thomas Jefferson for the University of Virginia, which matured six years later. No direct link between the two has, however, been proven.

It is widely assumed, though, that Ramée accepted the placement of the earlier foundations at Union in his design for North College and South College, the only two buildings that were immediately constructed. The erection of the towering centerpiece followed a much stranger course.

Enter architect Edward Tuckerman Potter, a grandson of Eliphalet Nott, who in 1858 produced a scale model of a building based largely on Ramée’s design. The model was occasioned by a ground-

breaking ceremony staged to generate publicity and elicit donations. Nott dubbed the building Graduates Hall and invited Union alumni to come see college history in the making. They came but apparently left their checkbooks behind, as one college official quipped. For more than a decade, all that occupied the site was a stone foundation. In the late 1860s or early 1870s Potter designed a more robust variation of Ramée's restrained classical temple. Rendered in the High Victorian Gothic style popularized by Ruskin, this version featured large Gothic arches, multicolored bands of dark Schenectady bluestone and creamy Ohio sandstone, and a slate-covered dome raised on a faceted drum with stained glass windows. The building was at last completed in 1878.

From the start the architectural wedding cake suffered a critical flaw: No one knew exactly what to do with it. At first considered a "ceremonial" building, it was converted to a library in 1903 with the aid of an Andrew Carnegie grant. When a new college library was built in 1961, the Nott was adapted again as a theater-in-the-round with scene shops and storage on the upper levels. None of the uses ever quite fit.

"You'd never build a building like that today. It's just wildly impractical," says West. "My strong impression is they were trying to do a memorial to Eliphalet Nott, and the purpose of the building was a secondary consideration." That dilemma remained when Union President Roger Hull arrived in 1990 and declared that the Nott Memorial would be restored. But restored as what?

Options included a museum or a rare book room connected underground to the nearby library. Questions about the building's use also fed campus controversy over spending valuable resources on a memorial while overlooking the urgent needs of the college library and displacing the theater. "There were some who thought the thing should have been bulldozed," says West. But the success of his office in raising \$17 million to build a new theater stemmed some of the criticism, and a capital campaign for library improvements was made the next priority. Meanwhile, the \$9 million needed to renovate the Nott (plus a \$2 million maintenance endowment) got its boost from an initial gift of \$5 million from Margaret Dyson and smaller amounts – some as little as \$5 – from 1,735 other donors.

Possible uses for the building were greatly limited by the decision to remove interior additions and enable people to experience the full volume of the 103-foot-high space. That led to a scheme that placed a 460-seat lecture hall/reception area on the first floor, a gallery for changing exhibits on the mezzanine, and a student reading room on the third-level balcony. "Our intention was to try to get students into the building on a daily basis," says Joseph Mammola, the vice president for campus life. "And we think we have created the most magnificent study space in North America."

Alterations to the Nott, a National Historic Landmark, ran the gamut from surface to structure. Exterior stonework was cleaned, repaired, and waterproofed, and decorative elements such as the copper balustrade were restored. Each of the 286 stained-glass windows was disassembled into thousands of pieces, then refurbished, reassembled, and installed with Plexiglas storm windows to increase the building's energy efficiency. The architects also redesigned the main entrance with a basement-level vestibule for wheelchair access. Gaining the needed clearances required removing four of the five-by-five-foot masonry columns in the basement and replacing them with slender steel columns.

Stabilizing the building structure was most critical, however, because the stone cavity walls were being pushed apart by water freezing within them. An intricate structural cage was designed, consisting of reinforced-concrete columns created by filling the original stove flues (sixteen of them, one at the intersection of each facet of the building) with steel bars and concrete. The columns are tied to new concrete ring beams that run continuously along the base of each floor level. The ring beams act much like barrel stays, preventing outward thrust of the walls.

Interior restoration included repair and cleaning of the cast-iron columns and stairs and of the marble wainscoting. Plaster was stripped from the walls, and after structural improvements were complete, new plaster was applied and painted in the earthen red original to the building. The interior of the dome was replastered and repainted, and efforts were made to waterproof and insulate it.

Adapting the building to late-20th century uses posed the greatest philosophical problems, Alexander says, because everyone wanted to highlight the building's 19th century qualities. While new ductwork was left exposed – in part because trying to hide it would have demanded unacceptable changes to the interior – the architects avoided making the ducts too prominent by choosing a shade of green closely matched to the original metalwork. “We’ve gotten away from the idea that everything new has to jump right out at you,” says Alexander. “We don’t need to have stainless-steel ducts in order for people to realize that the ducts are new.”

