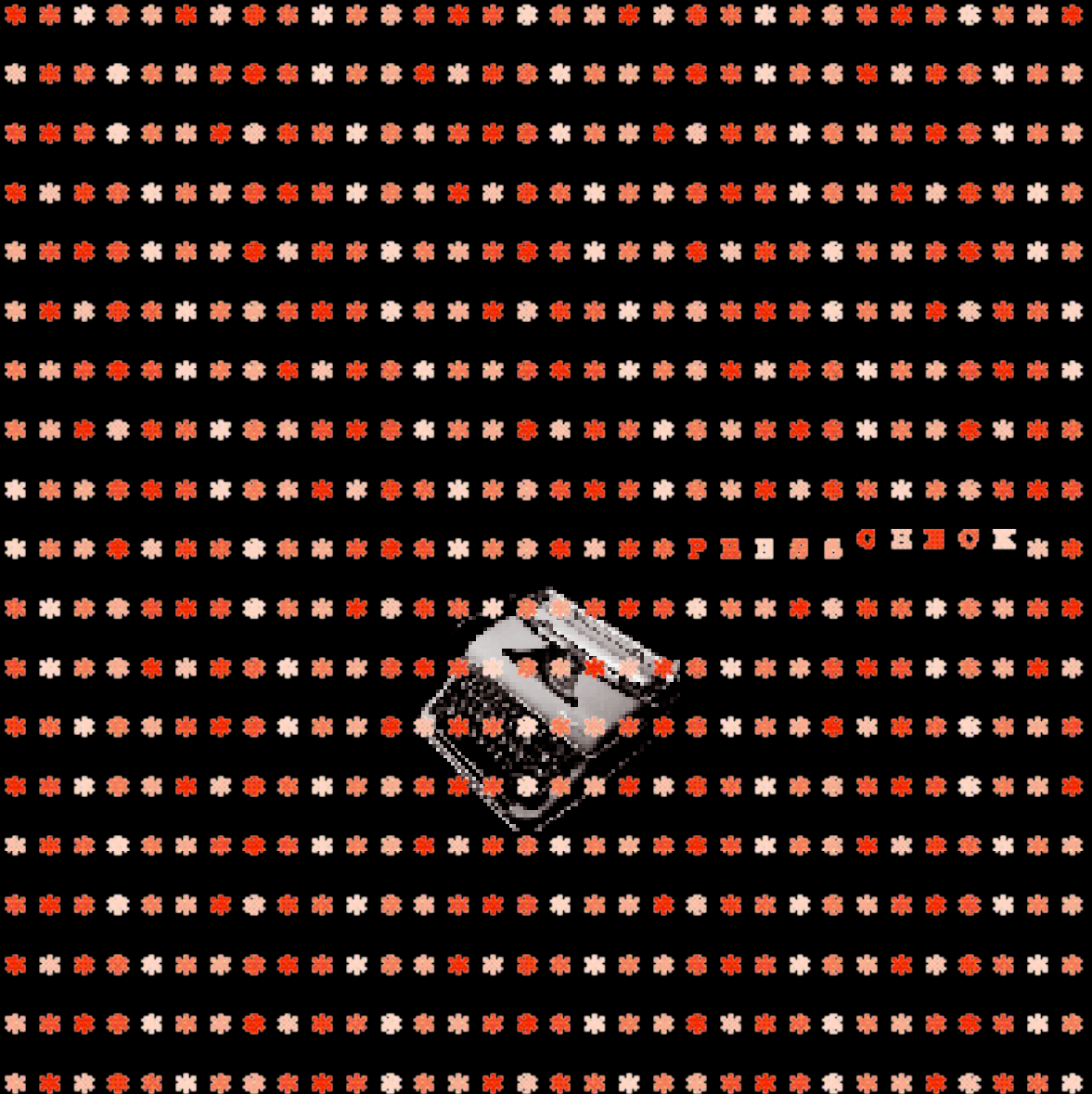


# arcca

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

professional practice issue

04.1



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- \* The Place of Histories
  - \* Readers First
  - \* Architecture and Its Value Explained

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# Comment

In this issue of **arcCA**, we look at the current state of the architectural press. We've sought a variety of points of view, ranging from a critique (by Thomas Fisher, FAIA, former editor of *Progressive Architecture*) of the dominance that our sister McGraw-Hill publication, *Architectural Record*, enjoys in the American marketplace, to a history of architectural journals in California, to a "how-to" guide to setting up your firm's media relations strategy.



*Ray Kappe: a Retrospective, 1953-2003, A+D Museum*

**arcCA** does not regularly publish book reviews, but in an issue on the architectural press I thought I might mention three impressive new books. *Ray Kappe: a Retrospective, 1953-2003*, published by the A+D Museum to accompany a recent exhibition, is an elegant and well-illustrated compendium of the work of the founding director of SCIArc (Los Angeles: A+D Museum Publishing, 2003). For the many of us who have grown weary of the perennial republication of vintage photos (lovely as they are), Donlyn Lyndon's *The Sea Ranch*, with over 300 wonderful new photographs by Jim Alinder and essays by Donald Canty and Lawrence Halprin, beautifully brings our understanding of this seminal coastal development up-to-date (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004). And I am particularly delighted by the publication of *Delta Primer*, by Jane Wolff, the first fragment of which was originally published in *arcCA* 00.2, "Common Ground." As Margit Aramburu, Executive Director, Delta Protection Commission,

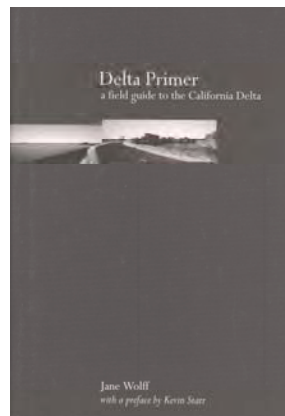


*The Sea Ranch, Donlyn Lyndon*

writes, "I have worked in the Delta for ten years, and *Delta Primer* took me places I hadn't seen and introduced me to history I hadn't heard. It's hard to describe: it's beautiful artwork, it's a geographic study of a unique landscape, and it's a political primer about the future of water and land uses in the State of California." Available as both a book and a deck of playing cards that allows one to work out for oneself the complex exchange of values required to manage the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Delta, *Delta Primer* is the tenth publication of William Stout Publishers (San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2003).

By the by, if you happen to engage a vendor or consultant whose ad you've seen in **arcCA**, please mention to them that you saw it here—and that you appreciate their support of the magazine. As I appreciate yours.

**Tim Culvahouse, AIA, editor**



*Delta Primer, Jane Wolff*

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**John King** is the urban design writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 2002 and 2003.

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# Our Humpty Dumpty Press

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Thomas Fisher, FAIA

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The architectural press, like the profession itself, has undergone a fundamental change in both its media and its methods, affecting the way we get information and communicate with each other and the public. As with all such changes, this one has both good and bad aspects, but what distinguishes this change is that, again like the profession, consolidation and fragmentation have occurred at the same time.

## **HUMPTY DUMPTY SAT ON A WALL**

Just as large firms continue to buy smaller firms, the architectural magazines have undergone mergers and acquisitions to the point where one has most of the advertising dollars. And just as tiny, boutique firms have arisen to meet the specialized needs of clients, new media keep emerging in the architectural press to address particular readers or markets.

This simultaneous consolidation and fragmentation may seem paradoxical, but it really represents two sides of the same phenomenon: deregulation. We live in an era of “economic fundamentalism,” as the economist Jane Kelsey put it, dominated by a belief in the self-correcting and self-regulating nature of markets. And, as with all fundamentalist beliefs, this one leads to extremes: in the case of the architectural press, extreme size on one hand and extreme specialization on the other. Like Humpty Dumpty, one big egg sits on top of the wall, dominating the market, while at the base of the wall there exists a growing number of pieces to the architectural press, each of which struggles in its own way.

