

# arcca

architecture california  
the journal of the american institute of architects  
california council

professional practice issue

02.1



\* United Cab no. 118

\* A Note on Value

\* Under the Radar

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<b>Publisher</b>	Susan K. Miller California Regional Publisher F.W. Dodge Construction Publications Ann Looper Publisher, <i>arcCA</i>
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arcCA is dedicated to providing a forum for the exchange of ideas among members, other architects and related disciplines on issues affecting California architecture. arcCA is published quarterly and distributed to AIACC members as part of their membership dues. In addition, single copies and subscriptions are available at the following rates:

Single copies: \$6 AIA members; \$9 non-members.  
Subscriptions (four issues per year): \$24 AIA members;  
\$15 students; \$34 non-members, U.S.; \$38 Canada; \$42 foreign.

**Subscriptions:** arcCA, c/o AIACC, 1303 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95814, www.aiacc.org

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# Comment

One thing I've noticed, working on this issue of **arcCA**, is that most people don't know any architect jokes. Even most architects don't. There's that Monty Python sketch, the one with the rotating knives (see <http://www.montypython.net/scripts/architec.php>). Otherwise, it's pretty slim pickin's.

I don't know why. We're certainly funny *looking*, the eyewear alone should do it. And the shoes.

Maybe people don't understand us well enough to make jokes about us. Maybe we seem so downtrodden that people can't bring themselves to poke fun. Maybe the kinds of things that go wrong with buildings are too terrible to laugh about; or else they're too quiet or too technical or too gradual to prompt a punch line.

We did, however, turn up one joke (courtesy of Buzz Yudell), and it's a good one:

There's a big line at the Pearly Gates, moving really slowly. Folks are getting restless.

All of a sudden, this old guy with long hair and a long beard and a t-square under his arm wanders up to the front of the line and just walks right in.

A fellow eight or ten people back in the line objects: "Yo! St. Peter! What's up? We've been standing here for hours, and you let this architect just stroll right in!"

To which St. Peter replies, "Oh, that's not an architect. That's God. He just *thinks* he's an architect."

Jokes about architects may be hard to come by, but opinions about us aren't. **arcCA** has asked twenty or so people from diverse walks of life to tell us what they think of architects and the architecture profession. Their responses are collected in "Perspectives: Looking In from the Outside." While some of the respondents dress us down for unrealistic attitudes or inattentiveness or even callousness, I was pleased, surprised, and not a little bit humbled to discover how much people value our idealism. As Jonathan Arons, Chair of Astronomy at UC Berkeley, puts it, "architects are those people who get to remind us again and again of the wonders of the ideal. The more of that reminder, the better." Perhaps *we* need reminding, as well.



"TO ME THE WINDOW IS STILL  
A SYMBOLICALLY LOADED MOTIF"  
DRAWLED CODY

We have bracketed the "Perspectives" with a report on an "undercover" assignment, sussing out public perceptions of architecture from the driver's seat of a cab; and a sobering anecdote from Michael Benedikt, who took the AIACC audience by storm at last year's Monterey Design Conference.

We have also added a new feature, "Under the Radar," in which we profile a recently completed building that has escaped the notice of the glossies. At the risk of crashing my server, I invite submissions for future editions of "Under the Radar." To be eligible, a project or its architect must be located in California; the project must not have been published nationally or internationally (local publication is OK); and construction must have been completed within the last twelve months or, for unfinished projects, must be 60%-70% complete. Architects need not be AIA members. Submissions from widely published firms (as determined by the **arcCA** Editorial Board) may not be accepted. Please send submissions to me by email at [tculvahouse@ccac-art.edu](mailto:tculvahouse@ccac-art.edu), attaching three to five JPG images with a combined file size of no greater than 1.5MB. Describe the project in fewer than 200 words in the body of the email, providing a brief caption for each image, keyed to the image's file name. (If you don't have the capability to submit by email, you may send me the equivalent information by regular mail c/o AIACC, 1303 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, California, 95814.) I look forward to hearing from you. ●

Tim Culvahouse, Editor

# Correspondence

Editor/

While I agree with Bryan Shiles ("Architecture in Public and the Public in Architecture," *arcCA* 01.3) that the design of the Berkeley Public Safety Building "does not speak to Berkeley's famously progressive civic values," I do not agree with his statement that "the city chose the safe route." In fact, the city chose several *different* routes in selecting architects and arriving at a design.

Berkeley first pursued a standard procedure (RFQ, RFP, interviews with short list). Our firm, (then Bull Stockwell Allen & Ripley) made the short list. Two of the principals are Berkeley residents and were quite aware of the sometimes-contentious political process in the City. In our presentation we emphasized our willingness to listen to various points of view, including the users, and the goal would be to design a building that would have its own architecture but would be a good neighbor to the classical 1908 Bakewell and Brown designed City Hall. Our interview went well and our team was selected. To assure that the building would function well, we had associated with Leach-Mounce Architects, specialists in public safety buildings.

At this point, one of the planning commissioners, who was also an architect, argued that this process would not lead to cutting edge architecture and that Berkeley should hold an open competition for the design of the public safety building. The original architect selection was thrown out and the competition was held. We did not enter. As might have been predicted in a city like Berkeley, the selection of the jurors was not popular with the politicians, the public, or the users. There was only agreement that the design certainly was not contextual. To solve this problem, the city of Berkeley hired Robert A. M. Stern to design a more acceptable façade. Another architect selected by the design-build contractor did the construction documents.

The final building is a product of the direction-less process. It is not classical, not contextual, not progressive, and, we have heard, not functional. It has no commodity, firmness, or delight.

**Henrik Bull, FAIA, BSA Architects**

Editor/

While it is always a pleasure to read about projects in my locale, I read with dismay Bryan Shiles article regarding the public in public architecture, in which he describes the Berkeley Tsukamoto Public Safety Building as a building that "mimics the past and appeals to the lowest common denominator."

Having been involved with the public process that generated this particular building, I must point out that the article is misinformed and misleading. The new Public Safety Building is not located next to a 1939 City Hall by James Plachek. That "New" 1939 City Hall building lies across the Civic Center Park and was originally the Farm Bureau Building; it was built by Plachek in the Art Deco style. Instead, the new Public Safety Building lies next to the "Old" City Hall, which was designed in 1908 by John Bakewell and Arthur Brown, Jr., an architectural firm whose other work includes the San Francisco City Hall. The building is a wonderful example of Beau Arts Classicism and was the first building constructed in Berkeley's Historic Civic Center District, which successfully includes buildings from all eras up to and including the 1950s. Berkeley's Historic Civic Center District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places for its significance to city government, architecture, and city planning. The District is organized around a central park (which was designed by a team including Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan) and was inspired by the turn-of-the-century City Beautiful Movement.

Shiles's article conveniently fails to mention that, prior to commissioning the present building, the City sponsored a public competition and selected a building that was well-planned but, alas, fraught with "high-tech" architectural language. There was strong, vocal public reaction against the winner. Due to the public nature of the building, the City responded to its constituency by abandoning the competition. Instead, the Council selected an architect whose work was consistently responsive to unique contexts. Certainly, no other site in Berkeley has as much context as this one.

According to Shiles, however, the building fails *because* it is sympathetic to its context. The article asks how a public service building *in Berkeley* could be designed in the language of classicism. Yet it was quite clear that this was the kind of building Berkeleyans wanted in their daily lives, not

the “machine-for-living” that the competition wrought. While noting the presence of “progressive” UC a few blocks up the road, the article fails to make the logical leap that perhaps Berkeley’s residents might be more sophisticated than most communities. In fact, Berkeley is probably one of the more liveable cities in the Bay Area precisely because of its highly informed citizens.

Furthermore, there is probably no other city in the United States that has more public process and input than Berkeley. After two years of public hearings regarding the design of this particular building, these denizens didn’t “abandon” diversity when they selected the current building; on the contrary, they “respected” the context of their beautiful Civic Center. In spite of this, the article claims, “The absence of adequate public process undermined the building’s potential to represent the city’s character. The very diversity and expressiveness that Berkeley’s political culture has popularized was categorically barred from the built environment.” What?

The article assumes that responding to an existing context is the least imaginative avenue of discourse for architects and public architecture, even though it goes on to advocate a link between the patterns and traditions of place and the language of architecture. This is the typical viewpoint of most contemporary, “cosmopolitan” American architects who have no real connection to the past or a place, much less a particularly memorable place; they usually ignore context because they’ve been trained to do so and haven’t a clue about what it means.

The article’s claim that innovation is a bigger responsibility for an architect than respecting the merely adjacent echoes Howard Roark and world-war mentalities. It disavows the lessons of local vernacular and gives us places like Pruitt-Igoe. Instead, a long-range perspective validates the fact that it takes a more knowledgeable and skillful designer to build on the past and make it legitimate for the present as well as for the future. Berkeley’s new building is quite successful because it naturally progresses from the historic district, and it uses a legible architectural language, one people respond to positively. It doesn’t replicate hand-wrought decoration from Greek and Roman sources, as does the old City Hall, nor does it look like any of the other buildings in the Civic Center. Instead, it uses modern materials and methods for a very modern building type. Berkeley’s Safety Building simply reflects the contemporary public life of one of the country’s most progressive cities—which, in fact, is precisely what a civic building is supposed to do.

**Jerri Holan, AIA, Chair, AIASF Historic Resources Committee**  
Coauthor, *Berkeley’s Historic Civic Center District*,  
National Register of Historic Places, 1998

### Bryan Shiles responds:

Ms. Holan’s response to my article seems to imply that if an architect does not respond to a context in the way she and those who are like-minded see fit, then that architect is not responding to the context at all. I think that Ms. Holan, like many in the preservation/contextual “community,” confuses *sympathetic* response with *rote* response. It seems to be beyond the hubristic view of those who hold the rhetorical high ground on the definition of “contextual” that a sympathetic and thoughtful response to a context may *look* nothing like the buildings that constitute the context.

Ms. Holan offers an interesting insight into the position of those who would bias a context of continuity over any other view of place when she says that the Civic Center Park has “more context than any other part of Berkeley.” How can one place have more context than the next place? Ms. Holan’s assertion represents not only a failure to see the beauty and complexity of all places but a limited view of what a Civic Center might be in our time. She seems to think that context is defined only by buildings and landscape. I would suggest that buildings, patterns, signs, aspirations, and time *together* define context.

There are several things that are certainly not in question here. One is the value and beauty of Berkeley’s Civic Center. Another is the intelligence and sophistication of the residents of Berkeley. I would suggest a third: that the City of Berkeley has changed a bit since the Civic Center was planned and many of the buildings that surround the park were built. Could there be a way to represent some of these changes and the beautiful complexity which is Berkeley in a new Civic Center building and still be respectful of the patterns and surfaces of the past? Of course I think so, but such a response might look different from what surrounds it, which would be a tough go in today’s political context.

In my article, I attempted to portray the process by which the new Public Safety Building in Berkeley was conceived as a failure in collective imagination. I see no good guys and bad guys here. I would not presume to label the building a failure, as Ms. Holan suggests I did. I would ask: Is this the best that Berkeley could have hoped for? The building seems more the precipitate of a community in the mode of maintenance and conservation than of one in the mode of searching and becoming. Ms. Holan suggests that most citizens know what they want their public buildings to look like. I wonder: are there no more questions to ask in Berkeley? ●

# Contributors

Glen Baxter's many books include *Atlas*, *Jodhpurs in the Quantocks*, *The Impending Gleam*, *The Billiard Table Murders*, *The Wonder Book of Sex*, and *Blizzards of Tweed*. His work is on exhibit at San Francisco's Modernism Gallery through 9 March.

Architect Michael Benedikt holds the Hal Box Chair in Urbanism and is Director of the Center for American Architecture and Design at the University of Texas at Austin. His latest book, *A General Theory of Value*, is forthcoming from University of Chicago Press.

Charles Bloszies, AIA, is an architect and a structural engineer. He is principal of an eclectic design firm in San Francisco ([www.archengine.com](http://www.archengine.com)).

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Sharon Tucker leads Tucker Elie Communication in San Francisco.



UNITED CAB no. 118



## The Importance of Architecture to Non-Architects

Casius Pealer, Associate AIA

“When I drive through the most spectacular urban form of the universe, I see order and disorder, beauty and lack of beauty. In all this I move quickly, very quickly, with my finger on the shutter release, in order to catch, to capture this beauty, this order. For nothing exists which is not recorded. Except within oneself.”

David Bradford,  
*Drive-by Shootings:*  
*Photographs by a New York Taxi Driver*

In 1997, I quit my architecture job and moved home to New Orleans to drive a taxicab. This unusual transition was the result of my interest in better understanding how non-architects communicate about architecture. My plan was to spend approximately nine months working “undercover” in the public realm. Although my research would ostensibly pay for itself, I was also working under the auspices of the American Architectural Foundation as a Field Correspondent.