Glass vestibules were added on three sides of the Nott to keep the temperature more constant, and an elevator was added for wheelchair access. Alexander says he approached those particular interventions with fear and trepidation, because of their potential intrusiveness. No vestibule was built at the west entry expressly to avoid upstaging the delicate curved stairs that lead to the mezzanine and balcony.

Exposed steel beams along the front of the vestibules and elevator tower add an industrial flair that relates the new pieces to the old.

The architects designed new light fixtures that complement the early gas fixtures that circled the Nott's perimeter. "We needed something substantial that would hold up next to the ductwork – and the architecture, for that matter," says Alexander. The largest of the new fixtures is equipped with a variety of lamps to produce a range of effects – low ambient light during dinners, for example, or brighter light for lectures – an arrangement effected by lighting designers Peter Coxe Associates of Marblehead, Massachusetts. Other key participants included general contractors A.J. Martini, Inc., of Malden, Massachusetts, and historic materials consultants Preservation Technology Associates of Boston.

The rare encaustic-tile floor required minor repairs. England-based H&R Johnson, the only company in the world still making encaustic tile, was located for the restoration of the tiles, which are made by a process of pouring colored clays into a mold.

A unique aspect of the building, and one that posed unusual technical challenges, is the penetration of the roof with 832 "illuminators," each consisting of a two-inch-diameter copper tube with a colored-glass disc set into the base. Seen from below, each illuminator is a five-pointed star, and their combination on the dome's cobalt-blue ceiling forms a kind of multicolored constellation. Because the pattern and colors are not random, each illuminator was documented by location, removed from the dome, rebuilt to deter water leakage, and returned to its place.

Potter left no written clues to the development of the pattern, but historians have speculated about its meaning. "The illuminators set the building apart almost more than any other feature," notes Union biology professor Carl J. George, himself something of an expert on their interpretation. Standing beneath the dome, George points out an arrangement of two general patterns. First is the southern array ranging from red to indigo – the colors of the Newtonian spectrum. Opposite them, on the north side, are stars of lavender, violet, and purple – clerical colors with religious overtones. Potter indulged freely in the intense symbolism of Victorian tradition, says George. In Potter's day much controversy focused on the proper role of theology in a world being altered by the rapid emergence of science. Here, in the dome of Union College, the sacred and the secular are unified.

The restoration also required scholarship in the Hebrew language, chosen by Potter for the stern inscription on the dome exterior: "The work is great, the day is short, the master presses the workmen." Minor errors in the original text, made either at the time of original construction or during later repairs, were corrected during the cleaning and replacement of the slate shingles.

Now some of the earlier disharmony surrounding the Nott's restoration has subsided. Within days of the building's rededication,

undergraduates were making frequent use of the upper-gallery study area and plugging their laptop computers into the handy outlets provided as part of the building's reworking. People were trickling in to see the first exhibit on the college's founding. And, for visitors to campus, the Nott Memorial was becoming the first stop on the tour.

The Nott restoration coincides with a decision by college officials to gradually repaint historic buildings in the original beige rather than continue the gray-and-white scheme introduced over the course of the past 40 years. "We're going to go back to matching the original Ramée earthen tone," says Mammola. "When we do that, the Nott will seem less eccentric – to some degree – than it appears now. It's still going to have that wonderful eclectic quality about it – a collection of a little bit of everything – but it will fit in better."

And, after all, who's to say that a healthy dose of nonconformity isn't exactly what a college campus needs? Historian and National Trust Trustee David McCullough may have been thinking much the same thing when, at the Nott's reopening in February, he declared to the Union College faithful: "When every airport, every ketchup bottle, every sitcom, and every magazine rack looks the same, how much more important it is to come into a structure in which the idea is not to look like anything else."

This article first appeared in the July/August 1995 issue of *Historic Preservation*.

Indianapolis Races Downtown

Indianapolis is on a fast-track comeback with an urban-style mall and other new initiatives underway.

Architects may be uncomfortable with the notion that a shopping mall could be an antidote to urban problems. But the Circle Centre Mall in Indianapolis, Indiana, is not just any mall. Located a block away from Monument Circle, the city's urban heart, this three-story shopping and entertainment complex is strategically placed to attract office workers, sports enthusiasts, and conventioners. In fact, the 800,000-square-foot colossus has shown early signs of emerging as the magnet that city boosters hoped it would become – a complement to the trio of Market Square Arena, RCA Dome, and Indiana Convention Center, which have kept downtown alive.

“Things are lively in Indianapolis,” maintains Lynn Molzan, principal of the local firm Woollen, Molzan and Partners. “Circle Centre Mall has done an amazing job of stimulating development – everybody is scrambling to get in on the action.”