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#### HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL

One of the great falls in the architectural media occurred some eight years ago, when *Progressive Architecture* (P/A) was pushed into closure after 75 years of operation. Before 1995, the three major American architectural magazines—*Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, and *Progressive Architecture*—existed in equilibrium, with each about the same size and each occupying its own editorial niche. *Architecture* magazine, formerly the *AIA Journal*, had been the Institute's magazine for decades, but faced with severe financial problems of its own making, the AIA decided to renegotiate its magazine contract. Upon receipt of a substantial payment from McGraw-Hill, the AIA tapped *Architectural Record* as its new magazine, a decision that put *Architecture* in dire straights, with few paid subscribers. So, in a do-or-die move, its publishers bought P/A, forcibly folded the magazine and took its 70-some thousand paid subscribers as its own. That off-the-wall move killed a former competitor, but it didn't work financially. In the last several years, *Architecture* has struggled economically, while the *Record* has dominated the advertiser market, with some issues approaching 400 pages in length.

The AIA greased the wall, and *Architecture* magazine, rather than take a fall, pushed P/A instead. Some of the former P/A editors, myself included, along with Kevin Lippert of the Princeton Architectural Press and a New York dot-com company called Reach Networks, attempted to restart the magazine as an on-line publication and web browser. But no amount of hard work or money could put Humpty Dumpty back together again. The on-line world in 1996 was too new, and the revenue from publishing on the web too uncertain, as remains the case today. But even if we had tried to revive P/A as a print publication, the dominance of one magazine in the field enables it to suppress advertiser and subscription rates long enough to keep any upstarts permanently in the red. As a result, the American architectural profession may never have more than two national magazines, fewer than in countries a fraction of our size. *Architectural Record* may be the big winner, but we are all poorer because of it.

#### ALL THE KING'S HORSES AND ALL THE KING'S MEN

At the same time, the pieces of the architectural media continue to increase in number and variety. Local and regional professional journals have arisen, such as *Architecture Boston* and *arcCA*, to join already established and well-regarded regional publications such as *Texas Architect* and *Architecture Minnesota*. While a bright spot in the publishing world, these magazines all require some degree of subsidy from their AIA components, which curbs their editorial independence to varying degrees.

Academically based journals have also arisen, be they practice oriented like *Praxis*, theory oriented like *Grey Room*, or research oriented like *Architectural Research Quarterly*. While more independent—and to varying degrees, more esoteric—than the local AIA magazines, these journals all struggle with modest budgets, meager revenues, and small circulation numbers. Few of these journals will last over the long-term, although longevity may not matter much in an age of increasingly rapid change.

The rise of non-print media underscores that idea. Faxed newsletters, such as *OfficeInsight*, and e-mail publications such as *ArchitectureWeek* and *Archvoices* have arisen to serve the architectural community with mainly text-based information, with links to websites, where image quality and



typography do count. These efforts, while admirable, have extremely modest revenue streams, resulting in their having almost no marketing budget and relatively little original content. They best serve as places to connect to or comment upon information generated by others, a valuable contribution, but hardly journalism.

In-house magazines represent another area of growth in the hardly-journalism category. Some of these publications amount to little more than house organs, taking the hard-sell approach by featuring the work of the firm and profiling clients or consultants. Others are more magazine-like, with articles about the markets they serve, the trends they see, and the lessons they have learned. These publications reflect the tension that has long existed in architecture between our being a trade, touting our wares, or a profession, sharing our knowledge.

#### **COULDN'T PUT HUMPTY DUMPTY TOGETHER AGAIN**

The idea of knowledge sharing has become a major issue in the profession and central to the AIA's strategic plan. While the consolidation and fragmentation of the architectural press may have something to do with it, the quality and depth of information we get—or more importantly, don't get—through our media also plays a part.

Professions differ from businesses and trades in how they share information. If the latter hold proprietary knowledge and keep trade secrets, the former share what they know through practice and research. The other major professions—medicine, law, engineering—have excelled in knowledge generation and sharing, but architecture has yet to put all the pieces together on this.

The medical profession, for example, has a highly evolved knowledge loop, with a wide range of journals that get into the hands of physicians the critical information they need to do their work, based on research conducted in the medical schools and teaching hospitals, which in turn responds to problems encountered by physicians' interactions with patients. Their professional press provides a key link in the integration of practice and research, which has led to the development of a remarkable knowledge base, with increased compensation following suit.

The knowledge loop between architectural practice and research has breaks in two places. Although we often teach or work together, architects

and academics rarely talk to each other about the problems encountered in practice that merit research. Much of the research in our field, as a result, ends up having little bearing on practice. At the same time, the project-oriented research done in offices almost never gets shared more broadly, either for lack of time and money or out of a belief that such sharing will reduce a firm's competitive advantage.

The failure here is one of communication, and the architectural press plays a major part in that. The journals in medicine help set the research agendas in the various areas of medical specialty as well as reporting on research results. The architectural press, in contrast, has traditionally focused on the process and the final form of architecture, with almost no reporting on the pre-design research-phase of projects and almost no evaluation of buildings after a few years of occupation to see what has worked and what hasn't. Nor, with the exception of a few small-circulation research journals, does the architectural press report with any regularity on the research going on in the schools.

The AIA has just started to address this gap with a new research newsletter called *AIA J*, although it remains as much about research news—who is doing what—as about actual research findings that a practitioner can use.

If we are to thrive as a profession, we need a healthier and more rigorous press, with journals that cover in depth all phases of architectural practice and research. Some of these might cover key topic areas such as sustainability or security or digital tools. Other might focus on all aspects of the markets we work in—from design, practice, and technology innovations, to the economics, politics, and public policy affecting clients and communities.

One thing is certain: we will not thrive with the press we have—one big Humpty Dumpty and dozens of under-funded fragments around it. If we don't pay more attention to and take greater control of our media, the next big fall may not be another magazine, but the architectural profession itself. ●



# Readers First

(No offense Intended)

---

John King, *San Francisco Chronicle*

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Last summer, a co-worker stopped by my desk to make a pitch, ever-so-politely, for me to review the new building at her daughter's high school. The school had just finished a gym with an attractive, iconic, head-turning curved metal roof. Everyone was excited, she said, and it really was striking.

The conversation resumed a few months later via email. Had I gone by? Not only that, get this—the gym had received an honor award from the local branch of the AIA. Any progress on that review?

To which I responded that I knew about the award because, in fact, I had been on the jury (helped sway the lone skeptic, I didn't add). And yes I had stopped by ... and no, no plans to review it, because I honestly saw nothing in the building that might serve as a springboard for a discussion with the million or so readers who skim the *Chronicle* on any given day.

All of which is an extremely roundabout way of saying that, when you write about buildings for general readers, the readers come first.

No doubt this frustrates architects—even more so their publicists—and I don't blame you. Here you craft some consummate example of small-scale sustainability, and those clods in the press don't care. Or they shrug off your butterfly-roof, ultra-clear glass, blob-like data processing center near Chico that is a shoo-in for an *AR* "Building Types Study."

I feel your pain. I especially feel your pain when that data processing center *is* pretty cool. But here's the catch: who cares? You may think it's cool, I may think it's cool, folks pulling in to the parking lot outside Chico may think it's cool—but unless there's something about that building that will resonate with general readers of a daily newspaper, there's not any good reason for me to write about it.

Does this translate to a declaration that only big buildings or tall buildings or local examples of starchitecture merit coverage? Not at all.

Architectural criticism in newspapers these days falls into two camps. One treats the subject essentially as a branch of the high arts, an intellectual discipline and rhetorical exercise in which quality is measured by how well or poorly a particular design reflects some pure quality of invention (thanks, Mr. Muschamp, you can put down your hand now). The other focuses on something much different: the built terrain, the existing context, how things fit together and whether or not the building/plaza/proposal is likely to make life around it better or worse.

While members of this latter camp appreciate architecture in and of itself, we're also looking for subjects that add an extra dimension to the tale. Not only do I want to write about buildings that are in the public eye when they open; from an urban design viewpoint it is equally essential to find and critique the suburban shopping center that best captures how that world is changing, or dense infill housing that might give pointers on how to fold people into existing communities by adding quality, not just quantity. It's a search for structures with implications—implications that will resonate with readers who have never seen the buildings in question, or who think Glenn Murcutt is a journeyman infielder.

Still, this approach means that good buildings do fall by the wayside. A home of austere minimalism in the cultivated wilds of Sonoma has no general lessons to teach. The same goes for the design of interior spaces or restorations of older buildings. They might be wonderful, they might demonstrate innovations that your peers can learn from, but if that's as far as it goes...