My goal in changing professions was to learn about the general, human experience of architecture: how is architecture important to people, how

are we affected by it both consciously and unconsciously, how do we take ownership of private spaces, and how are we inspired by public places? Driving a taxi allowed me the sort of informal conversations with people that I hoped would give me a better perspective on the importance of well-designed and well-built places. All the quotations in this essay are from conversations with passengers in my taxi.

As a taxi driver, my job was still to design particular experiences within the city—only now the entire city was my office and I worked directly for my clients. Those clients were from every imaginable social or ethnic background, and “additional services” included carrying groceries and running the occasional red light. I completed most commissions in less than twenty minutes.

My first efforts at getting passengers to talk about architecture centered on trying to define a list of standard questions I could ask and then to audio tape the answers. But in explaining what the tape recorder was for, I had to blow my cover as “just a guy driving a cab.” I then thought I could ask people to fill out a questionnaire, but realized the same problems would arise.

I soon began to understand that important conversations were happening without my choreography. People were talking with me about the real importance of architecture anyway, just as they would with any cab driver. Once I realized this fact, it made perfect sense. If architecture is half as important as we architects like to think it is, then people will talk about it all the time.

The good news is that people *do* talk about architecture all the time. At first, I didn't hear it. People would talk about a band they heard last night, or a new job they started, or the new church they joined, or how great Mardi Gras was. But occasionally, sometimes even days later, I would remember a complaint about how low the stage was that the band had played on. A comment on the drab colors of the new office. Praise for the inspirational lighting in the church. How great it was to be able to open the second floor window and be right at the level of the parade floats—an easy target for the plastic or stuffed trinkets that mean so much in late February New Orleans.

Throughout ten months of casual and not-so-casual conversations with thousands of people from all walks of life, I learned a great deal about the importance of the built environment for real people. Diversity of styles and of use is important. The enthusiastic use of color. Appropriate context. Significant reference (not necessarily deference) to history. Decoration. Symbolism. Complexity, but not capriciousness or chaos. Orientation within that complexity. Authenticity. Plants and natural materials. Water and natural light. Most importantly, I learned that people do in fact talk about architecture all the time.

## STORIES

"Do you know somewhere—probably on Magazine Street—where I can find an old pair of binoculars?" asked the woman who called a cab from the Lakeside Mall. "I'm setting up a display at the store I work at, and we need something that says, 'African safari.'"

"Man, that sounds like a job I'd like to have," I said, buying time, since I had no idea where to get antique binoculars.

"Well, you know, people aren't interested in just buying quality clothes anymore. You go into Ralph Lauren stores and there are props and stage settings—a saddle and a rope. They're not selling

saddles, they're using the saddle to tell a story."

"So this is to trick people into thinking they're buying authentic Western clothes?"

"No, really—stories create connections for people. Stories create the emotional context people need to locate themselves within a larger experience."

—26-year old former Peace Corps volunteer, now retail sales manager in suburban New Orleans

All the various elements of the built environment either come together to tell a story, to allow people "to locate themselves within a larger experience," or they don't. New Orleans as a city has some of the most fantastic stories to tell, and it is the visitors' (and residents') ability, through the physical environment, to locate themselves within those stories that keeps them coming back. The stories are all the more fantastic because they are true. But fantastic environments like Disney World, Busch Gardens, and many newer, individual retail experiences like the Rainforest Cafe, the Nature Company, and even Starbucks work on the same principle: people need to locate themselves within a larger experience.

"Hey, I used to live in DC, too," I said, trying to encourage some conversation.

"Yeah, man, well I hate DC—all those short, squatty, gray buildings surrounded by a fence. The place is like a prison."

—27 year-old male, New Orleans costume shop owner

Clearly, the nation's capital is not like a prison to everyone. The symbolism and the stories told there are understandably different from stories told in Europe or even in most other American cities. New York City tells a story about capitalism, enterprise, and opportunity. Washington's story is also about enterprise and opportunity, but it is a collective enterprise and one that tells much more specific stories about particular leaders of that collective enterprise. It is perhaps more difficult for people who don't see themselves either as leaders or as part of the collective to locate themselves within the context of DC.

## CONTEXT

"Yeah, this is our first trip to New Orleans."

"Oh, fabulous. What do you think so far?"

“Well, we only got here this afternoon, but we’re staying at this new bed and breakfast on...Perrier Street, I think.”

“Oh, that purple and blue house in the 4700 block by Napoleon Avenue? It looks wonderful—is it?”

“Kind of. We found this picture on the Internet, and it looked great. The pictures looked beautiful, but who knew there’d be so many buildings, um...in need of repair nearby.”

—Middle-aged couple from upstate New York

One reason that architecture does have a moral imperative to serve the public realm is that the experience of the public realm—the street—is always just an aggregate of the physical and visual experience contributed by individual components. The whole is potentially much greater than the sum of its parts, but too often is less.

The stories that we as a community have to tell are actually far more complex and important than even we architects imagine. Because these stories defy planning, many architects and clients retreat into what they can control: the individual building. But just as we can’t all work alone, because team-building is difficult and relies largely on complex and unexpected personal relationships, we shouldn’t allow the built environment—our environment—to be composed of self-referential elements, all inefficiently striving to achieve their own, often conflicting, plans.

#### DIVERSITY

“Hey cabbie, we’ll only be in New Orleans for two days. What should we do?”

“Well, for \$1 per person, each way, the best deal in the city is definitely the St. Charles streetcar.”

“Oh, we’ve taken the trolley down St. Charles a few times. What I really like is that there’s a shack next to a mansion next to a grocery store. It’s very interesting.”

—Middle-aged man, dentist from Lafayette, Louisiana

Diversity in the built environment does not have to be as radical as a mansion next to a shack. Just as each of us has a unique personality and unique quirks and attributes, even strictly residential and economically stratified areas don’t have to be

This is not an  
argument for  
being nostalgic,  
but rather for  
being a good host

homogenous. Art imitates life, and like people, buildings have personalities. Simply owning a house is a form of personal expression.

For someone concerned with design and with design integrity, the kitsch collections of “stuff” in most homes is devastating. My parents live in Florida, but they love the Southwest and have been fortunate to travel there a number of times. In their living room, they look past paintings of red sand buttes, “Indian” rugs and a little cactus plant to the palm fronds and oak grove just outside. As a designer, I have to swallow hard before I go home; but as their son, I understand that these items are in fact relics of their experiences and memories, their trips out West with me, with other family, and with each other on their 30th anniversary. In short, these “things” tell an important part of their story. And if they moved out West to live in an authentic adobe hut, they would hang pictures of palm fronds and oak groves on the walls. And that’s proof of the vitality of the lives they have been fortunate to lead.

#### SYMBOLS

“Hey, cabbie, someone sent our office a Mardi Gras cake last week, and one guy almost choked on the plastic toy hidden inside. What’s the deal with the plastic toy?” asked an obviously first-time visitor to New Orleans.

“Well, first of all, it’s a king cake, not a Mardi Gras cake,” I explained, “though it is a Mardi Gras tradition. The plastic baby is the whole point. A king cake without a baby hidden inside is like a Mardi Gras float without beads. Finding the baby in your slice means you buy the next king cake.”

—Four guys from Nashville, visiting early in the Mardi Gras season

Unfortunately, the kinds of symbols or clues necessary to tell an engaging story do not always mean the same things to different people from different backgrounds. In a world trying to accommodate and encourage diversity, symbols are potentially dangerous things. Ionic columns might symbolize the birth of democracy, or they might symbolize cultural imperialism. Native Americans might respect the wolf, but American ranchers might despise it. Even Art Deco depictions of industry, farming, and mechanization are often viewed as anti-feminist.

Symbols are, however, necessary, even unavoidable, for expressing fundamental human conditions. Clean lines and white canvasses are symbols of a Western, often male outlook. People yearn for more variety, more referents. The resurgence of tattooing is evidence of this yearning. If people can read symbols in the clouds, then they will read symbols into whatever environment we architects produce. And regular people do this because they are more interested in visual art, in imbuing their lives with substantive meaning, than we architects like to think. We need to re-learn how to use meaningful symbols explicitly, even if we can’t perfectly control their meaning.

## MATERIALS

“Man, have you ever been to the State Palace Theater? We played this gig there last night and that place is awesome,” said the bleached-blond guy in the back seat.

“How so?” I asked.

“Well,” said his friend, “the lights are really cool—lots of stained glass. The fire hose cover is surrounded by pieces of stained glass. You just don’t get to see stuff like that often.”

—25-year old DJ’s from San Francisco

Like a catchy advertising jingle, the State Palace Theater will remain a part of those kids’ (and pre-

sumably unimaginable numbers of other kids) memories, precisely because so few places have any reference to hand-made or hand-crafted work as an integral part of the story being told. My experiences with people of all different backgrounds and interests confirmed my initial hope: that people do respond in a visceral if sometimes poorly articulated way to both firmness and delight. And with the State Palace Theater, the delight that was built into the original structure was really an investment that could have come from the advertising or marketing budget as well as from the construction budget.

## ORIENTATION

“Yeah, man, New Orleans is crazy. Do you cab drivers just take people for rides, drive ‘em all over the city ‘cause they don’t know where the heck they are, then drop ‘em four blocks away and charge ‘em \$15?”

“Well, not rea—”

“Yeah, I mean, when you get out of the airport in Spain, man, the cabs are just waiting there. Waiting to take advantage of your disorientation.”

—20-year old male, Tulane University sophomore

Our language implies that “orientation” is the standard condition and that “disorientation” is simply a state of being out of “orientation.” The reality is in fact the opposite: disorientation is our natural state, and so we use both the natural and built environments to orient ourselves within a larger context, both physically and emotionally. Cities built on a strict grid are logically comforting in the sense noted above, where comfort is simply the absence of sensation. Cities like New Orleans and Barcelona are logically very disorienting, but experientially rich. Both planned and accumulated cities have many positive qualities, and both communicate the positive and negative aspects of those value systems, necessarily shaping the personalities of the people who live in those cities. New Orleans could never have been the capital of democracy, and Philadelphia and DC could never have produced jazz.

## EVENT

“Could you take me to 8600 Washington Avenue, sir?” asked the matronly black lady carrying a big ceramic bowl covered in tin foil. “It’s a new church building our congregation just finished.”

“Of course I can,” I replied. “So... is your new church nice?”

“Oh, my, yes. They have wonderful services there.”  
—55-year old New Orleans church-goer

I thought this woman would respond to my question by telling me about the beautiful stained glass, the fragrant flowers outside, or the comfortable pews inside. Quality places—places that are memorable and contribute to our individual and collective identity—inspire people and give them hope and renewed energy. But so do other good people, books, plants, music, and television. As architects and designers, our job is to make places conducive to various modes of inspiration, either in themselves or in support of other activities.

#### LANGUAGE

“That building’s neat inside.”  
—91-year old retired male from Marerro, LA

Unfortunately, while people usually have very clear opinions about what they like or dislike—what is “too showy” or “too plain,” “neat,” “cool,” “impressive,” “dumb,” “interesting,” etc.—people are not used to going into great detail about exactly why they think what they think about a facade, a room, a park, a painting, or an entire street. Often people would identify intricate details or the colors of a building in some general way, but were typically much better at identifying what they didn’t like about a particular place rather than what contributed to a positive feeling. This particular cultural trait—if indeed it is such—contributes to the impression that good architecture or design is simply a matter of personal taste, like whether Mac is better than IBM or whether Jazz Fest is better than Mardi Gras. Those sorts of choices do, however, reveal more basic, core values. As individuals and collectively, we need to consider more consciously our core values and how our choices about the built environment either reinforce or challenge those values.

#### CONCLUSION

“If what’s important to you is having a roof over your head, then by gosh, have the best darn roof you can manage.”

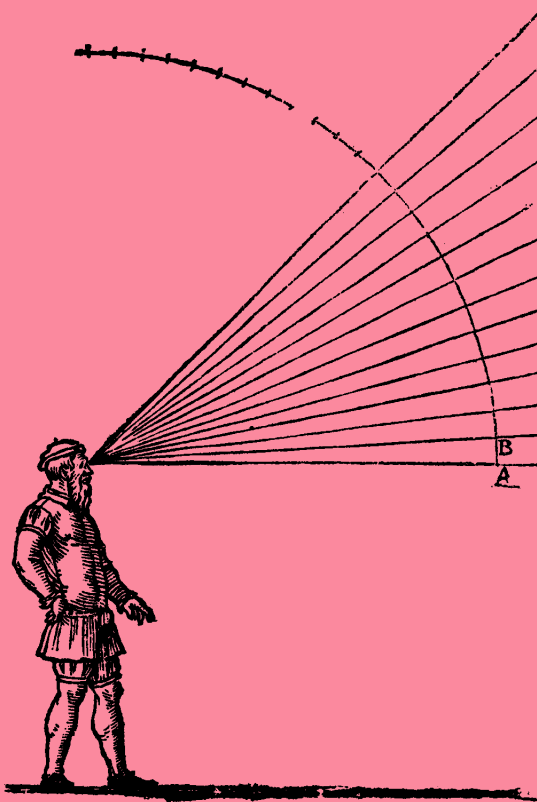
—35 year-old male, actor from New Orleans

The built environment is important because people are important, and the ability to gather and share, barter, eat, discuss, learn, compete, celebrate, sing, pray, be comforted, be born, die, and be re-born all require a physical place. As the woman said, “Stories create the emotional context people need to locate themselves within a larger experience.” The importance of the built environment is not in aesthetic, technical, or even historical beauty, but in engaging and adding meaning to the fundamentally human events that occur within, under, around, through, outside of those environments.