Much of the credit for Indianapolis' new vitality goes to a combined city-county government that has worked aggressively since the mid-1970s to rebuild a city suffering from typical urban ills. By working with its raw assets, Indianapolis has capitalized on visionary mayors such as William Hudnut and Stephen Goldsmith, a progressive government, and able developers to generate \$3 billion in public and private investment in downtown.

This thriving metropolis of 1.5 million people came out in

droves for last September's opening of the \$315 million Circle Centre, which was slow in the making. As long ago as 1979, Indianapolis was proposing a downtown mall built on a bulldozed site. "The idea was to put in a building with no windows and no apertures on the street," explains Reid Williamson, president of the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, which dogged the project from day one. "That was the gruesome and forbidding start."

Circle Centre finally got on track with the arrival of Stanton Eckstut, principal of Ehrenkrantz & Eckstut Architects of New York City. Eckstut, a noted urban designer, says he tried to capture the essence of Indianapolis in the design and felt it important to preserve the turn-of-the-century brick and stone façades that lined the sidewalks along the mall's site. These façades – some applied to the mall, others part of intact buildings – successfully minimize the scale of the monolithic structure behind them and suggest the materials, form, and patterns that Eckstut interprets in the mall's interior metalwork and exterior rhythm and masonry details.

Yet, for all the trouble of salvaging the historic artifacts, many of the façades unfortunately offer no access to shops. And while they suggest the memory of a lively street life, they are mere vestiges of such a time, because the shopping mall by its nature is introverted. The location of parking lots beneath the complex further encourages shoppers to enter by car, conduct their business, and leave without ever engaging the city.

Eckstut attempted to counter that inward focus with the mall's centerpiece – a cascading glass Artsgarden for public exhibits and small performances. Hovering over the busy intersection of Washington and Illinois streets, the bulky pavilion is a prominent element of the cityscape from all directions. But at street level, it creates an imposing no-man's-land for pedestrians. Its \$12 million price tag was underwritten by the local Lilly Endowment, which has contributed some \$165 million to downtown's redevelopment.

Now that the mall is open and producing encouraging sales, eyes are turning toward the riverfront and the 250-acre White River State Park carved out of the city's former industrial zone. In the mid-1980s, the \$64 million Indianapolis Zoo relocated into the park, followed by the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indian and Western Art, which was built in 1987 when the city hosted the Pan American Games.

Several new initiatives are heating up: The Triple-A Indianapolis Indians will move this summer into a new 13,000-seat baseball stadium, designed by HOK Sports Facilities Group, in the southeast corner of the park. Ground will be broken this spring on a new \$10 million IMAX theater, to adjoin the \$35 million Indiana State Museum now on the boards. Work also begins this year on a proposed plaza

linking the historic Central Canal and the White River. "We want to create an urban park surrounded by important institutions that draw the public," explains White River Park Director John Kish.

Citywide, Mayor Goldsmith has advocated better housing opportunities by launching a \$529 million program of infrastructure improvements. On the west side of downtown, \$130 million has been spent to rehabilitate a 10-block section of the once-blighted Central Canal, creating a paved walk along which businesses and housing are being built. New residential projects there include 59 units at Watermark, a mix of Neotraditional single-family houses and condominiums that will strengthen the definition of the canal, as well as Canal Court, 250 suburban-style apartments that, with their disregard for the canal's edge, weaken the overall plan.

City backers say that the investments are paying off fast. USA Group, an administrator of student loans headquartered in the suburbs, is spending \$20 million to carve offices from part of the old L.S. Ayres Department Store, which is attached to Circle Centre. Just northwest of the mall, a national retailer is moving into another abandoned department store. And a 15,000-square-foot microbrewery is taking over an existing building across from the mall on Washington Street.

But don't expect Indianapolis to rest on its laurels. The city is anxious to lure a 600-room hotel to the remaining open site between the Artsgarden and Monument Circle, reports John Klipsch, who manages the city's public improvement bonds. The carrot the city government is dangling: expansion of the nearby convention center. Proposals are meanwhile being sought for Union Station, a struggling festival marketplace located a block south of circle Centre Mall. Finally, Mayor Goldsmith is determining the city's need for a new performing arts facility and examining the fate of Market Square Arena, the 25-year-old home of the NBA's Indiana Pacers. Eager to stay competitive, the birthplace of the Indy 500 keeps racing at full throttle.

This article first appeared in the April 1996 issue of Architecture.

Getting Urban Growth on Track

Projected growth along the D.C.-to-Richmond rail corridor has government and business looking for ways to avoid sprawl.