Another factor—one that's even more exasperating, I suspect—is that critics don't want to make the same explicit point over and over and over again.

Case at hand: the transformation of San Francisco's Ferry Building (and for those of you who haven't seen it, yes, it does deserve the hype). Besides being a great example of adaptive restoration, the changed spaces and new uses have a remarkable cultural dimension—they show that preservation must be flexible enough to respond to society's changes

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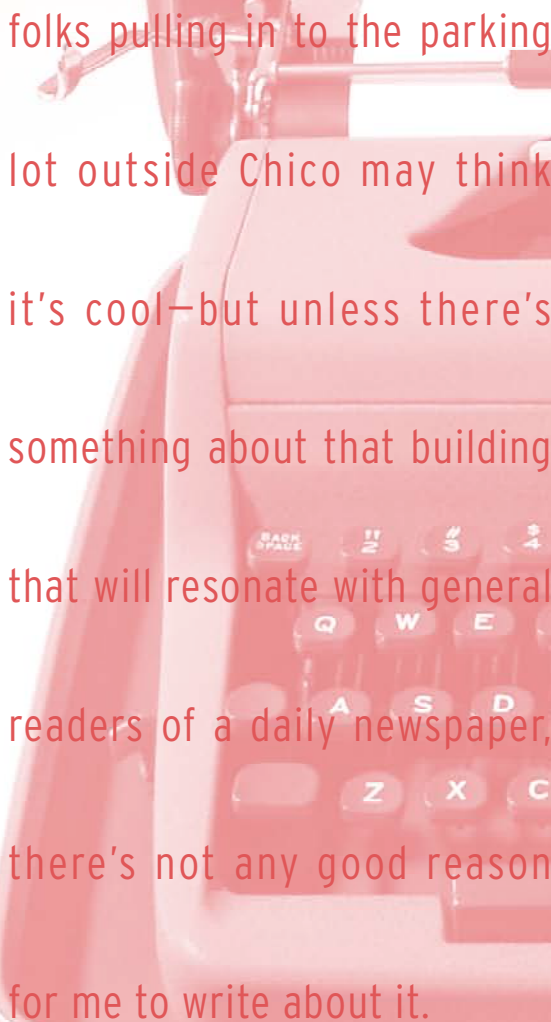
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beyond the purist dogma of just-put-back-what-was-there. But once you write about the Ferry Building and those implications at length—as I did last September—there's not a lot to say for awhile about other good new examples of preservation that argue the same point in more muted tones.

Fair? Not especially. But newspaper subscribers don't take blood vows to read everything that appears in the paper. To lure them, each story needs to start fresh, and a constant re-emphasis of the same themes only chases casual readers away.

The difference between the high and low camps is a matter of emphasis, not an absolute division; even those of us who view individual creations as one piece in the puzzle want that piece to be as good as possible. Besides, any good critic can't help but become a bit of a snob. When you see really exquisite new buildings, where the creativity and vision of the architect add unexpected dimensions—and the physical quality of what's built lives up to the artistic potential—it changes your perceptions the next time you take a tour of something that's *"good, but..."*

That said, I'm uncomfortable with particular critics trumpeting particular styles. I have my own aesthetic preferences and personal favorite architects ... (long pause) ... but what's more important from this critic's perspective is whether a building makes sense in its location, whether it is well-built with good materials, whether it feels good (and not in a condescending, carefully branded way). In short, whether it strengthens the weave of the larger urban fabric.

As for the final question everyone asks: no, I'm not told what to write. My opinions are not vetted by higher-ups. The only filtering that takes place comes when, heaven forbid, I use phrases that would make a member of the design community nod with recognition.

Fact is, any phrase more rarified than "columns" meets a skeptical reception; "you've lost me," a high-up editor said when I referred to how the towers on a bridge created "portals." And when I happily used the apt metaphor of "Mondrianesque" to describe a set of five residential buildings proposed for Market Street in San Francisco, to be safe I ran the reference by a younger editor—who responded with a blank stare. Which is why the review compares the design approach to "random patterns in a cubist painting." Architectural criticism, like architecture itself, is an art of the possible. ●



It's true. Buildings do tell stories.

# Architecture and its Value Explained

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Jeffrey Stein, AIA

---

Architecture is a storytelling art. Architects have always imagined it is their work to explain a place and its people through form and material, light and shadow, and construction detail. It's true. Buildings do tell stories. Their stories can inspire both the people who use them daily and those who only view them from a distance, imparting a sense of understanding—respect, even—for where and who they are. When we experience real architecture this is what we experience.

But here amid the complex and opposing forces of the 21st century, the stories that buildings tell are not always readily apparent. To be fair, this is not just the fault of architects or Architecture. Most of us do not spend our days examining the façades of buildings or carefully exploring their interiors to try to understand what they are telling us. Instead, cocooned in cars, we cruise past buildings at speeds that at best only allow us to glimpse them. For much of our time outdoors our attention is on the landscape of the road, not on architecture. And indoors, well, we have all these computer screens vying for our attention, don't we?

And so we rely on critics to explain archi-



ecture, to put the stories of buildings into print and translate the language of architecture into English language. That's what I do. For the past three years, I have been an architecture critic in Boston, Massachusetts.

I write a column on architecture for *Banker and Tradesman*, a weekly newspaper in Boston. Begun in 1872 by the Warren family, who still own it, *Banker and Tradesman* is the real estate newspaper-of-record in Massachusetts. It is read by nearly 10,000 bankers, tradesmen (and -women), real estate brokers, mortgage lenders, contractors, developers, homebuyers, people who value architecture as a commodity but deserve to know more about its cultural and psychological value, too. The newspaper has cleverly titled my column "Design Matters". It not only describes what I write about, but it telegraphs the paper's editorial policy, as well: the editors believe design really *does* matter.

My road to writing about architecture began by becoming an architect. Plus, I teach architecture to undergraduates who plan to become architects themselves. My students are smart, creative, eager to ask not just "how to" but "what if." I'm not worried about them; they very likely will become fine architects. But one of architecture's stories is the relationship it describes. Architects are only half of that relationship. To make great architecture, architects need a constituency of great clients, developers, politicians, regular folks with vision who demand great architecture. Architecture needs people who know what they're experiencing and who want more of it, people who understand architecture's potential and demand it be fulfilled. The fact that such people seem somehow invisible in our culture does worry me.

A few years ago I let my colleagues know about my concern. "I want more people to understand more things about architecture," I said.

"You should write something," they said.

Next day, the telephone in my faculty office rang. The phone sits on a table awash in paper to the side of my desk. First ring. Papers to be graded, drawings to be checked, reports to be reported. The usual. The phone is under those papers. Second ring. I rush to find it and pick up the receiver before my voicemail will automatically answer. Third ring; I get it, a little breathless.

"Hello. It's Jeff Stein."

"Hello, Mr. Stein? I'm an editor of *Banker and Tradesman* in Boston." She gave her name. "As you may know, for several years we have had an architecture critic at our newspaper."

The editor named a well-known architecture writer, a respected author who had also been on the staff of a national architecture magazine in New York. I knew him and I liked his work. I had seen him on television discussing a book he had written.

"Our critic is leaving to go back to private practice and we must replace him right away. You come highly recommended." Now I'm really breathless.

"When should I start?"

Right away. Did I want to read his columns to see how he did it?

No, I did not.

Could I suggest a building to write about as a kind of test for the newspaper?

Yes, I could.

The next morning I was an architecture critic, writing about buildings and ideas for an audience who, I imagine, really need to read about architecture to understand the city where they live, the city they are making everyday.

My job now is to think about buildings one after another, to meet and interview architects to find out what they had in mind, to describe the extent to which they were able to realize that, and explain it to readers. All on deadline. And all in Boston, America's 4<sup>th</sup> fastest city, full of architects, institutions, high tech, high finance and higher education, and currently spending the last of \$15 billion of Federal Highway Funds (the "Big Dig") that have transformed the city's infrastructure and still trickle down to design projects of all kinds.