Risa Mickenberg, in the book *Taxi Driver Wisdom*, quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson as saying, “In every man (sic), there is something wherein I may learn of him.” Or as one of Mickenberg’s taxi drivers said, “If you’re a smart person, you can see what’s smart about the next guy.” I believe the same holds for buildings, and that we architects too often can’t see what’s smart about “the next guy.” If we have a moral imperative as architects, it is to design buildings that engage people—not rudely, by interrupting them and telling them what we think, but politely, with simple eye contact and a friendly smile. That friendliness means, among other things, including gestures such as benches, landscaping, and an appropriately scaled entryway. Once inside, we need to be effusive and courteous, if also occasionally provocative. If that courtesy means an operable window, a detailed handrail, or adequate lighting, then so be it. This is not an argument for being nostalgic, but rather for being a good host.

Buildings are in effect the hosts of our cities. When our buildings have been most haughty or indifferent, people have moved elsewhere. I am by no means suggesting that people want environments designed by committee, with no strong direction or point. Rather, I am suggesting that only by respecting, understanding, and engaging real people can the places we design begin to provide the leadership that society asks from us. As I found in the early stages of my research, the public’s answers to our questions are irrelevant. What matters are our answers to the public’s questions. To begin to provide those answers, we need to listen quietly to discern the questions. ●





## \* PERSPECTIVES

### Looking In from the Outside

Arthur Alef is an attorney who represents real estate developers and design professionals. He got an “A” in seventh grade drafting.

Young architects, and some older ones too, are not completely convinced of the worth of their work. They are in the business of selling something they haven't yet designed, much less built. To close the deal with a client, some architects are inclined to charge less than fair value. This feeds the insecurity of the inexperienced client, who would rather feel that he's dealing with a professional who will tell the client what he needs, what it will cost him, and why a well designed project will save more than it costs. The capes that Frank Lloyd Wright and Bill Pereira wore may be outdated, but the self-esteem the capes symbolized is not. The insecure architect who sells himself cheap in the expectation of later, more profitable assignments will find that when the client has a more important project, he will take it to “a real architect.”

There are owners and their lawyers who approach the negotiation of the owner-architect agreement as a form of combat. Demands are made for standards of care and indemnities that require

perfection and therefore fall outside the scope of the architect's insurance. (The irony is that the owner's quest for added protection may deprive him of access to the insurance that is often the primary or only source of real protection.) Fixed fees are demanded for projects that have not been adequately defined. Inadequate compensation is proposed for additional services or fast track or time delays not the fault of the architect. Sometimes the negotiations go on for months and involve inordinate expense. If the architect signs a bad contract, he didn't read it, didn't understand it, or didn't care. In any of those cases, I wouldn't want him as my architect.

There are architects who start (and sometimes finish) work without a written contract. The result is that both architect and owner are in a game without rules. The lack of rules encourages disputes that often would not come up if there were a written contract, even an imperfect one. The AIA forms are not perfect for every job, and sometimes they can be modified for a particular project. But those documents are a lot better, more complete, and fairer to both sides than most owners and architects and their lawyers can produce on their own.

The owner has a right to continuing, current information on the cost of design. He needs to be able to measure the amount left in the design budget against the design work yet to be done. The architect's monthly bills must go out on time. Additional work should be undertaken only after the scope and cost are agreed in writing. Prompt notice must be given of delays for which the architect will claim compensation.

The architect has a right to timely payment. A great help is a provision in the contract for a substantial retainer to apply to the last payment to accrue under the contract. But, if payment is not received in accordance with the contract terms, work should stop. The architect has no business financing the project. He shouldn't put himself or his consultants at risk. And he shouldn't be doing work that the owner may be unwilling or unable to pay for.

Institutional projects such as schools, hospitals and churches require the architect to deal with faculties, staffs, and boards. The architect needs their input in order that the design will fill the needs of the users. But sometimes these people get caught up in the creative process, and the line between designe r

and client gets blurred. The architect who can give a respectful hearing to users, base the design on their input, and still emerge with a project that is designed by the architect, not by the committee (or its most vocal member), is practicing psychology on a high level.

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Charles Altieri is a professor in the Department of English at the University of California at Berkeley. His last book was *Postmodernism Now*, and he is just finishing another, *An Aesthetics of the Affects*.

The editor requested that we outsiders give our views of the architecture profession. My view is simple: there is probably very little that distinguishes architects from practitioners who pursue other arts and even other professions beyond the arts. Virtually every profession leaves its practitioners torn between the ideals that gave them their calling and the quotidian demands that often make them dream of trying someone else's calling. We are almost all reasonably decent people willing to cut some corners but vulnerably eager for self-respect and hungry for the pleasure of a job well-done, even if finding the freedom to accomplish that puts us in constant tension with clients and administrators.

But while architects are probably pretty much like other professionals, architecture is not quite like other professions. Even though every profession has its ideals and exemplars, not every profession requires serving as witness for what a culture can offer of itself for posterity. From the outside at least, the obligations architects face are terrifying. Architecture is haunted by time. Visual artists have openings and, if they make it, retrospectives; composers have premieres and revivals. But even modest buildings are in effect always on stage, always offering a form of witness in relation to the future, and always called upon to justify the intelligence responsible for this use of so much time and money and available space. Perhaps only politicians face greater embarrassment, and they are well-armed by arrogance and by ignorance. If the building fails to establish a meaningful present, one cannot just tear it up or hide it, or reinterpret it. The environment it composes, physical and mental, will stand as an enduring monument to bad taste or cheap fantasy or management lacking in magnanimity, sometimes to all



three. But if the building succeeds there is perhaps no greater sense of accomplishment in any art.

Buildings are our richest emblems for establishing complex identities responsive to manifold competing claims but capable of orienting them to a single purposiveness (even if the purposiveness can seem drastically without purpose). Yet, as the city of Houston proves, these strong identities easily become ridiculous when they fail to envision as part of their own construction how they can enter into dialogue with other buildings and environments. Identity in architecture is a profoundly social phenomenon, so it is entirely apt that the ultimate measure of architectural space is the degree of pride it creates for those who in using that space find it becoming an emblem for their own capacities of collective self-assertion.

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**Jonathan Arons** is an astrophysicist and the chairman of the Department of Astronomy at the University of California at Berkeley. He occupies his professional life with theoretical studies of the workings and the lives of the neutron stars, the corpses of stars more massive than our Sun, a preoccupation also describable as the study of ten thousand nuclear wars per square yard per second.

I first encountered architects as friends, then as designers who showed me how to remodel my house, lately as collaborators in dreaming about a \$100M building for astronomers and physicists at a big research university. Through those experiences, I've come to see their place in society most of all as people who help other people's dreams come into being. At the same time, as artists in their own right, they use their clients' dreams to fulfill their own.

Of course, most of the time, architects aren't in such an idealized mode—as with all of us, the mundane world of budgets, rules, paperwork, commuting fill most of their time. Nevertheless, the architects I've seen in action, and about whose work I've read, have been the people who could turn often mundane desires for an extra room into something that uplifts the spirit of those who use what they've done.

Of course, this high artistic goal (only sometimes realizable in a specific job) often collides with the practical. What do we do when the physicists say, "I've got to have so many thousand square

feet of lab space," and that demand produces a bulky monster of a building; whereupon the architect says "can't you make do with less?" so as to create a building that will enhance, not disfigure the landscape? That's where the excitement lies, in the collision of the real and the ideal. So if I were to meet an architect at a party, I'm sure I'd get into a high adrenaline discussion of just where we do draw the line between the ideal and the real. More than almost any other professional in the misnamed "real" world of budgets and political constraints, the architects are those people who get to remind us, again and again, of the wonders of the ideal.

The more of that reminder, the better.

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**Nancy-Ann DeParle** is a Senior Advisor at JP Morgan Partners and an Adjunct Professor of Health Care Systems at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. From 1993 to 2000, she served in the Clinton Administration, first as Associate Director for Health at the White House Office of Management and Budget, and, from 1997 to 2000, as the Administrator of the Health Care Financing Administration, directing the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

I attended college at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the late 1970's. Along with ultimate Frisbee, streaking, and students transporting stacks of IBM cards ("Do Not Fold, Spindle, or Mutilate") from the computer lab, I remember walking back to my dorm at night from the library, past the ancient gymnasium that housed the architecture department. No matter what hour, the lights would be blazing and you could see bodies huddled over the drafting tables peering intently down or talking animatedly around a rendering, cans of Tab in hand. I always had the sense that it was some kind of special fraternity, *sans* keg parties and preppy uniforms. And though my liberal arts major was appropriate for the legal career I was then intent on pursuing, I used to gaze with envy at the windows bright with creative energy. It wasn't just the *esprit de corps* that I envied (although that was certainly part of it). It was that these would-be architects seemed so usefully engaged.

That impression of useful engagement has been reinforced over the years by architects I have known. My friends Kem Hinton and Seab Tuck in Nashville have worked on projects as varied as a Bev-

erly Hillbillies-sized log cabin for country songstress Barbara Mandrell and a mall to commemorate the Bicentennial of the State of Tennessee. (The state's centennial was heralded with a full-scale replica of the Parthenon that still stands today.) They have spent their careers usefully engaged in designing places that are pleasant for people to live, work, play, worship, and learn in. And, like my college classmates toiling in the architecture building at UT, they seem to have had a lot of fun in the process. What an incredible gift that is.

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**Heidi Duckler** is Artistic Director of Collage Dance Theatre.



Space. Time. Energy. These are the tools of my trade. I build choreographies from specific sites and the histories that inhabit them rather than from codified movements and steps. The white gallery and the theater's black box are sterile and uninspiring to me. I prefer to seek out spaces designed by architects both humble and notable, and create my pieces from cues in their design. I take into account the physical nature of the space in addition to its history and current use, juxtaposing my dancers with the "found objects" of everyday life. My choreography of human bodies thus responds to the original "choreographer" of the space.

I created "UnderEden" for Morris Lapidus's Eden Roc Hotel in Miami. When I first began searching for a site in Miami, I wasn't thinking of a hotel. But as soon as I saw Lapidus' exotic, rococo escape for travelers, I began to envision a choreography in response to its kitschy, '50s environment, so evocative of the period in which I grew up. The performance reflected the hotel's décor and inhabitants—a towel dance in the cabana, housekeepers dancing with vacuum cleaners—and maintained a theme of failed trans-

formation and transition, the hopes we bring to get-away sites of dream and fantasy.

Now I am creating a new piece for the Herald Examiner Building, which was designed by Julia Morgan. Morgan's Spanish-Mission style building covers an entire city block and is a wonderful evocation of theatrical California. I am working with the idea of the "news" in a fractured way, taking the audience on a "spin" through Morgan's elaborate lobby, down into the retired pressrooms, presenting a field of activities that rarely offers a single viewpoint. I will explore subjectivity and the relationship that arises between the body and the built environment. As I begin to develop my choreography, I have become intrigued by the mysterious relationship between the architect and William Randolph Hearst, who commissioned numerous buildings from her over the years. If only these walls could talk! Once monumental, the Herald Examiner building is no longer a site of authority and control. Now a space that is fluid and uncertain, it will be brought back to life by artists and audiences peeling through its layers of accumulated history.

I have not met the design architects for any of these spaces, but their interpretations of construction and use have become the inspiration for an activation of the space that they probably never imagined. Or maybe they did.