Contrary to the notion that suburban sprawl has won the battle over land use policies in Northern Virginia, the small town ideal of tree-lined streets and neighbors meeting at the corner market is alive and well in the minds of many Virginia architects, planners, and developers. Prompted by the advent of new commuter rail stops between Washington, D.C., and Fredericksburg, they picture compact communities built around a train station that residents can reach comfortably by foot. They picture towns where civic landmarks such as churches and schools are dotted among the houses, rather than set apart on distant lots. And they picture communities where people from all stations of life exist side-by-side by mixing housing types ranging from modest garage apartments to expansive town houses.

That is the vision for Brooke Station, a hypothetical community in Stafford County proposed by the Community Design Group, a faculty team from the University of Virginia and Virginia Commonwealth University. The study, which outlined how a new town of 4,000 people could develop around the existing Virginia Railway Express station at the crossroads of Routes 608 and 629, illustrates in real-world terms the power and pragmatism of land-use design based on the proximity of mass transit.

Brooke Station is a place where “a range of people may enjoy more benefits at less cost,” the report maintains. Through compact

development, the town would reduce internal infrastructure costs for roads and water and sewer lines while preserving more of the surrounding countryside. Many forms of transportation – including buses, cars, and bicycles – would be woven into a plan that places a high priority on pedestrian movement. And it all would be conveniently organized around a village center that provides a place for small commercial enterprises and creates a natural gathering place for residents.

The ideas fundamental to Brooke Station's design are sympathetic to tenets of transit-oriented development being promoted nationally by writers and architects such as the University of California's Peter Calthorpe. His 1993 book, *The Next American Metropolis*, is an important text in the professional libraries of urban planners. In it, Calthorpe argues for new methods of town design that respond to concerns such as ecology, affordability, diversity, and technology. "We need to start creating neighborhoods rather than subdivisions; urban quarters rather than isolated projects; and diverse communities rather than segregated master plans," he argues. "Quite simply, we need towns rather than suburbs."

Calthorpe and others like him advocate the making of towns that organize growth on a regional level to be compact and supportive of mass transit. Such towns create pedestrian-friendly street networks which benefit from the location of shops, offices, houses, jobs, parks, and civic uses within easy walking distance of transit stops. They make public spaces the focus of building orientation and neighborhood activity. And they preserve sensitive wildlife habitats, streams, and high-quality open spaces.

Many of these principles were central to Brooke Station's design. But Stafford County, an initial sponsor of the Brooke Station study, gave the final proposal a cool reception. Key county supervisors labeled the plan impractical and the planning department has not recommended the needed extension of basic utilities such as water and sewer to the Brooke area, says Bill Shelly, director of planning for Stafford County. "My basic feeling is some of the highway improvements for the interstate system may have a greater influence on future development than will the rail line," Shelly says. Consequently, land development along the highways through Stafford remains a much higher priority than development along the rail lines.

Leo Bevon, director of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, takes a much different view. Bevon actively promotes the concept of new high-density "villages" sprouting up at each of the commuter rail stops. The perpetuation of suburban sprawl is not affordable, he says, because of the long-term costs of road and infrastructure maintenance that come with it. Other negative effects of current land-use practices include continued dependence on foreign oil

and ever-increasing air pollution. “It’s healthier for us to have a balanced transportation system, rather than be so dependent on cars.”

Bevon’s department channeled grant money to the Brooke Station project and also sponsored a 1994 study that focused on the broader potential for land development along the entire rail corridor between Washington and Richmond. Both studies were selected by nationally-renowned juries for recognition in the design awards program sponsored by the Virginia Society AIA. Designated by the federal government as one of only six potential high-speed rail routes in the nation, the Washington-Richmond corridor is vitally important. And



because the study included two major circulation routes – the rail line and Interstate 95 – its recommendations highlighted opportunities to preserve and strengthen existing cities and towns while proposing ideal locations for new ones.

Fig. 9. Commuting at Woodbridge along the Virginia Railway Express.

The great advantage Virginia has at this stage of its urbanization is an existing network of rail lines. So the cost of building new railroads is virtually nonexistent, says Warren Boeschstein, a University of Virginia architecture professor and one of the primary authors of both the rail corridor study and the Brooke Station proposal. The fact that commuter rail operators need only to lease time on existing rail lines means their up-front capital investments are reduced greatly.

One of the strongest proponents for rail-based development and one of the key players to watch is RF&P Corporation, the former railroad-turned-real estate company which boasts more than \$690 million in assets and has a financial interest in more than 12 million square feet of built space. “There’s no secret that we believe quality of life in Northern Virginia is actually going to be measured in terms of access to mass transit,” says Denton U. Kent, president and CEO of the company, which has large land holdings along the Fredericksburg line of the Virginia Railway Express (VRE).