In my *Banker and Tradesman* column, I have discussed how architecture functions as a government-protected monopoly; what “Building Science”—the physics of how buildings work as systems—has to offer us; how transparency in the form of more and more glass is coming to Boston, and how this movement actually began there almost 100 years ago through the pioneering passive solar designs of Boston architect William Atkinson.


I have written about architects like Hans Hollein, whose design for an office building for Harvard University was stopped by local citizenry; Steven Holl, whose new college dormitory in Cambridge, Simmons Hall at MIT, is meant to be seen at speed; and, of course, I have included stories of Californian Frank Gehry, whose fabulous new Stata Center here is befuddling the masses and draining the budget coffers of its university client.

There is an element  
of mystery to architecture  
The mystery is not just  
in the architecture itself  
the mystery is why  
more of us aren't telling  
stories about it.

But even more important than the work of these name-brand architects who visit my city from time to time is the everyday work of architects who are my neighbors: a visitor's center in Concord; a series of new libraries in Boston; a courthouse in Lawrence, whose maple-paneled courtrooms, filled with sunlight, are like walking into a honey jar; Carol Johnson's landscape design for the Battle Road Trail across historic farmsteads and woodlots in Minute-man National Park near Lexington, a truly uncommon experience in a common landscape.

J.B. Jackson, the writer and landscape historian who divided much of his professional life between teaching stints at Berkeley and Harvard said this: “To interpret landscapes accurately, we must turn to the common places of ordinary people.” It's where we look for “Design Matters” around Boston and it's where we find that design matters, too. It is no small thing that telling the stories of these designs is encouraged outright by my editor at *Banker and Tradesman*, Terence Egan, and that he defends and promotes my work to all comers. Such storytelling resulted last year in “Design Matters” receiving an award from the New England Press Association in the “Serious Writing” category.

I wasn't expecting a forum like this, a situation that has me writing about architecture and design for newspaper readers in my own hometown. I think many more of these unexpected situations ought to erupt around the country. Architecture retains tremendous power and importance in our world. On average, Americans spend all but about an hour each day inside buildings. Whole forests are devoured to construct and maintain them. About half of all the fossil fuels we burn go to heat and cool and light them up. (The other half is spent transporting us between them.) And, of course, a building is the single most expensive thing most of us will ever purchase. The most expensive thing many of the companies we work for will ever purchase, too, both in terms of real dollars and in terms of the effect buildings have on the earth's biosphere. There is an element of mystery to architecture. The mystery is not just in the architecture itself; the mystery is why more of us aren't telling stories about it. ●



The Place of

Histories

The Place of Histories

the  
minimalist  
myth  
of  
twentieth  
century  
California

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Alan Hess

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architecture  
is  
running  
out  
of  
steam

The old gospel of St. Entenza and the Prophet Neutra was mostly a creation of magazines and historians, and it focused narrowly on the high art realm. It was always a highly selective interpretation of events. Now, after its long run, we need historians, curators, and critics to look freshly at the old images and fill in the large gaps. We need to rethink the definition of California design more broadly to include the innovative popular, commercial, and suburban architecture which has always been there, but was largely written out of the myth.

Only a new narrative—a fresh concept of what makes California a prolific generator of forms, types, and styles—will keep the state an inspiration for a new generation of architects.

Such an infusion of new ideas mined from history played a major role in the vitality of California design in the past. Good history books put lost ideas back into play—and reshape the landscape of California.

Today we would consider any California architectural history lacking Charles and Henry Greene's 1908 Gamble house to be seriously flawed. Yet for fifty years—half the century—the Gamble house and the Greene brothers were largely ignored.

It wasn't until the 1940s that historian Jean Murray Bangs noticed their work; she sought out the brothers in retirement (introducing them to her husband Harwell Hamilton Harris, who instantly responded to their work). It wasn't until 1964 that Randell Makinson's chapter on the brothers in *Five California Architects* firmly resurrected their reputation. Today, the Greene brothers are giants whose art helps to define the way we think of California design.



Jack Hillmer, *The Ludekins Residence* 1950

R. M. Schindler likewise was ignored in the latter years of his career and for a decade after his death in 1953. "The case of Schindler I do not profess to understand," muttered the eminent but perplexed architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock in 1940, thereby quelling most examination of Schindler's work for twenty-five years, until Esther McCoy brought her former employer to the attention of the world in *Five California Architects*. Today, Schindler is a Promethean figure, whose work has invigorated generations of architects.

Bernard Maybeck, Lloyd Wright, Albert Frey, John Lautner—this disturbing pattern of neglect and belated rediscovery has been too often repeated. Such lapses now seem inconceivable, but even Irving Gill had to wait until 2000 for a well-deserved monograph, Thomas S. Hines' *Irving Gill and the Architecture of Reform: a Study in Modernist Architectural Culture*.

This pattern raises two questions: what caused us to overlook such talented designers for so long? And who are we now neglecting?

We still do not have a complete or accurate view of California architects, trends, and buildings of the twentieth century. As the Greenes' and Schindler's rediscovered work broadened a narrow, doctrinaire concept of Modernism in the 1960s, California's yet-undiscovered treasures will broaden and strengthen our definition of California design.

We can start with the decades around 1900. Though there are histories of this seminal era (Richard Longstreth's *On the Edge of the World*, Robert Winter's *Toward a Simpler Way of Life*, biographies of Maybeck by Sally Woodbridge and Kenneth Cardwell, of Julia Morgan by Sara Boutelle) there have been no monographs on such major figures as Willis Polk or Ernest Coxhead. The tidal wave of Modernism swept them and their ideas away after 1930, but that over-reaction should now be corrected. Their fluid, culturally sensitive view of modern technology and life should be an important part of any California architect's image bank.

Polk and Coxhead's generation was followed by a string of intriguing, inventive, but long neglected residential and institutional architects who have also been unjustly marginalized in the history texts. Their exploration of historical continuities, regional characteristics, or alternative modernism is today refreshing: Maynard Lyndon, Gardner Dailey, Ernest Kump, Clarence Tantau, Gordon Kaufmann, Robert Stanton, Edward Fickett, William Cody, and Jack Hillmer are only a few. Once we know more about these designers, our picture of the twentieth century will be rendered more complex, more varied, more colorful; diversity has always been a strength of California culture.

Equally significant (but even more difficult to grapple with) is the architecture of Imperial California: the post-World War II era when the state boomed, suburbs bloomed, and cultural centers and corporate headquarters blossomed alongside great shopping malls and housing tracts—often designed by the same architects. The major architects of that era—Welton Becket Associates, Pereira and Luckman, John Carl Warnecke, A.C. Martin, Victor Gruen Associates, and Edward Durell Stone (not a Californian, but a frequent contributor)—still sit uncomfortably on the margins of inquiry and discussion, cast out because of their sometimes bombastic, unrepentant Modernism and occasional lapses into gargantuan scale and corporativism. But their best work defined a state of profound innovation, energy, charisma, and influence. With self assurance, they addressed the critical issues of enormous scale, public space in a consumer society, and mass aesthetics that still confront us. Imperial California's civic leaders rarely went out of state when selecting architects for major commissions.

The design of suburbia was a key contribution of this era, from shopping centers and ranch house tracts to roadside coffee shops and freeways. Suburbia was a radical urban concept rooted in progressive ideas of the early twentieth century, yet we know little of the architects who shaped it in practice. California's inventive, artful, influential commercial culture was represented in the work of architects like Stiles O. Clements (prolific architect of elegant and innovative early shopping centers), Wayne McAllister (master architect of the Streamline drive-in and originator of the Las Vegas hotel), Armet and Davis (premier architects of the Googie coffee shop), Palmer and Krisel (who built thousands more modern tract homes than Joe Eichler), S. Charles Lee (architect of spectacular movie theaters), and John Hench (Walt Disney's right-hand man designing Disneyland)—and these are only a few. These talented architects designed modern buildings superbly in tune with the spirit of their times, culture, and technology; their work largely shaped the California suburban metropolis as it is still experienced by millions. And they are mostly absent from the history books.

What causes someone to notice buildings hidden in plain view? Why did Jean Murray Bangs suddenly notice the Gamble house after driving the same streets of Pasadena for years? How does someone disperse the fog of fashion to see things clearly? How does one develop the fortitude to look at the awkward, inexplicable, or unfashionable?