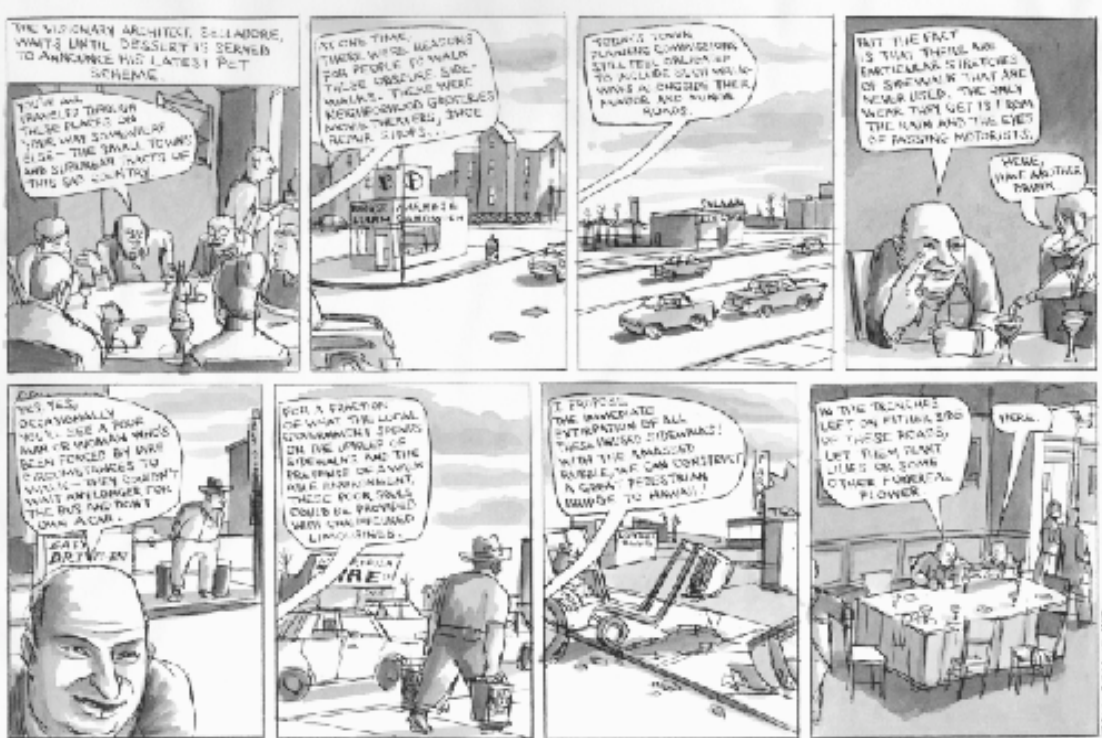
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**Peter C. Griffith** is a Senior Scientist for Science Systems and Applications at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. He is Project Support Manager for the agency's component of the Large Scale Biosphere-Atmosphere Experiment in Amazonia.

When I was a kid, my parents' architect split my head open. Not on purpose. But the blood was red and I got my first stitches at the emergency room.

My parents had commissioned our home from a young architect who had studied with Frank Lloyd Wright. They knew nothing about building or contracting, so paid extra to have the architect supervise the construction of the house he designed. It was pretty radical for a small town in Central Florida in the 1950's. "Whatcha buildin' there, Doc, a gas station?" Flat roof, exposed interior and exterior steel beams, glass, concrete.

The architect integrated his design into its



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Ben Katchor's picture-stories—*Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer*; *The Jew of New York*; *The Cardboard Valise*; and, currently, *Hotel & Farm*—have appeared in newspapers and magazines around the country for more than a decade. Four collections of his strips have been published in book form: *Cheap Novelties*; *The Pleasures of Urban Decay*; *Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer: Stories*; *The Jew of New York*, and, most recently, *The Beauty Supply District*. *The Carbon Copy Building*, an opera for which he wrote the libretto, won an Obie Award for Best New American Production of 2000. Mr. Katchor is a MacArthur Fellow.

environment on the shore of a lake, leaving it surrounded by old live oak trees and Spanish moss and open to Florida breezes. A hundred feet of floor-to-ceiling glass faced the water.

Who could have complained about such a home? It was my own private paradise. I could walk out or in, anytime, anywhere, to bugs, trees, grass, sand, or water.

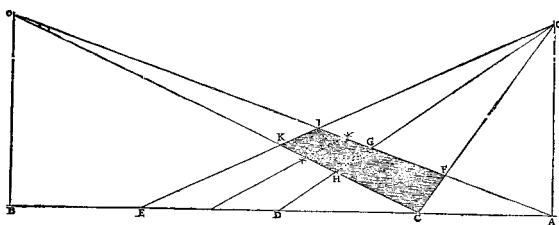
Who could have complained about such a house? It was my mother's nightmare. Its environment dripped, blew, and crawled into every corner. Storms cracked the plate glass. The flat roof leaked, the electric ceil heat warmed fitfully or not at all, the terrazzo floors hurt her feet.

But what most aggravated my mother was living daily with any number of construction mistakes. It seems the young architect also knew nothing of building or contracting.

One night, I rolled out of my bed onto one of these mistakes, which split my scalp. A plate-glass window rail was supposed to have been recessed into the terrazzo, but had been installed on top of the floor.

The architect went on to design acclaimed commercial, governmental, and residential structures around Central Florida. My mother liked to say that he made all his mistakes on our house, and then on to fame and fortune.

Today the house is a pediatrician's clinic and nearly unrecognizable, the victim of a savage remuddling. I live in a 1913 foursquare, but visit Fallingwater.



Jay Mark Johnson is an artist and writer living in Venice, California. Currently employed in the film industry, he has worked previously for Aldo Rossi, Peter Eisenman, and the Salvadoran rebels.

I studied architecture many years ago but left the profession soon after completing school. I had come to feel that there were only two types of beauty that appealed to me: the beauty found in "nature," untouched by human intervention, and the beauty of any human project that helped to reduce the inequities and sufferings of the world. In my restlessness, I could not imagine languishing in a decade of architectural apprenticeship as a prerequisite to realizing projects of my own interest. So I turned away from the profession, becoming, ultimately, both an artist and a political activist.

I have never entirely left behind my architectural education nor the pleasures of working on buildings. Currently I am putting the finishing touches on a small, seven hundred year old stone house, located in a hillside Tuscan village, which I have been renovating over the last few years. On the sunniest, southern wall where I still have some pointing and plastering to do, I plan on removing some of the old stones and inserting ceramic birdhouses for the swallows that dart and swirl noisily around the house when the sun is rising and setting. I'm optimistic that the plan will work, because the largest cracks in the wall are already inhabited by the same birds.

I enjoy interacting with the birds and other animals living near me. While residing in Hollywood, I once made friends with a blue jay we called Micuate, who used to wake us for his morning feeding by tapping with his beak on our bedroom window. During those same years, I fed numerous skunks by putting out daily plates of cat food in the kitchen. Our favorite regulars were Gandhi, Reversa, and Extra. After feeding, Reversa would often try to sneak into the living room and hide under one of the couches or behind the fireplace. Her behavior led us to believe that she wanted nothing more than to move in with us. In another house, I once found our most ferocious hunter friend, Gatis, the cat, sharing his bowl of milk with a tiny baby 'possum who had fallen off her mother's back. Cinderella, as we called her, became a regular visitor and, due to the rich diet we provided, grew up to be the most beautiful

'possum we had ever seen. I have had similar relationships with raccoons and squirrels, with pigeons and doves, with mallards and gulls, with a few families of crows, and with dozens of blue jays.

Increasingly, we are becoming the *de facto* wards of our environmentally strained planet. Beyond focusing on established ecological concerns, how should architects respond? On the urban scale, the Garden City vision should be revisited. In both cities and suburbs, the boundaries between “natural” and “built” should be blurred, the word “pest” removed from our regular vocabularies. Architects should study biology, and architectural designs should incorporate habitats for our non-human friends, who are already living in our neighborhoods anyway.



**ZsuZsanna Listro** is Administrative Assistant for the Department of Architecture at CCAC (California College of Arts and Crafts).

I grew up in a house built by my grandfather. One summer, my grandmother spent each day at the beach house measuring out each room, figuring out where her furniture would go, and placing stakes to designate the size and shape of the room in the empty lot next to the house. Months later, on sight of its construction, she said to my grandfather “Dick, this is such a big house,” to which he replied, “Emily, you designed it.” I still remember the little things that made that house unique: the bay window in the living room, the countertops built just a bit higher for taller people (they were 5’10” and 6’ tall), the teardrop driveway that allowed us children room to play without having to leave the yard, the flowering trees that bloomed year round.

Living on the West Coast, I worked briefly as an assistant for an architecture firm. And it was

there that I met an older gentleman in his 70s who was truly passionate about architecture. He told me that the reason he became an architect so long ago is that we are born in a building, we live in a building, and we die in a building. It made me think. It made me look at architecture again.

I now work at a non-profit art school with many architects who teach part-time. I appreciate their ability to be organized, responsible, and reliable. I greatly appreciate the intelligence of the faculty I work with, having worked in other industries with less educated people. I see the students spending most of their time on projects for their architecture classes, utilizing every inch of space available and every bit of time. And from watching architects, it seems that this is something that follows them through their careers.

I then sit here at my desk and wonder about architects and the profession that these students are choosing. What does it really encompass? I attend lectures and I read syllabi. I try to understand what it really means to be an architect, and, yet, I’m still searching. Do you really know what it’s all about until you become one?

I look at where I live, where I work and where I play, wondering if this building was one of many cookie-cutter designs or if it was carefully planned by an architect who cared, who thought about the people who would some day occupy this space. I wonder about the reuse of buildings, about how easy or hard it is to adapt the environment to the person, instead of the person to the environment. I wonder about the materials used, how much of it is new material and how much is recycled. I hope that one day most of the buildings that are constructed can have a signature expression of the architect in them that allows the visitor an experience and a small insight into what he or she was thinking when that building was designed. Buildings last for many years, sometimes centuries. Will the designs of today be the old beauty of the future? Will they be environments that create memories? Will they stand tall or be knocked down to make room for something else? Do architects get the chance to make the difference each time they create?

And I also wonder: who was the brilliant person who decided to put the heaters on the ceiling? Who was the person who filled the whole side of the

building with windows, so that we can freeze in the winter and sweat in the summer? It looks pretty, but is it functional? Who was that person who designed the leaky roof? Is it poor design or poor construction? Does this happen all the time?

Architects: can't live with them, can't live without them. But can you live in the buildings they build?

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Spencer McCallie III retired two years ago as the third generation Headmaster of the McCallie School of Chattanooga, Tennessee, which, during his twenty-five year tenure, replaced the founders' first school buildings, added another 250,000 square feet, and converted over 100 parcels of small houses and small businesses into 50 acres of campus.

We never had an architect tell us that he was the wrong person for the job. In fact, because all our prospects had spent many years in school, they assured us that they were eager and able to give us what we needed, at a cost we could afford. I believe now that they were sincere. But they had no idea what a building can do for a community of young students and their teachers.

I was in a schoolmarm mode in the early days. Give us something simple and useful. We school people do not want anything exciting because it might cost too much, and we would be criticized. Children will not know the difference anyway.

Like many other independent school heads, I became obsessed with fund-raising and budgets. Our time should have been spent on students and students' engagement in their learning, but Heads were frequently overwhelmed by the search for dollars. I wish I had learned earlier in my career how much the right architect could further both student engagement and fund-raising. I wish I had understood how difficult it is to choose the right architect!

Thirty years ago we were trying to build a functional academic building for the least cost on a limited campus. A local architect, who designed everything from churches to banks, satisfied the building committee and did everything we asked. The result was useful, but it did not excite either donors or students. I was never congratulated for its low square foot costs or for the building itself. Good teachers used it well, but it did not add engagement to the community of learners.

Fifteen years later, we spent a record amount on a grand athletic facility designed by a firm that specialized in such facilities. They convinced us that its openness and other somewhat expensive features would draw students into higher levels of participation. They were correct, and it also drew donors, excited by its promise. It has generated student activity ever since. I do not remember its square foot cost and am never asked.

A few years later, planning a new middle school, we screened a long national list of architects of schools and carefully interviewed a half dozen and visited their school buildings, asking how their buildings were affecting learning. The best interviewed us and chided us for our vagueness. The best also questioned our students, met with our parents and teachers, and questioned every idea of our administrative team. Only those who had experience with schools and who were familiar with the realities of the classroom stayed in the running very long. The others fell by the wayside, as what we saw and felt in the schools that they had built contradicted impressive presentations.

Our choice talked to us about the life of teachers and students in a small community, not much about costs or engineering. The finished product pulses with the energy of middle schoolers and good teachers. Prospective parents are entranced by walking through; marketing is much easier. When I commented to parents about the good first impression the new buildings made, a mother told me that they had the same effect on her every day she brought her son to school. Other parents felt the same. They never asked what it cost to build.

What fun it is to bask in the undeserved, reflected glory of a successful building! If I were starting over, no search process would be as painful as mine for the right architect.

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Rev. Rocky Miskelly is Vice-president of Congregational Development for Cargill Associates, one of the nation's foremost capital development firms. Previously, Rev. Miskelly was pastor of several churches in Mississippi and Georgia, at each of which he oversaw major new building construction.