Last year, RF&P successfully negotiated with Fairfax County officials to locate the county’s first VRE station in Lorton on a site surrounded by 230 acres of RF&P land. VRE developed the station and, in return, the company built the roads and parking lot. Fairfax also has designated the area as Lorton’s town center, seeking to create a definable community. Now RF&P is soliciting mixed-use residential pro-

posals from private developers. Farther south, near the Leeland Road commuter station in Stafford County, RF&P filed for rezoning of its 445-acre Walnut Farms property to allow for residential development that would take advantage of commuter rail. In June, the county planning commission approved placing 750 dwelling units on the site.

RF&P also controls the train stations in Fredericksburg and Alexandria, both of which have been renovated with the aid of federal dollars. Even before commuter rail came to Fredericksburg in 1992, the city began revising its downtown master plan to anticipate increased ridership and development pressures, says planner Erik Nelson. The city planning commission has approved guidelines that call for higher-density residential development near the train station and revised strategies for commercial development in town, such as placing buildings closer to the street and putting parking lots behind. Also proposed is a transportation hub along Lafayette Boulevard, where trains, buses, and park-and-ride shuttles would converge.

Boosted by a federal transportation grant, the city hired architect James McGhee to rework the Fredericksburg station's former waiting area for use as a shop or restaurant, create a new waiting area, and redesign the platform roof. "Most immediately, this project will help the crime issue by getting some activity back in the station area," says McGhee. "But it will also force people to look to infill lots." McGhee, in turn, has bought a downtown lot nearby and secured approval for a new two-story building. He's designing retail space for the first floor and will locate his office above. "It will be the first new building in the downtown Fredericksburg historic area since the 1930s."

Even tiny Ashland, the picturesque home of Randolph-Macon College, is set to embark on a comprehensive transportation plan intended to integrate many modes of travel without compromising the town's positive qualities. Amtrak trains slice right through the heart of Ashland, so "we consider the train to be a vital link in our community," says Barbara Nelson, the town's director of planning.

But the most publicized of these transit-oriented projects is an elephant by comparison to the mouse-sized initiatives taking shape elsewhere along the rail corridor. That is Potomac Yard – a 342-acre retired railroad yard located between Old Town Alexandria and Crystal City. It, too, is owned by RF&P. Unlike the small-town visions being promoted to the south, Potomac Yard will quickly take on the proportions of a new urban center. "It will be a nodal kind of development pattern that has occurred in other parts of Northern Virginia, although the scale will be lower," says RF&P's Denton Kent.

The development's height limit is 110 feet and a total of 5,500 housing units have been approved, which should generate a population of about 10,000 residents. Kent estimates the office buildings on the

site will generate an additional 27,000 people during work hours. In all, about 30 percent of the Potomac Yard project will be transit oriented. "Our scheme for the main body of the yard is to carve out about 62 acres in the center near the station," Kent says. The core, he adds, will take about 15 years to complete.

The multiple layering of transportation facilities is a critical element of the Potomac Yard project, and Kent believes it is what ultimately led to the project's approval. Potomac Yard's high-density commercial core is planned around a transit hub that will integrate Amtrak, Metrorail, the two VRE commuter lines, public bus service, and bicycle/pedestrian routes. Next to the site is Washington National Airport. All of this combines to produce what some real estate experts regard as the prime development site in the country. But Kent readily acknowledges that its value rests in an ability to move people to and from residence and business.

"Without mass transit, we would be just another large site," he says. "But with the advent of mass transit, we can also provide the opportunity for living and working in a transit environment, which we see as a great advantage."

This article first appeared in Inform magazine, 1995: Number Two.

Neighborhoods by Design

In planning a variety of residential districts, UDA Architects is reestablishing a sense of traditional community.

When a decaying urban neighborhood covering 76 acres in Richmond, Virginia, was cleared beginning in the late 1960s, the shared expectation among its relocated residents was that their home, known as Randolph, would be quickly rebuilt for their return.

It didn't happen that way. Instead, Randolph suffered the requisite sins of urban renewal — evident here, as in so many cities, by the sight of empty blocks grown tall with weeds from years of apparent inaction. But city-building takes time. Now, more than 20 years after the bulldozers rolled through and with more than 300 of a projected 600 housing units built and occupied, the urban design for Randolph that won a citation in the 1983 P/A Awards program is complete enough to declare its first signs of success.