Whatever it is, it's a talent that a sophisticated, mature culture must cultivate at least as assiduously as it does its *avant garde*. We owe a debt to those writers who began to uncover some of these neglected riches; besides Bangs and McCoy, historian David Gebhard helped to re-establish Schindler in his essential 1971 book. He also explored the fairy tale homes of Walter Raymond Yelland and Hugh Comstock, the Moderne of Kem Weber, and the organic architecture of Lloyd Wright—subjects that would have been lost without his attention. Reyner Banham looked at the entire city of Los Angeles and discovered patterns and purposes few others suspected in the humdrum sprawl. John Beach had a universalist taste that allowed him to detect brilliance in the most unlikely corners of vernacular and high art design; he helped to relaunch the Art Moderne, unearthed lost Schindler houses, decoded Ernest Coxhead, and inspired

California's innovative preservation community.

So, fragments of the new picture are out there; the problem is that large gaps remain. Sally Woodbridge's *Bay Area Houses* remains an excellent source, as does *An Everyday Modernism: the Houses of William Wurster*, edited by Marc Treib. Richard Longstreth's illuminating histories, *City Center to Miracle Mile* and *The Drive-in, the Supermarket and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*, bring out the urban history of the car metropolis and the contribution of architects like Morgan Walls and Clements. Greg Hise's *Magnetic Los Angeles* does the same for housing developers such as Fritz Burns who helped shape the metropolis. Julius Shulman and Pierluigi Serraino's *Modernism Rediscovered* only begins to scratch the surface of the richness of architectural design in the mid-century. The Los Angeles Conservancy has sponsored exhibits, tours, and talks to spread awareness to the general public. The San Jose Preservation Action Council has taken up the cause of early Silicon Valley campus architecture—a cornerstone of suburban planning.

Yet the picture is far from complete. We can no longer afford to leave this process of rediscovery to chance. We need a new narrative about a magnificently diverse culture generating innovative and varied design across society's spectrum, from the high art *avant garde* to the thriving mass market—a culture which, in fact, often dissolves the artificial walls between the two. The golden California economy and culture of the 1950s that produced the wealthy and progressive clients who hired Koenig, Ellwood, Killingsworth, and Hensman also produced the mass market that encouraged the ground-breaking, entrepreneurial, and popular carwashes, tracts, and drive-in restaurants and movies of suburbia. They are all part of the same fabric. Twentieth century California will ultimately reveal a greater landscape, beyond the Gregory Ain tracts of Mar Vista and the Joe Eichler tracts of Palo Alto, past the stylish canyon enclaves of Santa Monica, the arroyos of Pasadena, and the hills of Berkeley. Lautner, McAllister, Lyndon, Clements, Hench, Becket—place their considerable work in the picture alongside the Case Study architects and Frank Gehry and you have a very different—and more accurate—view of California architecture. ●

Like outdoor  
still-lives,  
magazine photographs  
lavish attention  
on a building's  
palpable qualities,  
fussed  
and fixed by light.



Architectural Magazines

# in California

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Mitchell Schwarzer

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In fast-forward California, one of the best places to view older architecture is on the pages of an older magazine. Not only do we see myriad buildings lost to the wrecking ball, but we see them and the survivors in the context of cityscapes frozen in time and flavored by period streetlamps, automobiles, and signage. Featured buildings look voluptuous in their coiffed, tranquil newness. Rarely do the images convey the clamor of construction, the noise of transport, or the distraction of people. Like outdoor still-lives, magazine photographs lavish attention on a building's palpable qualities, fussed and fixed by light. These views also confront us with the transience of architectural ideas and urban neighborhoods. A stretch of downtown Fresno, captured in the 1920s, expresses the economic ripples of that decade, as several recently-completed office buildings sparkle with (what would be a short-lived) promise. An advertisement for a San Diego school in the 1950s similarly registers the brief reign of crisp, white modernism.

California's architectural magazines unfold an exhaustive record of California's architectural attitudes, both in pragmatic building and slightly-less pragmatic lifestyle creation. No single magazine has covered the era from the late nineteenth century, when publishing began, to the present. Indeed, the different magazines (and their constantly changing formats and names) confirm the state's volatile design cli-

mate Some magazines promote particular movements while others strive for breadth. Some magazines cater mainly to architects while others appeal to clients (and especially homeowners), and still others extend their reach to academia. In most cases, magazines deal with California. But many disseminate out-of-state developments, and at least one tries to impart cosmopolitan sophistication to the Golden State.

Among the first architectural magazines was *The California Architect and Building News*, launched in 1880 (as successor to *Quarterly Architectural Review*) and continued after 1900 as *Industrial News*. Organ of the San Francisco AIA, the newsprint monthly catered to architects, businessmen in the building trades, and government regulators. The buildings discussed are public edifices in the Beaux-Arts style or prominent houses in a wider palette; they are illustrated on full pages in either watercolor or pen and ink. Generally, the illustrations stand for the buildings, and the short articles engage a spectrum of matter-of-fact issues, such as "The Disposal of Dust" or "The Murderous Sewers." Often the articles get juicier, as in "Electrolysis in the Streets," in which the author raises understandable concern for the deadly current leaking from street railways. Or take the churlish piece, "Do the Chinese Invent?" In the 1880s, the anonymous author argues that the answer is "no," even when taking paper and gunpowder into consideration.

The most important professionally-oriented magazine in the state's history was the *Architect and Engineer*, which began publishing as *Architect and Engineer of California* in 1905 and ended as *Western Architect and Engineer* in 1962. Edited in San Francisco, the *Architect and Engineer* was a professional's magazine, comprehensively reporting on the buildings and building issues of the day. Early on, a visionary tone was set by the architect B.J.S. Cahill—editor of the short-lived *American Builder's Review* (1905 to 1907)—who wrote several lengthy articles that passionately argued for developing grand axes of monuments and parks in San Francisco.

But most topic headings were down to earth, literally: concrete and cement; terra cotta and brick; heating, lighting, and electrical systems; seismic issues; new materials like plywood; new lighting systems like fluorescent tubes. A typical article title was "Advantages of Using Damp-Proof Compound," intended for those not wanting to be left out in the wet. By the twenties, the *Architect and Engineer* also offered headlines like "Revival of Colonial Architecture" and began to merge its practical interests with lofty aesthetics. We start to see titles like "Paint, Architecturally Considered" or "Building Beauty into Highway Drainage Systems." Although, to present-day ears, the titles can sound preposterous, the magazine embodied a signal aspect of visual culture decades before visual cul-

ture became a commonplace term: leave no aspect of the physical environment un-designed and hence impractical or ugly.

Over time, the *Architect and Engineer* improved its depth of reporting and graphic appeal. Large numbers of individual building reviews were published, each including a lengthy written description and evaluation, and all featuring copious imagery. Articles include a plan, a photo of the whole completed structure, and a notable detail. Like most of the writing, the photography is comprehensive, not challenging; shots are taken from either a frontal stance or predictably picturesque angle. By the forties, the magazine began to inch toward modernism, featuring many titles that begin with "Trends in Present Day...." Never mistaken for high literary ambitions, in its final years—as *Western Architect and Engineer*—the magazine occasionally broke out into profound writing and imagery. In September 1961 the architectural historian Esther McCoy wrote a beautiful article on Wilshire Boulevard (accompanied by photos by Marvin Read), that starts out: "Wilshire Boulevard begins in chaos and ends in jeopardy." Not since Willis Polk's turn-of-the-century essays on architecture for the San Francisco literary journal *The Wave* had architectural periodical writing veered so far into poetry.

Years earlier, though, another magazine made poetry out of design, instigating the importation of architectural modernism into the state and crafting its contours to the California landscape and lifestyle. That magazine was *Arts and Architecture*, and McCoy was a frequent contributor. Its editor was John Entenza, an architectural autodidact out of Los Angeles. Here, too, the journal began under another name, *Pacific Coast Architect*, and with a less than messianic mission. *Pacific Coast Architect* was founded in 1911 and originally edited out of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Compared to the *Architect and Engineer*, *Pacific Coast Architect*, which merged in 1929 with *California Southland* to form *California Arts and Architecture*, was consumer-oriented. Articles carpeted home decorating challenges for "ladies," with titles like "The Philosophy of the Fireplace," "Why Little Lamps?" or "Wood Paneled Walls Never Lose their Charm." Certain old habits were so important in the post-Prohibition thirties that design could fall out altogether in such literary benders as "In Defense of Drinking."