Architects contribute much to society. Not only do they give us the well designed (normally) and func-

tional spaces in which we live, work, and play, but the aesthetics of an architect's design possess the potential to speak to our physical sensibilities, to arouse in us feelings and emotions that only architecture can stir. The visible work of the architect, the building itself, has the ability by its very form to enrich or degrade our lives, our emotional health.

In the 1930's and well into WWII, Hitler used his architect, Albert Speer, to move, excite, stimulate, rouse, and eventually galvanize the German people into believing that they were a superior race. Speer's vision of a "New" Berlin was grandiose. The Reichstag, an incredibly grand and monstrous structure, was designed and constructed (albeit with slave labor) in less than 12 months. Believe it or not, architecture played a role in perpetrating the hoax of superiority on the German working class.

The Communists, on the other hand, must have understood that architecture could be used to de-motivate a populace just as easily as it could be used to inspire a country. In contrast to the Nazis' grand architecture, the Communists, after WWI, built hideous, monolithic, concrete apartment blocks and public buildings that stood as much in contrast to the lush green yards of the architecturally wonderful homes and apartments constructed in the city of Berlin between 1850 and 1914 as it did to Nazi era construction. The uninspired architecture of Communist East Berlin from 1945 to 1990 was not only drab and boring; it was also heartless, soulless, and lifeless—much as life itself came to be for East Berliners during the same period.

Architects would do well to remember that their work will speak, even sing, to people on a daily basis as long as it lasts. When I have worked with architects in a formalized relationship as a builder, I have often asked, what are you having my building "say" by its very look, feel, and design. I believe that the collective architecture of our cities becomes either a delightful chorus of voices or a cacophony equal to that which surrounded Babel. Furthermore, I think that the majority of architectural work in the last half century in America has often allowed economics to dictate, tipping the scale too far toward function, as opposed to form, in most building design. Is it any wonder, then, that songs are written about San Francisco, Chicago, St. Louis, and New York, as opposed to, say, L.A., Bakersfield, Oakland,

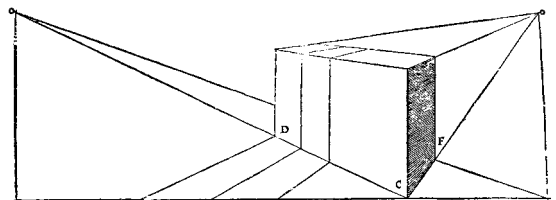
or Cleveland? While I realize that every building cannot be a symphony, there are many plain, uninspired structures that could have at least been jingles, or possessed of something to make the soul sing, even if just for a few notes.

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Voltaire Moise, a native of the West Indies, is a waiter in San Francisco.

I think architects are god.

The most interesting thing about them is that most of the time they appear to be very sexy. I don't know—it could just be my own fascination. Architects, because I am so attracted to them—I mean sexually attracted—being around them, it's ecstasy, and when I am not around them it's like heroin. I know it may sound like not a normal thing, to have such a crush, but I do. Sometimes, I ask myself the question: why such fascination? Then I realize the answer is right there: when I was a kid, up until the age of fourteen, I wanted to be an architect. I was always building stuff, like little mud houses, and it never crossed my mind that maybe I wanted to be a construction worker, not that it's a bad thing. It was *architect*, because I always loved seeing the design plan of a home. Then things started to change, I began to play with dolls, liked finding old clothes from my parents and designing clothes for them. Anyway, I never made it as an architect or a fashion designer, instead I found myself developing this sexual fantasy about architects. I sometimes wonder if I will end up being with one.



**David Prowler** is a developer in San Francisco. He was Director of the Mayor's Office of Economic Development, a member of the City Planning Commission, and the Mayor's Project Manager for Pacific Bell Ballpark and Mission Bay. He is author of a book on Marcel Duchamp and serves on the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Zen Center.

Here in San Francisco, there is a lot of discussion about buildings. Not necessarily about architecture, but about buildings—like are they a good or bad thing. By and large, San Franciscans will concede that the building in which they live is a good thing, especially if it is a Victorian. Beyond that there is a steep drop off in support.

Of course, how people feel about buildings will color how they feel about architecture and architects. To varying degrees, architects are agents of change, designing something that wasn't there before or changing something that's already here. So how people feel about changes will also color how they feel about architecture and architects.

I like change, and anyway it's going to happen whether we like it or not, especially to cities. Even Disneyland changes. It's a great thing about cities. Since most of our experience of urban changes is visual, architects are important shapers of that experience. Planners too. (By the way, did you ever see the Seinfeld episode where George, who always wanted to be an architect and sometimes pretends to be, sponsors a kid for a scholarship and then turns on him when the kid says he wants to be a planner rather than an architect? George decides the kid is too big for his britches.)

I feel kind of sorry for architects. It seems like a lot of schooling, much of it tedious. Then they work for clients who are by and large philistines. You've got to get support from neighbors and planners and sometimes even politicians. And unless you are Philip Johnson there isn't much money in it—and he started out really rich.

I think that because San Franciscans by and large don't care for change (at least among the vocal), because most clients are suspicious of architecture, and because the local newspapers are so bad, we don't get much good new architecture here. And then because so much of the new stuff is so banal, it is hard for people to get excited about architecture or architects.

The architect has to work within a complex context, struggling with or being supported by clients, building and planning officials, budgets, politics, and culture. It is hard to say whose fault a second rate building is or who to thank for a success. Can Gaudi get all the credit for the wild apartment houses he did in Barcelona? No, it took a combination of a talented architect (a genius), a society turned on by the birth of modernism, and adventurous clients.

I've been on the fringe of architecture for decades: as a planning commissioner, neighborhood planner in Chinatown, project manager, Director of Economic Development for SF, and now as a developer. I have tried in each of these roles to help foster a climate in which the architect is free to do his or her best work.

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**Rosanne Reynolds** has worked in offices as mid-level management, supervised crowd control and movement for large art exhibitions, and worked as a massage therapist for 11 years. Among her clients is ELS Architecture & Urban Design. Ms. Reynolds completed a BA in Ceramic Sculpture at CCAC in December and is applying to graduate schools with the long-term goal of exhibiting and teaching.

Good architecture is a requirement for a reasonable civilization and the first reflection of a dysfunctional one. As a massage therapist and beginning artist, I am not in a tax-bracket to ever be able to have an architect design for me; I am not able to determine my environment at any meaningful scale. Like most people, I am at the mercy of architects working for bureaucracies and corporations, and most of these don't seem to care much about us—after all, we have to use the buildings regardless, so the success of their designs hinges more on elitism. They care more about the status they'll earn if they are accepted, pretty purely visually, by the same art patrons who determine the progress of Fine Art, and they seem to care most about whether something is "truly innovative." Well, at this point, I don't think that anything can be truly innovative unless a new medium or material is invented—and that may not be applicable to architecture. And these people who set the criteria rarely have to interact much with the building itself, unlike the bulk of us. Moving away from the status





buildings, we are left with the purely utilitarian buildings—schools, mini-malls, office space—dictated primarily by cost, short-term cost at that. And that, somehow, always brings us back to variations of the Bauhaus.

I believe that people need architecture that responds to their physical needs—arrangement, efficiency, fit, variability, mobility. As a massage therapist, I work on people every day who are slowly being twisted by poor ergonomic design in their workplaces and living rooms—and you can blame the designers, not the architects, but interior design is predicated on the overall design of the buildings themselves.

Just as passionately, I think that people are starving for some beauty in their surroundings, largely denied by building trends today. And let me define beauty in this context: I mean the Golden Ratio, I mean evocative materials, I mean a historical or some other meaningful association in the design, and I mean the D-word: decoration. So smite me.

In this age of, I hope, greater environmental awareness, it is also negligent not to be building for the long haul, with the utmost in energy-saving features and materials. If architects and their clients thought more about adapting old buildings with newer designs (like the Musee D'Orsay in Paris), or of new designs that could be expected to go gracefully or whimsically into the future (like the Chrysler building), I think that more people could go to work with pride and a sense of purpose and community.

Editor's note: Ms. Reynolds also took the time to answer each of thirteen questions that the editor had put together as a stimulus for our correspondents' thoughts. A selection of her answers follows:

*arcCA*: Would you say that, in practice, architects typically fulfill the potential of their role? If not, in what ways do they not?

RR: They do in how much they influence most aspects of our lives. I don't think that they often make the right choices for the common good, given that influence. Specifically, I am disappointed by a neglect of ergonomics, both on the large scale of people-moving and function-coordination in a building, and on the small-scale of, say, one employee's cubicle or a chair in a waiting room. And I definitely feel that they are letting us down in the matter of aesthetics.

*arcCA*: When you first worked with or otherwise got to know an architect, how did your perception of the architect's role change?

RR: I'm impressed by how inspired and dedicated to their work the ones I've met have been, as well as by their sense of humor. (Of course, I only know architects from the Bay Area!) I also hadn't been aware that engineers largely do the nuts and bolts of the design, which is actually a great relief.

*arcCA*: You're at a party. You strike up a conversation with an attractive stranger. After some minutes of stimulating repartee, you learn that the individual is an architect. How does this make you feel? Why?

RR: I have done that. It makes me feel pleased, that I must be smart... Though I think it has more to do with my own self-esteem issues about not being a "professional" in the degree sense. But, let's face it, architects have a glamour about them, like lawyers without the ambiguity.

*arcCA*: How do you perceive the social status of the architect? The political status? The economic status?

RR: Social: pretty high. Perceived as a monied professional, smart, creative, artistic, doing good in the world (and not likely to be indicted). Possibly not

given as much credit as some professions in terms of celebrity status or charisma. Maybe seen as a little too hard-working. Political: not so high. In our country, at least, architects' people-pleasing and coalition-building skills are mainly ignored—and, God knows, politicians don't care at all about what people really want. Plus, I don't think architects have that high a corruptibility factor. Economic: I think the public perceives architects as being much more highly paid than they largely are, probably because only the celebrity architects get much press. The people who actually make most of it happen seem to me to make fairly median-to-low professional salaries (But hey! Some of the lucky ones get massage!).

*arcCA*: In Argentina (we are told), politicians are more likely to have been trained as architects than as attorneys. Do you think of architects as particularly qualified to hold public office? Why or why not?

RR: I think that architects are far better *qualified* to hold public office than attorneys are (and I've worked for both). The problem is that attorneys have far better skills for *attaining* public office—the ability to sway, to focus attention on what is essentially a distraction, charisma, etc. Architects have great skills for gathering information, building coalitions, prioritizing and compromising, looking at public interests, delegating, etc. They know how to design and build. But we need a populace who can appreciate those skills, and don't need circuses thrown in.

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**Robert Rindler** is Dean of the School of Art at The Cooper Union.

It is truly difficult for me to say anything about architecture these days without referring to what happened in front of my eyes in New York City on 9.11.01 and its impact on the world's relationship to building.

I was a very young student in the School of Art and Architecture at Cooper Union in the late 60s. My best friend's father was the head structural engineer for the foundation of the new World Trade Center project. Long before construction on the towers began, I learned of the incredibly complex and fascinating challenge of building down for several years in preparation for building up. It helped to



stoke my interest in architecture for all of its potential power, masculinity, and majesty.

After graduate school at Yale, I worked for interior architect Warren Platner in New Haven. He had received the commission to design the top floor of each of the towers and had hired about 25 recent art and architecture school graduates to join the design team. One floor was to be the most expensive and elegant restaurant in the world, and the other a slick, all white ship's deck designed for public observation of the city from the sky.

Hot glue guns had just been invented and we all worked in chipboard on two huge  $r'' = r'$  models of each of the towers' top floors, constructed in the office loft. My first assignment was to design a 15' x 25' brass chandelier for the executive dining room at Windows on the World. We all soon realized that very few architects get to make a building. We laughed about the old boys needing to "get it up" twice in a row, just one more time. Most of us felt like fluffers.

One day, just two weeks before Christmas, Warren called all of us young men into his conference room and fired us. It had just been discovered that the towers would interfere with TV reception in lower Manhattan and there was heated debate in many arenas about the true motive in needing to build this tall. The project's budget was practically eliminated. This proved to be my last job at anything remotely close to playing at architecture. I turned to education... to think it through... to talk it out.

Thirty years after graduating from Cooper Union, and after twenty-five years as a professor and administrator at four different art and architecture schools, I returned to NYC and to Cooper to head the School of Art. I've taught architecture, photographed it, and even hung around with architects now and again... not a bad lot. They seek the art of architecture, and I remain obsessed with the architecture of art.