The designers — UDA Architects, of Pittsburgh, whose resume includes a history of planning and urban design with open citizen participation — came to the project in 1979 after an earlier master plan for the site was ruled invalid by HUD. Active in the redevelopment effort was a community of “absentee citizens,” as they called themselves, who formed a planning committee that pressed city agencies for action. While the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority was poised to pepper the site with clusters of public housing organized around central courtyards and surrounded by parking lots, the community pushed to rebuild Randolph in a way that reflected past tradi-

tions and anticipated a new generation of upwardly mobile residents. For the most part the community prevailed, yielding the sort of results that are more common these days in theory than in practice: a new residential development that achieves a mix of income groups and housing types. "Our basic battle cry was 'build neighborhoods with streets and front yards and back yards and porches,'" says UDA principal Ray Gindroz. "The idea was to blur the distinction between the subsidized and market-rate houses by developing the streets and sidewalks."

As a starting point, UDA studied the stable, early 20th-century neighborhoods bordering Randolph for cues that could be duplicated or modified to give the new streetscape a native character and charm. UDA's analysis generated a master plan based on Richmond's traditional model of short residential blocks, and incorporated elements such as on-street parking, street trees, rear service alleys, formal parks and landmarks, and a pattern book of building façades.

The plan called for new public open spaces at key locations. The largest of these, Idlewood Park, provides recreational facilities such as a swimming pool and tennis courts. It serves as a buffer between Randolph and the busy expressway that defines the northern edge of the neighborhood. Two smaller parks designed for the area deftly accommodate shifts in the city's street grid. On the premise that parks can be places of danger as well as pleasure, one of the small parks has been blocked by political maneuvering. But the other, which has all the makings of a quiet urban refuge, provides a welcome place for informal conversation and establishes a new landmark that anchors one end of the development. Gazebos on each of the park sites are placed on axis with approaching streets, extending the reach of Randolph as far as the eye can see.

The foundation of the neighborhood's urban design is a pattern of houses fronting on the street with porches and small yards. Within these restrictions, the plan allows for several house types, including single-family detached houses, attached two-family houses and duplexes, and townhouse-style units. Setbacks are strictly enforced to control the proportions and continuity of the street wall. And a regular pattern of trees has been planted along the sidewalks, though many years will pass before these streets can be called shady.

UDA's design analysis also revealed that the richness and variety of nearby streets occurs primarily through variations in materials, surface texture, and landscaping. In plan and form, the nearby houses are largely repetitive. Following this tradition, UDA designed a pattern book of house types for Randolph that can be altered by substituting new façades, porches, gables, and dormers. While builders and buyers are free to choose among the inventory of options (with certain restrictions on how close identical buildings can be built), the similarities in

window proportions, materials, roof slope, and general height provide the consistency needed to hold the pieces together.

Even at that, the first efforts were not totally successful. Room for interpretation within the general guidelines resulted in houses completed with second-rate trim, poorly executed porches, and dark window frames that “disappear” from the façades. UDA quickly redefined its scope of services to include complete construction documents of the building façades, leaving only the floor plans to contractors’ whims.

Sales momentum was slow to build in Randolph, because the area carried the stigma of a slum. Initial efforts to sell lots and houses (none are built on speculation) relied heavily on low-interest mortgages from the Virginia Housing Development Authority. But now that a critical mass of new houses has accumulated, half of the houses are being sold at market rate with conventional financing – and often to young black professionals.

Today the overriding impression of Randolph is one of stability and a steady rhythm of porches along its residential streets; the required number of subsidized units were built unobtrusively on the fringes of the site. But, in some cases, single-family houses sold at market rate share a back alley with subsidized housing units. “It’s kind of a breakthrough,” says Gindroz, who is optimistic about the prospects of Randolph but suffers no Pollyanna complex.

“You are not going to solve either affordable housing or the rebuilding and stabilizing of communities with this kind of focused effort,” he notes. “Therefore, when you do have the money and resources, you need build in such a way that the new life you are putting in can flow into areas around it as directly as possible, and get individual investment of homeowners to respond.”

In Randolph, the foundation of strong community values – and the contribution of urban designers who are able to listen – has helped to make that happen.

This article first appeared in the June 1992 issue of Progressive Architecture.

Declaration of Interdependence

Proclaiming an eco-manifesto for the millennium, architect Bill McDonough denounces downcycling, urban sprawl, and other strategies of tragedy that tyrannize the next generation.

In choosing to stake his professional future on an issue as potentially tedious as “the environment,” architect and designer William McDonough has become a master of the buzzword. He frequently challenges American businesses to “use current solar income” and remember that “waste equals food” while he champions the coming of the Next Industrial Revolution and outlines his eco-manifesto, which he calls the Declarations of Interdependence.

McDonough, the University of Virginia’s dean of architecture, recently launched the Institute for Sustainable Design. Last year, DesignTex Inc. released a McDonough-designed line of fabrics made with biodegradable fibers and re-engineered chemical processes. “They are so safe,” he says, “you can eat them.”