*Arts and Architecture* was heir to a long tradition of writing on the particular virtues (and occasional vices) of California, including the *Pacific Rural Press*, which began in 1870, and the granddaddy of California lifestyle consultants, *Sunset Magazine*. Founded by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1898 and published to this day, *Sunset* has unabashedly promoted western living through the western house and the western landscape. Its advocacy for Cliff May's ranch house



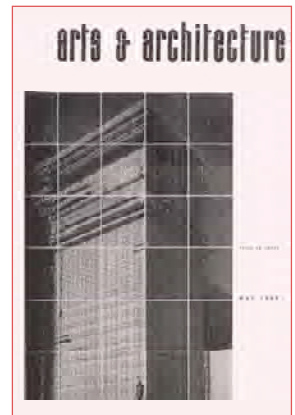
type helped standardize that design after the Second World War. According to architectural historian Robert Gonzalez, writing in *Architecture California* (Summer 1987), *Sunset's* "editorials, articles, and standard features also reveal that the West was consistently presented as a *tabula rasa* that could be reshaped to fit the cultural and physical needs of an emerging class of land-owning suburbanites." Likewise, *Arts and Architecture* pressed its readers to compose a fresh, modern lifestyle through the purchase and decoration of small houses, their interiors, and their gardens.

These tendencies catapulted forward after 1938 when Entenza took over the editorship; he would be at the magazine's helm until 1962. For the first time, California had an architectural magazine that promoted western living through radical design, attuned to European architectural theories, industrial methods and materials, and a perceptual appeal to the unique landscapes of the state. Instead of situating historicist houses within tended gardens that tended to look back to England or New England, Entenza presented modern houses jutting out from desert gullies or coastal canyons, with floor to ceiling glass walls revealing palm trees and mountains. The precipitously revamped monthly extended its range to other building types and began to feature developments outside California and outside architecture—within, for example, music or painting. The number and placement of illustrations accorded with the flair of modernism. In 1949, a spread on Welton Becket's Prudential Building in Los Angeles included fourteen photos. One night shot captures the entire building lit up against the dark city, a beacon of the future rising from the slumber of the past. Two other street views at night showcase the striped blaze of lit windows. Finally, the abnormalities of the asymmetrical building emerge in detailed shots, taken from acute angles and arranged on the pages of the journal like blotches of color in a Kandinsky painting.

Each issue featured new architectural works, mostly houses, but also schools, factories, or office buildings. Houses are illustrated on two or three pages, with abundant photographs surrounding a pithy text. Descriptions follow modernist logic: first, a statement of the program; second, an accounting of the dimensions of the problem; and third, the means by which they were solved via constructional methods, materials, and composition. The pages of the magazine were also graced with articles highlighting George Nelson's furniture designs, Konrad Wachsmann's constructional innovations, Garrett Eckbo's gardens, or Ad Reinhardt's paintings. Theoretical pieces, like Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's "Idea and Pure Form" round out the magazine's coverage. Such think pieces ran infrequently, but from time to time an entire issue was devoted

to a special topic, like Mies van der Rohe or contemporary Mexican architecture.

*Arts and Architecture* is best known for the most important publishing event in California architectural history: The Case Study House Program. It was announced in a 1945 editorial, when eight architects were chosen to design eight houses that would respond to the special situation of Southern California, as well as the shape and form of post-war living.



*Arts & Architecture*, May 1949

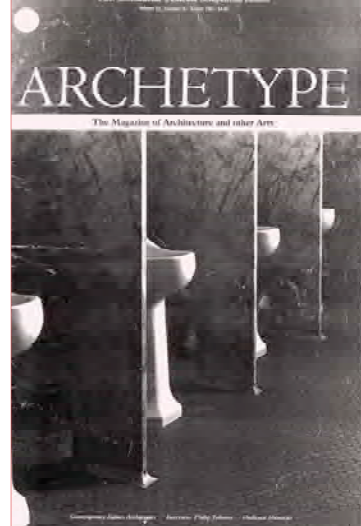
One night shot captures the entire building lit up against the dark city, a beacon of the future rising from the slumber of the past. Two other street views at night showcase the striped blaze of lit windows. Finally, the abnormalities of the asymmetrical building emerge in detailed shots, taken from acute angles and arranged on the pages of the journal like blotches of color in a Kandinsky painting.

Over the years, the list grew to include Richard Neutra, William Wurster, Raphael Soriano, Pierre Koenig, and Charles Eames. Like the gleaming, pearly, modernist structures then rising throughout the state, the Case Study houses stood out from everything else discussed in the magazine. Within a given year, a Case Study house could be promoted by up to six articles. First there would be the announcement of the new numbered house, its site, and its architect. Next, a short piece presented initial architectural drawings and design concepts. Then, one or two articles showed construction progress. Finally, the finished house was exhibited in a satiny spread, six to twelve pages, with detailed descriptions and up to thirty images. The Case Study Program turned houses into monuments. Because of *Arts and Architecture's* international distribution, California architecture made the world scene.

In 1981, after mid-century modernism had faded into history, the magazine was "revived" by Barbara Goldstein as *Arts + Architecture*. Still based in Los Angeles, it had a more diffuse focus, redolent of postmodern times. Lasting only until 1985, the color glossy ran frequent special issues: in 1984, "The Postwar House" covered Eichler Homes, Stucco Boxes, and Artist's Co-ops, as well as city houses for small lots in San Francisco; in 1985, "Postmodernism" mixed up new approaches to painting, classicism, landscape, and architecture. *Arts + Architecture* was part of a drift toward a more critical architectural journalism. In an age lacking firm belief in a unified architectural order, it became easier to criticize buildings, development, and the profession. Glorification gave way to skepticism.

Around the same time, in San Francisco, another periodical of this sort was launched by an editorial team that included Andrew Batey, Kurt Forster, Diane Ghirardo, and Mark Mack. *Archetype*, lasting also a brief four years between 1979 and 1983, was a West Coast combination of post-hippie rag and *Oppositions*, the avant-garde New York architectural magazine. *Archetype* avowed cross-fertilization of media (from photography to art to industrial design), the inclusion of history and theory, and a roving cosmopolitan beat. The opening editorial stated: "One of the objectives for a voice from the west should be to eradicate the fear of communication with the architectural community on the East Coast and in Europe."

The pages of *Archetype* are suffused with the verdant forms and mutating ideas that animate the built environment. Alongside descriptive articles on California houses by Morphosis or Robert Mangurian are longer think pieces on Palladian villas, Albert Speer's Master Plan for Berlin, or Colin Rowe's urban design studio at Cornell University. Vernacular topics range from the new "Wind Tunnel" at the Ames Research Center in Mountain View, to the commercial build-



*Archetype*, Volume III, Number II, Winter 1983

The pages of *Archetype*

a resuffused with the verdant forms

and mutating ideas that

animate the built environment.

ings of late nineteenth century Montreal, to walls. Translations were provided of theoretical writings, and interviews queried architects like Luis Barragan or historians like Alberto Sartoris. Fantasy found favor; a long visual essay in the first year featured drawings by Craig Hodgetts for Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. *Archetype's* imagery could be hit or midding. 1981's special issue on photography contains some splendid shots. And in 1979, Tim Street-Porter contributed a series of photographic ironies of Southern California, including one of an Airstream trailer peeking up behind a concrete-block wall and salaciously shaded by cypress trees and steel piping.

The quarterly magazine's eclecticism is epitomized by the "Building of the Quarter" section, which ran in each issue. Older and easily recognizable Californian landmarks—the Rincon Annex Post Office in San Francisco and the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles—launch the building parade. But, lest we think this exercise would hold to the tried and true, the editors' sights soon passed to the unnoticed or little noticed: the new Palazzo Gagosian, continuing Venice, California's, mannerist romance with Venice, Italy; a San Francisco Victorian dressed by David Ireland in industrial shimmers and seams. One "Building of the Quarter" featured a medley of outhouses, each lurking muskily despite their two-dimensionality.