At 9:00 on 9.11 I was just convening a breakfast meeting of the faculty when Hans Haacke arrived and announced that he saw one of the World Trade Towers on fire as he rode his bicycle to school from downtown. We all immediately took the elevator to the top floor. The second plane had just hit and we all watched in horror as both towers collapsed. A colleague took photos, as another drew furiously. From Cooper's roof, the loft where I live was directly

in the line of sight of the blazing towers. They each curtsied in very elegant slow motion, wearing puffy, matte gray tutus dotted with cascading glitter against the bluest of skies. In a moment, the buildings, the old boys, and the country were deflated. It was at once the most beautiful and the most horrific sight and realization of an idea that I had ever seen, and I am changed forever as a result.

It is for others to decide whether or not to build or rebuild... there or anywhere. We certainly continue to need shelter. I'm just one of the crowd who uses buildings, not makes them. It would seem that the architect's relationship to building must be changed forever too... at least I hope it is. We are in the era of vulnerability and our relationship to American monuments must now reflect the fragility of human existence as well as the supremacy. Strength and power must be redefined, not rebuilt. I hope we are up to the humbling task of building renewal.

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**Dan Rosenfeld** is a principal with Urban Partners, LLC, in Los Angeles. He has a degree in architecture from Stanford, attended the Yale School of Architecture, and practiced briefly in the field prior to becoming a real estate developer (and client of architects). He has also served as Director of Real Estate and Buildings for the State of California and the City of Los Angeles.

First, let me be clear: I love architects. Architects, however, make their own beds.

Architects should lead society: create environments that encourage others to achieve their potential; inspire communities like the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Renaissance masters of yore.

But they don't.

Architects should help set social policy and guide all aspects of land use and development for our communities.

But there is not one architect in our legislature, Board of Supervisors, or City Council, nor is there even an architect among the senior advisors to these groups. And the problem is not with government alone: the AIA has not introduced a single meaningful piece of legislation in the past ten years.

Instead, architects marginalize themselves; distributing awards and publishing articles about each other; producing often beautiful work, but



Del Mar Station, designed by Moule & Polyzoides, developed by Urban Partners, LLC

substantially ignored by society at large. In fact, the vast majority of buildings constructed today are not even designed by architects.

Why? Several guesses: 1) architects disdain the business aspects of real estate, yet money is (and always was) the mother's milk of good design; 2) architects turn their noses up at politics, yet political life produced the Parthenons, Pantheons, and Pennsylvania Avenues that represent our highest aspirations for good civic design; and 3) architects define their role too narrowly: environmental design is not an end in itself (to be captured and idealized in magazine photographs), but rather a broad, all-inclusive vessel for expanding our entire ecological, social, and psychological lives.

Architects can set the human mind in motion.

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After twenty years at Bank of America's investment banking subsidiary, where he was a Managing Director in Real Estate Investment Banking, **Peter St. Clair** is not really retired in San Diego. He was interviewed for **arcCA** by Sharon Tucker, who provides the following report.

"You need an interpreter. It's always a difficult communication process." So says Peter St. Clair of relationships with architects over a long and distin-

guished career, first in real estate development and, for the past 20 years, in banking.

He says a banker usually needs "something extremely simple" from an architect. But too often, he gets too much detail in language he can't understand. The banker may receive an exotic electronic file format he can't even open, let alone interpret. Likewise, the architect is probably unschooled in risk analysis or secondary market placement of bank loans.

In short, St. Clair believes, the banker and the architect must typically confront "a gross mismatch of expertise."

He praises project management tools such as those at [buzzsaw.com](http://buzzsaw.com), which support efficient, team-wide communication and documentation. He suggests adapting some of that data for use by appraisers and bankers and bringing them into the electronic communication loop.

In St. Clair's experience, architects take a seat at the table early enough in the process. And he admires their problem-solving abilities. Confronted, for example, "by challenging topography, zoning restrictions, or some wild idea of the (property) owners," designers tackle "the classic problem-solving assignment" with gusto. "And," he says, "the best of them are good at working with planning and zoning departments and creating a set of drawings that a contractor can actually bid and build."

Architects don't score as well, in his estimation, on time- and budget-management. He doesn't lay full responsibility at their door, though, given the unwieldy number of people involved these days on big construction projects. "You deal with different professionals at different stages of the project even when an owner has hired a project manager. So, you've probably got an *à la carte* relationship with the architect."

St. Clair, who has also logged time in corporate real estate (which manages the bank's own properties), appreciates fine, strong design. But he says he understands why the financial industry often "thinks of architects as dreamers." The constant re-design of something perfectly functional can be maddening, which makes it critical for architects to pay close attention to clients' specifications and tolerance for choice.

He applauds the increase in green building practices in the profession, pragmatically pointing out that, given the up-tick in interior mold problems and

other workplace environment issues, a greater sensitivity in choosing materials can only be a good thing.

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**William S. Saunders** is Editor of *Harvard Design Magazine*, author of books including *Modern Architecture: Photographs by Ezra Stoller*, and a graduate of degree programs in literature, in which the only torture he had to endure was typing before word processors were invented.

I am in awe of architects, and I pity them. Because of the emotional demand it imposes, the profession of architecture seems to me extremely difficult, requiring a range of personal strengths that perhaps no other profession requires. Architects need to be both tender and tough. Architecture is where the delicacy, sensitivity, and openness to the unknown of art meets the selfless receptivity and tact of the therapist and the diplomat, the precision and objectivity of the scientist, the willingness to accept failure of the athlete, and the patience and ability to compromise of the politician. The artist in the architect is all inwardness, probing feeling, nuance, and refinement. But the businessman, the builder, the engineer, the marketer, the servant of the client, and the negotiator with all kinds of people, from neighborhood groups to cost controllers—all those personae want and need to oppose or at least shut off the artist. Architects (those who are artistically ambitious, anyway) are trapped in the crossfire of competing and even opposing motivations. They are doomed to inner torment.

Unless, of course, they are extraordinarily flexible, patient, even-tempered, and able to accept disappointment without despair and with an immediate ability to carry on, working with the conditions they face, trying to make the best of them in relatively good spirits. Architects need to be Buddhas, pragmatists, stoics, and sometimes saints. They need thick skins as well as delicate sensibilities. They need to be simultaneously and equally idealistic and realistic. Those who can't do so either become pure businessmen or drop out, like four early retirees I know who now paint landscapes.

And, as if all these strengths weren't enough, architects also need special brains, brains that can hold together in awareness more details, needs, people, and goings-on than must a mother with eight children. So much is always demanding

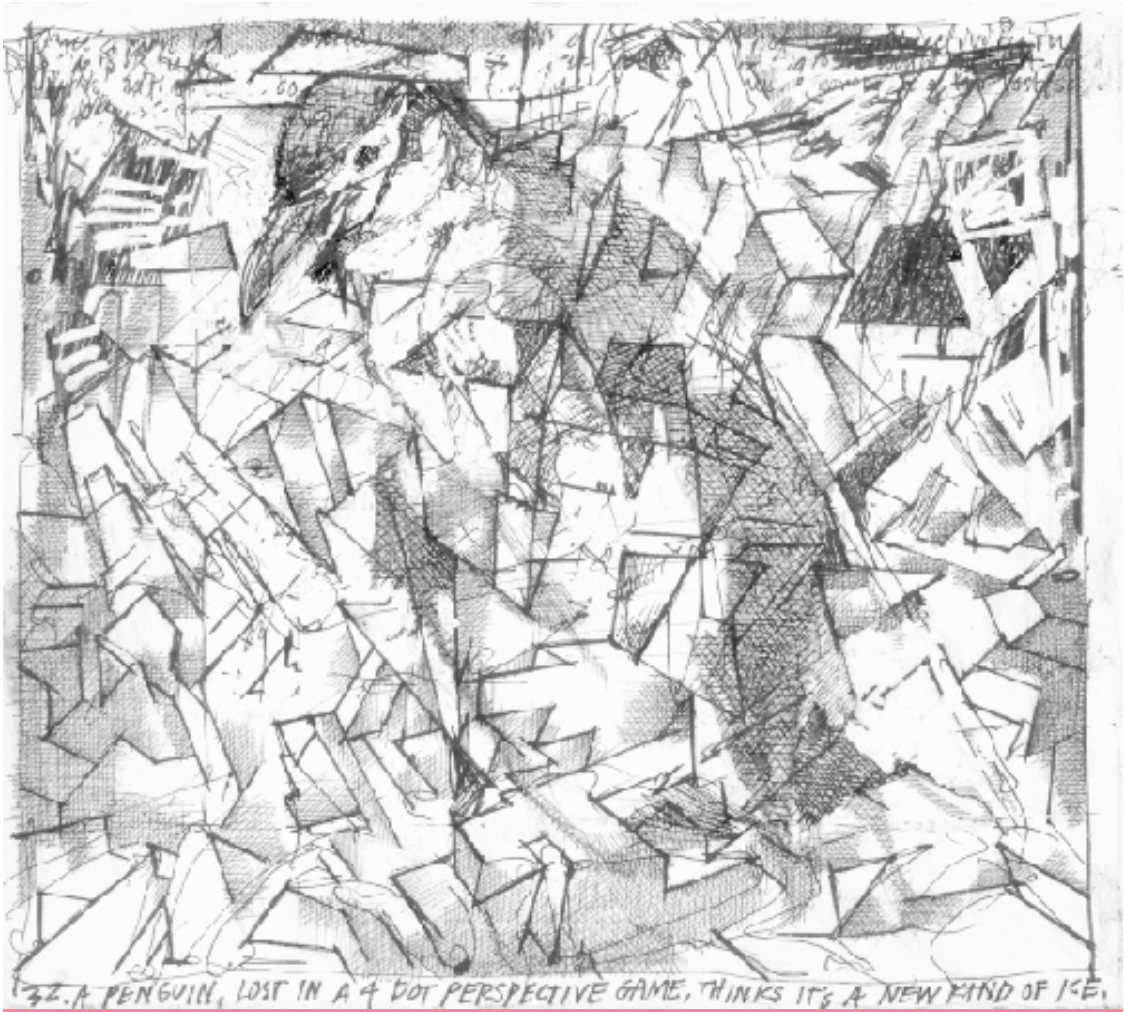
their attention: "Have the carpenters, the masons, the electricians, the plumbers, the painters, and the landscapers all done the hundreds of things they were supposed to? Have they done those things right? Where are the next jobs coming from? Is the placement of this wall (etc. etc. etc. etc.) in this drawing as good as it could be? In the office and among my clients and contractors, who is unhappy, doing the wrong thing in counterproductive conflict with me or others, needing stroking, needing supervision? How can we: meet the deadline? pay the bills? come in on budget? get the plans approved? meet payroll? manage to stay civil and awake at the evening public design review meeting? diminish the design yet again to reduce expenses? and find time to rise above all this to seek inspiration and think in some depth?"

The busiest architect I know, one who also teaches and is constantly active in community and urban affairs, has a fortunate habit: when things fall apart, he laughs.

It is hard for young architects just to survive in a bit of comfort. Usually their education debts are high and their pay low. They come out of school bursting with ideas, ideals, and ambitions, and they find themselves in back rooms detailing bathrooms. If they are ever to gain power, fame, and fortune, it will, if things go normally, not be until they are in their fifties. They, along with all architects, are at the mercy of economic cycles. In downturns, unemployment for architects can reach over forty percent. While doctors, hairdressers, and undertakers are always needed, architects are, in most building, "optional." Their livelihood feels precarious.

Maybe that's part of why there is so much machismo and arrogance in architectural culture—to ward off the vulnerability. Black clothes, short hair, black or steely glasses, sports cars, uncompromising severity of critique in school juries, and, in design, a love of austerity, rationalism, minimalism, glass, steel, concrete, and technology, and an avoidance of fabrics, decoration, soft/warm materials and furniture, and bodily comforts. The more threatening are the feelings of dependence and weakness, the more that rigor, toughness, criticality, and unemotionality provide a refuge.

Which is not to say that most architects are macho and few architects welcome softness and



Barren Storey's illustrations have appeared in periodicals ranging from *National Geographic* to *Heavy Metal* and *D.C. Comics*, and he has published a graphic novel, *The Marat Sade Journals*. He is an Associate Affiliate Professor of Illustration at CCAC (California College of Arts and Crafts).

warmth. In competitive situations, however, in juries, reviews, competitions for the same commissions, hardness is the default mode. Perhaps there is a boot camp or hazing aspect to architectural education, with its charrettes and terrifying public presentation of one's work. Is this supposed to represent means of toughening students up in preparation for the harsh "real world"? Well, maybe many students do learn not to collapse under pressure and criticism. But maybe many are permanently scarred.