Working at an institution founded by Thomas Jefferson, what sort of mantle is passed on to you?

McDonough: I have the same design assignment that he did: How are we meant to pursue life, liberty, and happiness free from remote tyranny? In my case, I am calling for the Declarations of Interdependence, but I’m focusing on the same issues. Perhaps now the remote tyranny is not George III – but it’s an intergenerational remote tyranny. We’re actually tyrannizing future generations.

Intergenerational tyranny?

The question no longer is what are we going to leave behind for our children, but what are we *not* leaving behind? Like trout. If we permanently destroy genetic information and don't leave that as a resource, and we persistently toxify the planet, what we have left is a poisoned place, devoid of valuable information.

How does the digital revolution change things?

It allows us to dematerialize – we start to think more in terms of information and less in terms of stuff.

And how will the Institute for Sustainable Design address this?

It will render things visible. We'll have regional planning data available so we can show what it means to allow the present course to play itself out. People can see, for example, what the effect of sprawl will be if they don't do anything. We can project a tragedy. If what we are doing now is a strategy, it's a strategy of tragedy. A strategy of hope would require change. And we have to be willing to change immediately.

What does that require?

It's a way of looking at the world. The business community has adopted something called eco-efficiency, the idea that we can reduce our toxic conditions but we discern our energy consumption as separate. From my perspective, eco-efficiency is a derelict notion. It essentially says that you wake up in the morning feeling really guilty, and then you say, "Well how can I feel better by being less bad today?" All you've done is stretched out the agony. You haven't changed what you're doing. The question is would you rather die by slow torture or would you rather be shot? So instead of eco-efficiency we said: What would a sustainable agenda look like? You have to project what "100 percent sustainable" looks like in order to measure your progress. It makes you become a designer.

Unlike many defenders of the environment, you avoid the term "recycling" in favor of "downcycling." What do you mean?

We're actually losing the quality of the materials. As long as you keep converting carpets and milk jugs into park benches, you're not recycling – you're downcycling the quality of the petrochemical. It's losing quality. You can never get it back to being the jug, because it's being

contaminated with all sorts of other things.

So current recycling practices are inadequate?

More than inadequate. They're probably dangerous. When I see a milk bottle becoming fabric on your back and realize that it's full of anti-oxidants, UV stabilizers, and anti-ammodium residues from catalytic reactions and plasticizers, I think, "Wait a minute. That was never designed to be next to human skin." The largest carpet maker in the world has adopted our principle of cradle-to-cradle design. You can lease their carpet and they'll take it back as a technical nutrient. They render it back into carpet – forever. It doesn't get downcycled.

Bureaucracies are infamous for being unresponsive. Yet you've worked for huge companies like The Gap, Wal-Mart and Herman Miller. How do you penetrate the corporate culture?

I work only with the chairman of the board, and after explaining what we do, I've never had anybody come back and ask me to please give it to them energy-inefficient and toxic. We can show that the economics of buildings are irrelevant next to the economics of employees.

How would that manifest itself in a corporation?

Productivity. Just enjoyment – and also avoiding liability. It's not a small issue. We always make our offices as much like the outdoors as possible, so you feel refreshed at the end of the day. Then you go home to your cave and family and hunker down.

So that people are saying, "I can't wait to go back to work"?

Our argument, when we work with corporate leaders, is very clear. How many people do you think get up in the morning and can't wait to get to their gray rectangle under that neutral fluorescent light? And the air is bad on top of that.

Would Jefferson have sympathized with your agenda?

Mr. Jefferson understood very thoroughly what this idea of intergenerational responsibility was all about. In 1789, in a letter to James Madison, he said, "The earth belongs to the living. No man may by natural right oblige the lands he owns or occupies to debts greater than those that may be paid during his own lifetime, because if he could, then the world would belong to the dead and not to the living."

This article first appeared in the January 1997 issue of WIRED.

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Professional Experience

1989 to present: Editor, Inform magazine (Richmond, Virginia). Founding editor of a regional architecture and design magazine created to raise public awareness of good design. Published by the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects.

1992 to present: Contributing Editor, Architecture magazine, journal of the American Institute of Architects.

1995 to present: Contributing Editor, Preservation magazine, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

1988-89: Senior editor, Progressive Architecture magazine (Stamford, Connecticut). Responsible for feature articles on significant new buildings in the U.S. and abroad. Supervised planning, writing, and editing of magazine's technology section and was responsible for expanding magazine's technology coverage.

1987: Architecture critic/Home Section editor, The Hartford Courant (Hartford, Connecticut). Responsible for coverage of architecture and design for newspaper's arts sections during a period of widespread speculative development work in downtown Hartford.