The brief runs of *Arts + Architecture* and *Archetype* might be explained by their intentional yet invidious lack of focus. But, more to the point, by the 1970s, the great age of

magazine publishing had come to an end. From the 1920s to the 1960s, architectural magazines, both nationally and in California, fit well with American society's conformist consumerism. After the tumultuous 1960s, however, the individualization of taste rapidly accelerated. General-interest magazines—like *Life* or *Look*—gave way to specialty publications—like *Car and Driver* or *GO*—that stressed personal interests. Shelter magazines, such as *Architectural Digest* out of Los Angeles or the newer *Dwell* from San Francisco, did well by carving identifiable consumer niches. But architectural magazines beholden to a wide and inclusive definition of architecture have not prospered. On the national scene, *The Architectural Forum* and *Progressive Architecture* bit the dust. Nowadays, *Architectural Record* owes its survival to its sponsorship by the AIA. No differently, over the past twenty years, the only substantial magazines of architecture in the state have been published by the AIA California Council, out of Sacramento—no longer in the cultural cauldrons of the state, but rather in the political capital.

The first of these periodicals, *Architecture California*, ran for two decades ending in 1999. Over those years, it experimented with many earlier formulas of periodical publishing. Initially, the magazine's priority was to cover new buildings in the state. But restorations and urban design proposals received almost equal attention. A typical article that engaged the spirit of the times was Dan Solomon's 1982 piece, "San Francisco: the Continuity of Urban Life," which contrasted building typologies that were traditional (and favored) with those that were disruptive (and usually modernist). Solomon's bumptious neo-traditionalism was diluted, though, by the magazine's clutter of diverse theories. Architectural journalism had begun to resemble everyday journalism, as covers announced the latest trend or discovery, each and every issue. Starting in 1990, for financial reasons, *Architecture California* reinvented itself, dropping advertising, chapter news, color imagery, and trend-spotting. The now-smallish magazine bulked up, however, in historical and theoretical articles. A host of topical issues from mobile homes to sustainability to regionalism replaced most building reviews and lent *Architecture California* an academic demeanor.

In 2001, *arcCA*—successor to *Architecture California*—became the state's latest architectural magazine. Once again, the format and content were reinvented. Today, *arcCA* is heir to the varied magazine ventures of the past. Given the importance of an architectural magazine, the slim quarterly faces momentous challenges. Despite the growing influence of the internet and the large market of book publishing, magazines are still one of the chief places that buildings get

noticed and remembered. On a monthly, quarterly, or less frequent basis, magazines are the surest testimony to the changing relationship between architecture and culture over time.

For historians, magazines unfold forgotten attitudes on building, a stream of surprising enthusiasms, transient preoccupations, and sometimes shameful prejudices. For architectural historians, they are invaluable documents on the state's architectural legacy, providing factual information about a building or urban setting that would be otherwise hard to find. For architects and students, they are sites of learning and stimulus to inspiration, a travel guide to what's new and innovative. For Californians, they are testimonies to the step-by-step creation of the state's urbanized landscape. For those out-of-state, they are proof of California's architectural contributions as well as follies. And for all of us, magazines critically connect California's squalling built environment with its equally tempestuous arena of ideas. How critically and how extensively California's architecture is connected to ideas depends on the quality and quantity of magazine coverage. In order to make the most of building, there can hardly be enough reflection. ●



*Architecture California*, Volume 19, Number 1, Summer 1997

*Architecture California* reinvented itself, dropping advertising, chapter news, color imagery, and trend-spotting. The now-smallish magazine bulked up, however, in historical and theoretical articles. A host of topical issues from mobile homes to sustainability to regionalism replaced most building reviews and lent *Architecture California* an academic demeanor.



# The Architecture Critic:

# a survey

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András Szántó, Eric Fredericksen, and  
Ray Rinaldi

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*Reprinted with permission from "The Architecture Critic: a Survey of Newspaper Architecture Critics in America," András Szántó et al., eds. (New York: National Arts Journalism Program, Columbia University, 2001). For the full text of the report visit [www.najp.org/publications/research/architecture/index.htm](http://www.najp.org/publications/research/architecture/index.htm)*

ARCHITECTURE IS THE least thoroughly covered arts beat at most American newspapers. Among the approximately 140 dailies with a circulation above 75,000, fewer than 45 have an architecture critic, and only a third of those journalists pursue architecture criticism full-time.

The field has undeniably come a long way since Ada Louise Huxtable became a pioneer of modern architecture journalism in *The New York Times*, almost thirty years ago. But several of the nation's largest cities lack full-time architecture critics. Houston, the nation's fourth-largest metropolitan area, lacks one. So do Detroit, Sacramento and Kansas City. Three of the New York City metropolitan area's four daily newspapers have no regularly publishing architecture critic. Neither does the nation's second-largest newspaper, *USA Today*.

Forty writers identified by themselves or their editors as architecture critics (representing 37 newspapers with a combined daily circulation of 12,040,253 and Sunday circulation of 17,226,467) qualified for and completed our survey—the first ever in-depth investigation of the handful of men and women who shape the newspaper-reading public's view of architecture. These critics represent newspapers ranging in size from the *Los Angeles Times* (circulation 1,071,296) to the *Newport News Daily Press* (92,546). Together, they comprise the overwhelming majority of architecture critics currently active in the nation's newsrooms.

Prior studies by the National Arts Journalism Program (NAJP) have already shed light on weaknesses in arts coverage in the news. The situation of architecture criticism is a cause for particular concern. In *Reporting the Arts: News Coverage of Arts and Culture in America* (1999), the NAJP analyzed a national sampling of papers and found that arts and culture stories tended to receive less editorial space than business or sports stories, not to mention hard news. The most scarcely covered arts discipline was visual arts, and architecture ranked last among the visual-arts subdisciplines. While the figures vary from paper to paper, architecture vies with dance for the distinction of being the smallest niche of the smallest beat of the smallest department in most newspapers.

The low commitment to staffing and editorial space for architecture criticism is alarming in view of the building boom that cities around the nation have experienced in recent years. Prosperity has stimulated investment in private and public architecture. Institutions and municipalities are hiring brand-name designers for new projects. Corporations are building trophy headquarters and retail environments. Architecture has become a linchpin of wide-spread and often arts-based urban revitalization. Scores of new museums, libraries, performing arts centers, beautified ports, and downtowns herald the dynamism of recent years. In the midst of this efflorescence, however, a majority of newspaper readers lack the benefit of hearing regularly from an authoritative local architecture critic.

Architecture is the most public art form and, curiously, the least subject to public debate. In the absence of public discourse over architecture, control of new construction inevitably falls into the

hands of bureaucrats and developers. The stakes, therefore, are higher than the count of column inches and newsroom staff suggest. While high-profile architecture is thriving in the United States, as our survey findings attest, the sprawl of generic construction that is engulfing most communities nationwide underscores the news media's responsibility to nurture a thorough critique of the built environment.

In the spring of 2001, we asked architecture critics to complete an on-line questionnaire about their positions at their newspapers, their roles within the community, their relationships with the profession of architects and builders, and their theoretical influences and aesthetic preferences. The key findings, while presenting a mixed picture, allow for a more fine-grained understanding of the activities and challenges of architecture critics working at newspapers:

**MORE THAN HALF** of all architecture critics write about the topic part time. Part-time critics write far fewer stories than their full-time counterparts.

**ARCHITECTURE STORIES ARE** rarely featured on the front page. One-fourth of the newspapers involved in this report ran no architecture stories on page A-1 for the six months prior to the survey. Another one-fourth published only one.

**MORE THAN THREE-FOURTHS** of critics feel their writing had an impact on architecture in their region, but more than half say architects and developers do not consider their opinions when designing new projects.

**WHILE MOST CRITICS** feel positively about the current state of architecture as an art form, they are deeply concerned about the overall development of the built environment.

**MANY ARCHITECTURE CRITICS** go beyond opinion about the aesthetics of individual buildings, including reporting on sprawl and urban development. At the same time, they express regret that the field pays too much attention to the work of popular architects.