Why are there so many stories about successful architects doing everything possible to suppress public criticism of their work instead of seeking criticism as a way of learning to improve? Cases in point: the architect who tried to block use of photographs of his work in *Harvard Design Magazine* and to convince colleagues not to write for the magazine because *HDM* had published work by a writer who *elsewhere* had criticized him. The architect who refused to let *HDM* consider publishing some of his recent lectures because a professor at Harvard Design School has, in one phrase of a published interview, implied that the architect's detailing was not so good. The paucity of negative criticism in the trade magazines lest those magazines no longer be granted access to the architect's photographs, drawings, and sometimes buildings. The too prevalent division of one's architectural peers into friends and enemies, with the enemies to be blacklisted, cold-shouldered, dissed in conversations, never seen again. The too prevalent backbiting and scorn between competitive architectural schools.

Why are there so few females architects? Is it partly because gentleness, generosity, emotion, and unselfish collaboration seem dangerous or dysfunctional in the subculture of architects? Do many architects feel so on the verge of falling apart that they think any softness might push them over the edge?

To me, practicing architecture is like playing an X-treme sport: I can admire those who do it, but I would "never try this at home." I don't think I would have the strength to be, all at once, artist, engineer, businessman, politician, and therapist. However, designing the environment of my own home, where I do not have to struggle with recalcitrant societal realities, I have known how deeply satisfying it is to make an environment that works well and gives aesthetic pleasure. I can only imagine how

much more deeply satisfying it would be, to simultaneously satisfy and serve many more people and the culture at large.

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**Nalda Smith** is Community Advocate for Glide Foundation's Global Ministries, located in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. Previously homeless, she now calls the Cecil Williams Glide Community House ("C. W. House"), by Michael Willis Architects, her home. She was interviewed by Tim Culvahouse, who files the following report.

Nalda Smith spoke to me about the values embodied in the architecture of C. W. House: openness, acceptance, generosity. "Cecil," she says, "doesn't see your mistakes; he sees your strengths." He and his wife, Janice Mirikitani, had a vision for this place, and the architects shared this vision. "If they didn't, Cecil wouldn't have had them on board."

Ms. Smith elaborates, "You can see that the architects took time. They were diligent. They really understand us and see us as special, and because of that, we're able to see ourselves as special." She enumerates the building's qualities. She uses the words "beautiful," "homey," "warm." "I'm very proud of my house. The rooms are big, the closet is big. I have a nice, big bathroom. It's a three bedroom unit, but people say I have four bedrooms, because the bathroom's as big as another room." The appointments of the lobby and corridors are "like an exclusive hotel. People come in here with briefcases, in fur coats, looking for a room. In the Tenderloin—oh God, Jesus!" She laughs. "We tell them, 'This is a residence; the Hilton's over there.'"

"Cecil," she says, "asked the people who would live here what they wanted, and they requested a fountain. Cecil told the architect about the fountain and what we, the people, wanted. So they did that, and the inscription on the fountain came from a song written by Cecil, called 'Coming Home': 'No one rejected, everyone together, everyone accepted, and it feels so good to be home.' When they did that," Ms. Smith says, "they walked the walk. Cecil and Janice had a vision, but it was the architects who implemented it. They made a good team. We seldom hear about the ones behind the scenes. They need to be recognized. It's one thing to put it on paper; it's another thing to bring it to life."

Earlier, as we walked to C.W. House from her office at the church, Ms. Smith had observed, “When you’re in a place you love and enjoy, you can think, you can plan.” Now, on the ninth floor terrace, she shows me where she stands when she’s feeling low. “I stand here and look down there at the worst place I can see, the grimmest place—see those buildings down there?—to remind myself: if I take a drink, that’s where I’ll end up. I love it here, and I’m not going to give it up for anyone, not even me.”

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**John Stein** is Executive Assistant to the President at the University of the Pacific.

Several years ago, I was working at a small college that was engaged in a renovation project. One day, as I was making casual conversation with the contractor, he observed that he was in the construction business for several years before he realized that “f---ing architect” was actually two words.

My observations come from two very different perspectives. As an academic administrator, I have worked closely with architects on projects ranging from small renovations to major construction. Much of my pleasure has come from the process itself: working with the architect and the ubiquitous facilities committee, developing the program for the project, and understanding the options. The creative force of the project needs to be shared to be truly appreciated.

I have also had the pleasure of working at institutions that provide the academic preparation of young men and women for the profession. This vantage provides a view of the transition from aspirant to practitioner.

Other than fashion design students, who never cease to amaze me, architecture students are the most creative, driven, and focused of any group of students with whom I have worked. In large part, my admiration stems from the optimism inherent in architectural instruction, at least that which I have observed. These students believe that any problem can (and should) be solved. Typically, the best source for this instruction is the practicing architect who encourages the sense that all obstacles can be conquered.

I appreciate that the discord between those who build and those who design relates to how these obstacles are perceived. And I must admit that I have

learned to double all projections of cost given to me by an architect. It is the optimism thing – not that I would have it any other way. It is infinitely more pleasurable to work with this creative dynamic, although it creates particular challenges in a participatory, academic climate.

I wonder if there have been psychological studies of the impact of clients on these inspired, young architects? What else explains the loss of excitement for the profession that was so evident when they were students? Architects themselves share some of this burden.

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**Dugald Stermer** is an internationally recognized illustrator, a San Francisco Arts Commissioner, and a member of the board of the Delancy Street Foundation.

With much of twentieth century architecture, considerations concerning humanity seem almost an afterthought, a necessary evil, as if the architect would be happier if people didn’t enter the equation at all.

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**Tony Taccone** is Artistic Director of the Berkeley Repertory Theater.

I have worked with architects on projects ranging from the creation of two theaters (the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco and the Berkeley Rep) to the renovation of my home. Working on the design of the new theater in Berkeley was a very positive experience. I think it had very much to do with the character of the individuals involved as well as the fact that they were skilled in their particular profession. The design of our theater involved special problems and particular needs. Architects deal with the aesthetics, planning, the *feng-shui* of space as well as the practical issues of safety, earthquakes, city, and code requirements. But the really hard part of a project of this type is having to satisfy many groups of people: board, staff, city planners, the public. At times it was extremely complicated to negotiate our way through the differing opinions. We had to figure out what we collectively wanted, what we liked and disliked, what our history meant to us. Our architects showed great patience, respected our view, were great listeners. Ultimately, it worked because we developed a synergy of values.





Berkeley Repertory Theater, ELS Architecture & Urban Design

It seems to me that architects are key creative forces in any society. Whether they are visionaries boldly experimenting with form or collaborators seeking to satisfy large groups of people, their work has long term implications for how we choose to live. Such a responsibility brings a great deal of pressure. The public nature of the work and the fact that most buildings are intended to stand for a very long time places their work under intense scrutiny.

Architects are valuable not only because they “know all the rules” and have a wealth of experience dealing with a myriad of problems (time, money, aesthetics), but because they are connected to a deep sense of community. They try to take wildly subjective impulses and transmute those impulses into dynamic, exciting, livable structures. At their best, they move us forward in time, move our consciousness forward to see and experience the world in a new way. A truly great design, it seems to me, deals with the summation of our knowledge and creates a new sense of who we hope to be.

Artists, artisans, architects, when they are working well, bring an infectious vitality to their endeavors. Here in Berkeley and around the country, there’s been a bit of a renaissance in recent years. There seems to be a higher level of aesthetic refinement, a greater appreciation of space and visual character, a deeper consciousness and sense of the power

of physical beauty. Architects bring their appetites, curiosity, and applied knowledge to this rekindled interest in the quality of our cities and communities.

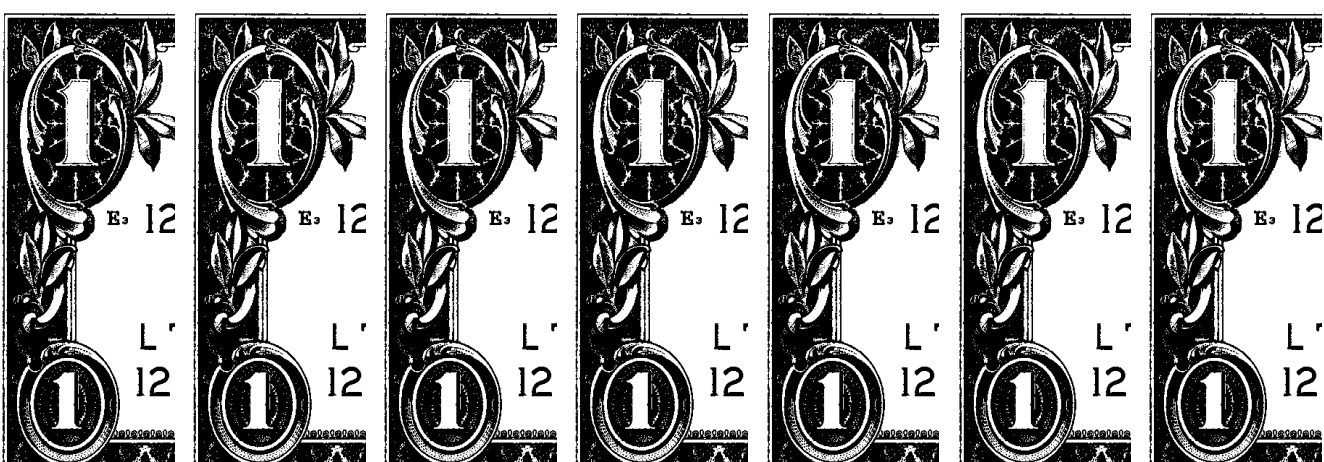
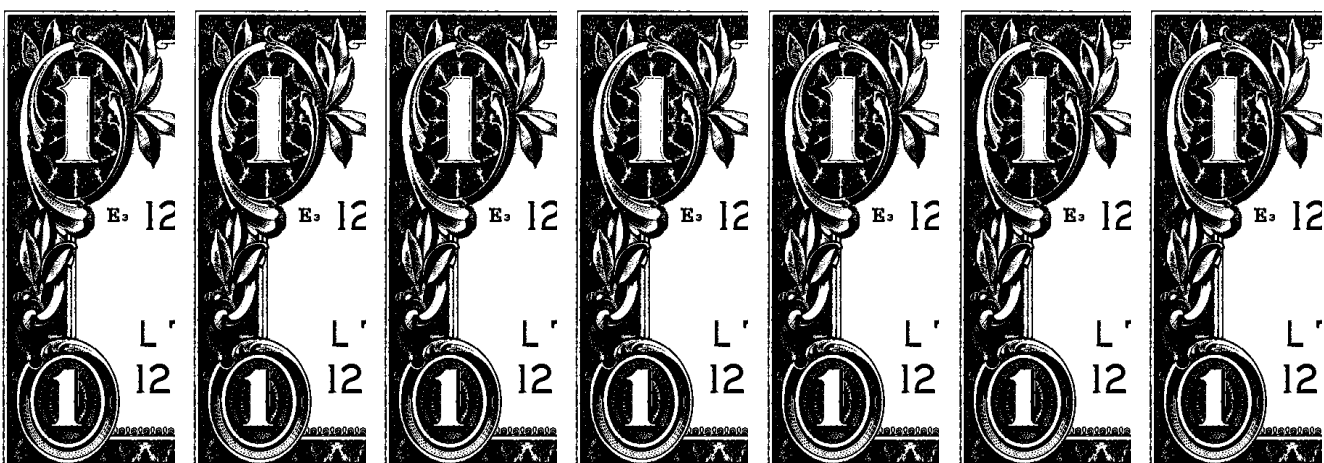
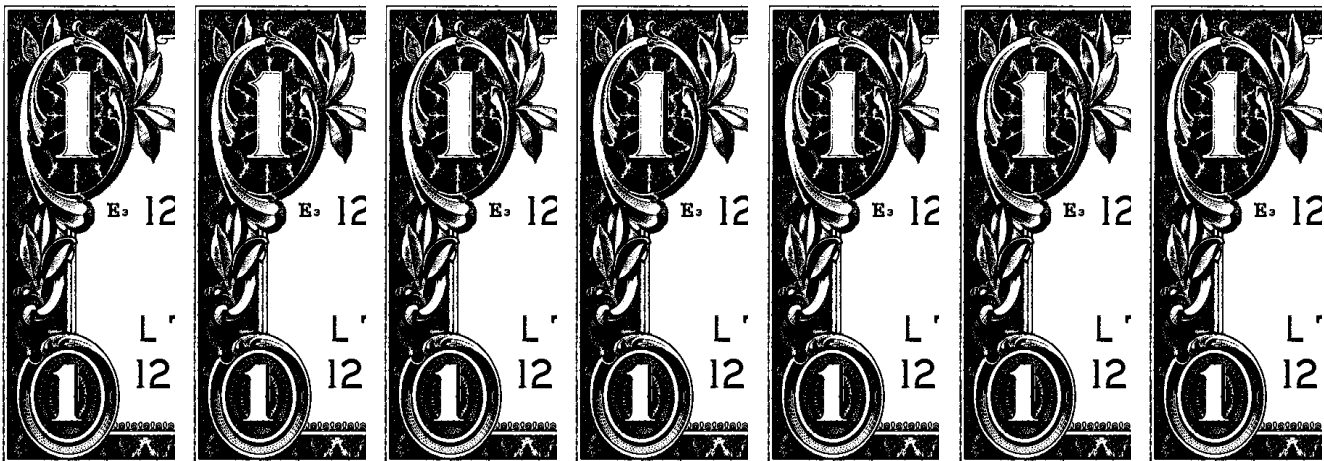
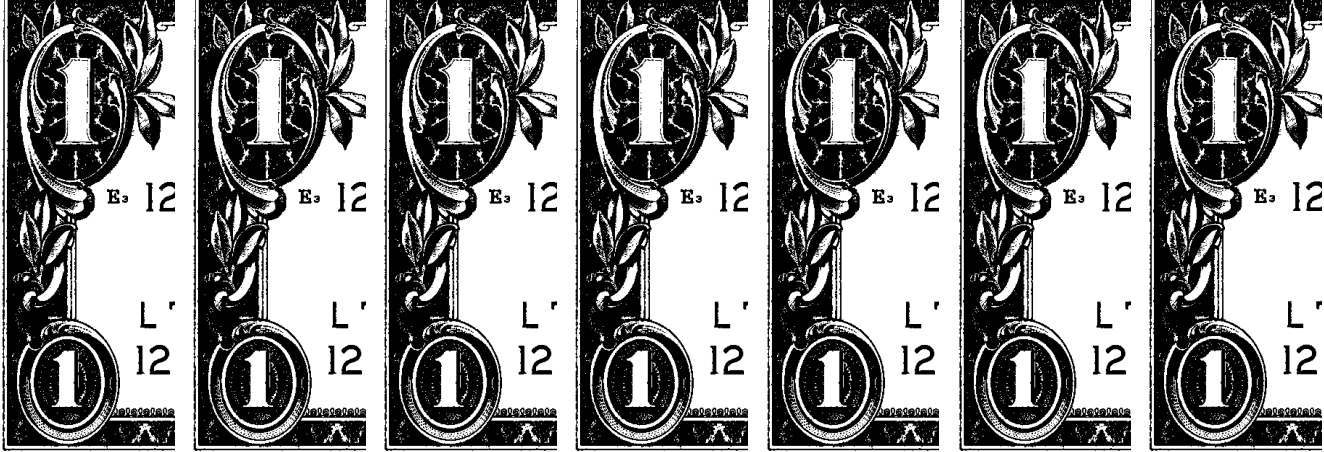
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**Mary Linn Wolf** is an advanced practice nurse in rural central Virginia. She is a family nurse practitioner and clinical specialist in adult psychiatric nursing and holds an M.A. in medieval history.