1986-87: Instructor, College of Architecture and Urban Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Blacksburg, Virginia).

1983-86: Graduate student in architecture, College of Architecture and Urban Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

1980-83: Feature writer, Sun-Sentinel/Fort Lauderdale News (Fort Lauderdale, Florida).

1979-80: Education reporter, Boca Raton News (Boca Raton, Florida).

1978: Municipal reporter, Charlottesville Daily Progress (Charlottesville, Virginia).

1977: General assignment reporter, The Chapel Hill Newspaper (Chapel Hill, North Carolina).

Education

1997. Master of Architecture. College of Architecture and Urban Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

1977. Bachelor of Arts. School of Journalism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Double major in Journalism and Political Science.

Community and Professional Activities

Panelist, "The Public in Public Art," a symposium at Virginia Commonwealth University sponsored by VCU Friends of the Library. October 1996.

Juror, Design Awards program, Maryland Society of Architects, Sept. 1996. Chaired jury that included W.G. Clark and Samuel A. "Pete" Anderson.

Chairman, Architect Selection Task Force, and Member, Building Committee, for development of new facilities for the Richmond Children's Museum. Beginning March 1996.

Guest critic, fourth year studio in graphic design, Virginia Commonwealth University, April 1996.

Lecturer/Panelist, "Core/Fringe/Hinterland: Relationships and Responses to Urban Growth and Change," a symposium in Birmingham, Ala., sponsored by the School of Architecture at Auburn University, Feb. 22-24, 1996.

Guest judge, design category, March of Dimes Gourmet Gala, sponsored by the Roanoke Chapter of the March of Dimes, February 10, 1996.

Juror, Design Awards program, Potomac Valley (Md.) Chapter AIA (suburban Washington, D.C.), November 1993.

Juror, Design Awards program, Charlotte Chapter AIA, October 1993.

Juror, Excellence in Architectural Drawings, Connecticut Society of Architects, August 1993.

Member, Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, The Octagon (Museum of the American Architectural Foundation), Washington, D.C., June 1993.

Guest lecturer, fifth-year design studio, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, April 1993.

Steering committee, Building Better Communities, a consortium of architects and designers formed to promote community development projects in four urban Richmond neighborhoods through a series of design charrettes and a second-stage design competition. 1992-93.

Juror, Awards for Excellence in Design Program, Hampton Roads (Va.) Chapter AIA, May 1992.

Guest critic, fourth year studio in interior design, Virginia Commonwealth University, May 1992.

Juror, Student/Associate/Young Architect Awards Program, Blue Ridge Chapter AIA, April 1992.

Juror, Residential Design Awards, Hartford Magazine/Connecticut Society of Architects, December 1991.

Juror, Waterfront Lot Design Competition, an open competition for professionals and students to propose development strategies that meet the environmental standards of the Chesapeake Bay Act, sponsored by Associated Lancaster Citizens, Lancaster, Virginia, October 1991.

Panelist, "Young Architects: A Survival Course," discussion of career options at Building Virginia, statewide convention of the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects, October 1991.

Juror, Design Awards Program, Virginia Chapter/American Society of Landscape Architects, January 1990.

Juror, Excellence in Masonry Design Awards Competition, Virginia Masonry Council, December 1989.

Juror, Design Excellence, Hampton Roads Chapter/National Association of Industrial and Office Parks (NAIOP), November 1989.

Panelist, "Getting Your Work in Print," discussion of relationships between design firms and the design press at Concept Chicago, annual convention and trade show of AIA Chicago Chapter, October 1989.

Panelist, "Meet the Press," discussion of relationships between design firms and the design press at Build Boston, annual convention of the Boston Society of Architects, November 1988.

Honors and Awards

Commendation for Editorial Excellence, AIA Component Publications Awards program, a national competition sponsored by the American Institute of Architects and Architecture magazine, 1995. Based on published samples of Inform magazine from 1994.

Allied Professions Award, Virginia Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, 1993. Based on coverage of landscape architecture issues in Inform magazine and contributions to the profession through published articles in Landscape Architecture magazine.

Jesse H. Neal Editorial Achievement Award, Best Single Article, Associated Business Publishers, 1990. Based on contribution to editorial team for Progressive Architecture issue titled "Reordering the Suburbs," May 1989.

Jesse H. Neal Editorial Achievement Award, Associated Business Publishers, 1989. Based on contribution to editorial team for Progressive Architecture issue titled "Housing the Homeless," October 1988.

First Place Award for general excellence in writing, major newspapers category, Florida Press Club, 1983. Based on series of feature articles written for Sun-Sentinel/Fort Lauderdale News.