In response to the flattering invitation to contribute one of the essays for this issue, I have been gnawing away at ideas that I hold about the profession of architecture, but finding it difficult to collect these thoughts. Last night, in one of the half-hours of the insomnia that has visited me these past few months, I realized that my foot-dragging in writing this essay provided the key to the very points I wish to make.

One of the principal problems confronting me with this exercise is that I have little concept of the reader of these comments or this very periodical. Although it is not a self-flattering revelation, I essentially envision architects as polarized “types”—as either career intellectuals using a symbolic visual language beyond my comprehension or as CAD technicians without the opportunity or ability to become career intellectuals. This polarity highlights a significant problem, as I see it, with the practice of architecture itself.

In order for architecture to survive as a profession, it must foster a public awareness of what it produces. One of the defining aspects of a profession is its development of a public image. I think that on the whole architecture is not successful at this task. It is at times willfully unsuccessful, which seems a shame. Everyone knows—or thinks he knows—what skills may be needed in lawyering or in doctoring. Architects, however, seem uncomfortable about telling the public what tasks they perform. To me, this reticence suggests a fear that, if you delineate the tangibles a client can expect for his money, then you will not also be held to an artistic standard for the intangible aspects also purchased with his dollars. This notion is baloney. There is abundant opportunity and demand for artistry in medicine and presumably in law (I am a nurse practitioner and can therefore only speak to the former profession), but these professions are marketed as services. This is not a bad thing; it’s just the human face of the market. ●



# A Note on Value

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Michael Benedikt

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On the construction industry's perspective on the value of architecture, a personal anecdote: In 1993, when I became director of the Center for American Architecture and Design at the University of Texas at Austin, I was determined to forge some sort of cooperative relationship with the research-and-development and/or public relations arm of the construction industry. That industry's interests and architects' interests, although they weren't identical, I thought, at least overlapped. Both wanted to improve the quality of buildings, both wanted to enhance the public's appreciation of what good construction did to improve their lives, and both were interested in claiming a larger slice of the country's economic pie to carry out the mission. (Statistics show the percentage of the GDP devoted to building construction dropping almost continuously since 1935, even though every year more square feet have been built.)

The non-profit Construction Industry Institute (CII) seemed a perfect candidate for my personal outreach campaign. Supported by 43 large building-owning companies and a roughly equal number of large construction contracting companies, the CII tracks and disseminates the research of some 37 universities in the subject area of building construction, from new construction management techniques to technical innovations to performance evaluations. (See [www.construction-institute.org](http://www.construction-institute.org) for a fuller description.)

As it happens, CII is headquartered in Austin. I went to visit.

Through a long and enjoyable afternoon with CII top management—refreshments, cigars, and much nodding all round—I learned a great deal. They were sympathetic with what I was trying to do. Yes, they agreed, it's a pity that construction spending is not growing proportionately with the economy; and yes, it's a pity that buildings aren't what they used to be, etc... but "that's because buildings today are not economical (i.e. inexpensive) enough." The

corporate sponsors of CII, I was told—although they might, behind a podium, call for finer and better buildings—would privately never support efforts by CII that might make buildings more expensive. Quite the opposite! Every nook and cranny, every step in the construction process, every material and every product used, was to be examined to see if it could be executed, manufactured, transported, or installed more quickly, safely, and economically. This was CII's public mission. Building costs had to come down, said my hosts, in order to increase demand, and then, perhaps, total spending on construction might go up. Basic economics!

I suggested that they were steadily cutting off the limb they were sitting on. Demand, I reminded them, is a combination of desire and affordability. Making buildings cheaper might make them less desirable faster than it made them more affordable, as my "percent-GDP" data seemed to show was already happening. Sure, people had to live and work somewhere, and in this we both had, as it were, a captive audience. But people wouldn't spend any more of their hard-earned money on their living or working space than they had to if they had better things to do with it; and the less joy we provided in this regard the more justified they would be in diverting their attention and money elsewhere. Even purely production-oriented buildings—like factories and other "capital facilities" (which is what CII likes to call all buildings except houses)—could reach a limit of cost efficiency and a point of vanishing marginal returns to research. And then what? Will we not have painted ourselves into a corner? We needed, I said, to increase demand by producing a higher quality, better appreciated, more wanted product. Buildings, per square foot, had to become what economists call a superior good—i.e., a good that people spend proportionately more, not less, on as they get wealthier—or at least a normal good (i.e. one that we spend a constant fraction of our wealth on)—if both our businesses were to keep their place in the economy and avoid commodification, which is the death knell of profitability. (I elected to forgo speaking of how architecture "lifted the human spirit" and other such idealistic stuff.)

Many hours later, with great personal warmth and professional courtesy, they wished me good-bye and good luck. ●



# Under the Radar

University of the Pacific:  
Art and Geo-Sciences Buildings  
Tim Perks Architecture

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**Therese Tierney, AIAS**

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The fastest growing region in California is, surprisingly, not the urban destinations of San Francisco or Los Angeles, but rather the Central Valley near Modesto, which is home to the University of the Pacific. The oldest chartered university in the state, UoP is modeled on a New England college, with gothic revival brick buildings framing tranquil quadrangles of maple trees and boxwood hedges. Yet, as the alma mater of innovative musicians Dave Brubeck and Chris Isaaks, the university is less traditional than its ivy covered buildings would imply.

Celebrating its 150th anniversary and preparing for an ever-expanding college population, UoP has embarked upon a new campus plan, assisted by campus architect David Meckel, FAIA, and campus planners, the SWA Group. The university has purchased a technical junior college to the south, where it has relocated its art and geo-sciences departments, formerly housed in Quonset huts.

Part of an educational process is being willing to learn from one's surroundings. Architect Tim Perks's insightful redesign of two 1935 Art Moderne buildings respects the original structures and artfully brings their history to life. Perks, who

worked previously for Jim Jennings Arkhitekture, retained the essential design elements of the cast concrete structures: streamlined horizontal lines inscribed on the façade and meticulously aligned with steel sash mullions.

The twin buildings had initially housed the various technical trade schools: construction, welding, plumbing, and electrical. In collaboration with Ove Arup, consulting mechanical engineer, Perks utilized the resources at hand, inventively but efficiently expressing the industrial spirit of the previous use. The original interior was stripped back to its bare shell. The saw-toothed roof has been released to hover above freestanding classrooms below. Industrial roof monitors provide natural daylighting, highly desirable considering both the lighting needs of an art studio and the rising cost of energy. Mechanical ducts and conduits wind their way through Unistrut trusses sandwiched between translucent polycarbonate panels, their location often framing studio entrances. While each system is exposed and independent, they work together to unify the design.

Instead of a traditional double-loaded corridor, canted forms create a charged rhythm of open and closed spaces. Classroom walls are designed to double up as critique or exhibit spaces. Walls disappear, either through rollup doors or transparent glazing, visually linking offices and studios to the active courtyard. An exceptional merging of site and program occurs when the art gallery's exterior glass wall rolls away during outdoor receptions on warm evenings.

As a frame to the campus' south entrance, Perks designed the building to promote social connectivity. In the courtyard, parallel shade structures define sitting areas. In addition to organizing departments, circulation zones provide for impromptu meetings.

The University of the Pacific will continue to evolve and transform, especially in the newer south campus area. Tim Perks has retained the area's former identity while creating a fresh and unexpected solution to a new program. The old and new live comfortably with one another, each retaining its own individuality yet brought together with site and climate in a single, unified idea. ●





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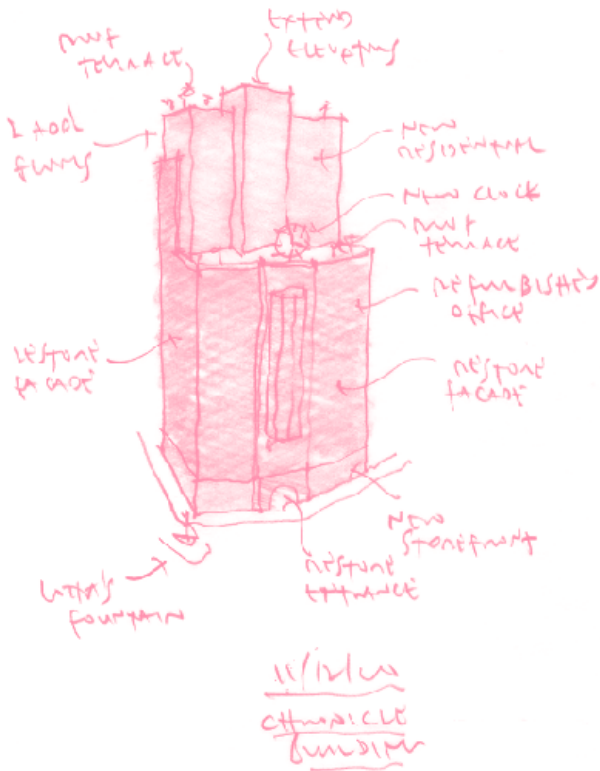
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# Coda



## Chronicle Building: the West's First Skyscraper

Charles Bloszies, AIA

The Tin Men altered more than just residential neighborhoods. Metal cladding, known as “slipcovers” to architectural historians, can be found on major buildings today. In San Francisco, a metal slipcover hides one of the city’s most famous structures.

The Chronicle Building was the first skyscraper constructed on the West Coast. Designed by Chicago architects Burnham and Root in 1890 for M.H. de Young, it was an architectural and technical marvel. It was taller than its rival Call Building, contained seismic bracing within its clay tile floors, and touted the largest clock in the world.

The San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 interrupted completion of a major addition, also designed by Daniel Burnham. Despite partial collapse due to the weight of heavy printing machinery on upper floors, the Chronicle Building was the first major structure repaired and put back into service after the cataclysm.

This distinctive skyscraper subsequently defined an important corner along Market Street until the metal slipcover, still visible today, was erected in 1962. It then changed hands a number of times and slowly fell into disrepair, narrowly avoiding demolition in 1990.

Using economic incentives for historic building reuse, new owners are now seeking a development partner to reestablish the building as one of architectural prominence. The slipcover will be removed and a modern addition will focus attention on the original façade in a gesture to return a landmark to the city of San Francisco. ●