**MANY ARCHITECTURE CRITICS** have conservative tastes, rating early-20th-century buildings, particularly those of Frank Lloyd Wright, well ahead of more recent ones.

**MANY CRITICS** rate postmodern architects poorly, but agree that postmodernism was a good influence on late-20th-century architecture.

**DESPITE THEIR SMALL** numbers and low exposure, architecture critics feel their work is respected within their newspapers and by their readers, though more than half believe their newspapers would not make it a priority to replace them if they left their jobs.

**CRITICS HAVE SIGNIFICANT** experience. Four out of five respondents have written about architecture for more than five years, and two-thirds for more than ten years.

**NEARLY ALL CRITICS** believe their readers care about the built environment, and most feel those readers have a basic understanding of architecture. Three-fourths of critics see themselves as educators.

As mentioned, we drew our critics from the roughly 140 newspapers whose daily ABC circulation exceeded 75,000 as of June 30, 1999. Our defining criterion was that a critic must have written six or more evaluative pieces about architecture within the 12-month period preceding the survey. We did not include home design, real estate, or urban design writers, nor did we include journalists whose architecture writing focused exclusively on news, features, and profiles.

We distributed our survey on-line to 47 critics, a few of whom, we discovered, did not qualify, and a few of whom—including critics from *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*—did not complete the questionnaire.

The average daily circulation of newspapers in our study was 301,006. The likelihood of a newspaper having an architecture critic drops off sharply between 200,000 and 250,000 circulation. Half of newspapers with a circulation figure between 220,000 and 240,000 have a critic; only 20 percent of papers between 185,000 and 200,000 have one. Of the approximately 40 newspapers between 75,000 and 100,000 circulation, only the *Newport News Daily Press* reported having an architecture critic.

Three newspapers had two qualifying critics, and, to our surprise, all three—the *Toledo Blade*, the *Providence Journal*, and *The Austin American-*

*Statesman*—were among the smaller newspapers in our survey. This can be explained in part by the fact that architecture criticism is not a full-time beat at these newspapers.

The field of architectural criticism, although small, is perpetually evolving. Today, as an ever-wider segment of the newspaper reading public takes an active interest in architecture and urban design, the need for informed comment on the built environment has never been greater. Home sales are at record highs, prompting interest in the shape of buildings, neighborhoods, and cities. The nation is experiencing a major phase of migration, economic expansion, and urban renewal, coupled with fascinating new phenomena like the "urbanizing suburb" and the proliferation of theme architecture. Such changes confront architecture critics with new challenges and newspapers with new opportunities. The findings of this report draw attention to the importance of further investment into architecture criticism, especially in medium-size newspapers and in smaller communities, where some of the most dramatic changes in the built environment are currently taking shape.

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### **Who the Critics Are**

**DEMOGRAPHICALLY SPEAKING, ARCHITECTURE** critics lack diversity, potentially influencing the way they, as a group, view the built environment. Male architecture critics outnumber their female peers almost three to one. Additionally, the critics are nearly all white. More than three-fourths live in an urban setting.

If we were to consider these critics as a political bloc, they would be far to the left. Three-fourths designated themselves as either liberal or progressive. They apparently followed through on those convictions in the last election: Thirty-one voted for Democrat Al Gore and five voted for Republican George W. Bush. Four respondents chose not to reveal how they voted.

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### **Critical Attitudes**

**IN ATTEMPTING TO** capture the critics' aesthetic leanings, we avoided using broad terms to characterize various styles or movements, asking instead for the critics' opinions of specific buildings, writers and

architects. Critics were asked to rate items in lists in those three categories, allowing us to numerically rank each item within each of the three lists. We intended our lists of names to represent not just the individual buildings, architects, or writers, but also to broadly suggest various approaches to architecture. If every writer chose Jane Jacobs as the most influential writer on architecture, that would have certain implications about their aesthetic as a group; if everybody chose Rem Koolhaas, something very different would be suggested.

## BUILDINGS

Critics were asked to rate 29 individual buildings (on a list concentrating mostly on the last 150 years and comprised of generally well-known works) on a four-point scale: “like a great deal,” “like somewhat,” “dislike somewhat,” and “dislike a great deal.” (“No opinion” was also an option.)

Responses suggested a strong correlation between public popularity and critical recognition. The three highest-rated works of architecture were the Brooklyn Bridge, Grand Central Station, and the Chrysler Building. The building ratings ranged from just shy of 2.0 (representing “like a great deal”) to just above -1.0 (“dislike somewhat”), though only the World Trade Center, among the 29 buildings, ranked that low.

A separate, open-ended question asked respondents to write in their three favorite *recent* buildings. Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao, Richard Meier’s Getty Center, and James Stewart Polshek’s Rose Center for Earth and Space headed that list, receiving many more mentions than other buildings.

## ARCHITECTS

There was little correlation between popular architects and architects who are critically acclaimed. The range of ratings that critics gave to practicing architects was narrower than the range given to buildings. Respondents rated individual architects on the same four-point scale. None of the architects received a plurality of unfavorable ratings; on a scale between +2 (like a great deal) and -2 (dislike a great deal) no architect listed on the questionnaire was rated below zero.

Frank Gehry topped the list of practicing architects, but Getty Center architect Richard Meier received only a middle-of-the-pack rating, despite the many citations of the Getty as being among the best

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three recent buildings. And Gehry’s work is not held in unequivocally high esteem. The high ratings for Gehry as an architect and for his Guggenheim Bilbao didn’t carry over to his recently completed Experience Music Project in Seattle, which received lower ratings from most critics.

Renzo Piano rated a close second to Gehry—though his most famous work, the Centre Pompidou, designed in collaboration with Richard Rogers, was not highly ranked by the critics. These two well-known architects were followed by a professionally admired architect with a lower public profile, Santiago Calatrava. The next on the list was Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, who has only a few architectural credits, albeit impressive ones.

The critics delivered generally low ratings for architects associated with late-20th-century post-modernism. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Michael Graves, Robert A.M. Stern, and Philip Johnson all ranked in the bottom half of the ratings spectrum. Indeed, Johnson, one of the few household-name architects in the nation, received the lowest rating from the critics from the list of designers in





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the survey. His oeuvre was singled out by one critic for a tally of “any buildings you dislike a great deal.” Another critic’s entry for that category: “any remnants of 80s pomo stuff wearing fancy hats.”

This antipathy toward postmodernism might not come as a surprise, as this strain of architecture belongs to the always-unfashionable recent past. Moreover, it is tempered by the fact that a clear majority of the respondents agreed with the statement, “The postmodern movement was, on the whole, a positive influence on architecture.”

While critics signal ambiguity on postmodernism, they do not subscribe to the latest fashions in architecture. Architects who are known to rely heavily on critical theory and deconstruction were clustered near the bottom of the list. Among the five least favorably rated architects is a group of theory-oriented deconstructionists: Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi, Greg Lynn, and Peter Eisenman.

#### WRITERS AND THEORISTS

Critics’ ratings of architecture writers and theorists indicate a similar categorical disfavor of critical theory. Peter Eisenman, Michel Foucault, and Bernard Tschumi, all favorites of the current theory-based architectural crowd, were rated just above the bottom of the list, whereas the highest ratings were generally given to urbanist and new-urbanist writers.

Jane Jacobs was ranked as the most influential writer on architecture, approached only by Ada Louise Huxtable. Jacobs’ writing celebrates vernacular architecture and is more concerned with the healthy workings of dense urban environments than in discussing individual works of architecture. But not far below Jacobs in the rankings, coming in fourth, was her frequent target, Lewis Mumford, who advocated the kind of spread out, garden-city, towers-in-a-park urbanism that Jacobs despised.

Vincent Scully was just ahead of Mumford, while the writings of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, best known for *Learning from Las Vegas* (and proponents, though in a much different way than Jacobs, of a vernacular approach to urban design) came just behind him. Taken together, these findings suggest a focus on urbanism as strong or stronger than the focus on individual buildings. Jacobs, Mumford, and Venturi and Scott Brown are all urbanistic thinkers, though the group’s aesthetic and design sensibilities are quite different. This find-

ing suggests architecture critics' deep concern for larger urban design issues.

Critics were invited to write in the names of other architecture writers and thinkers whose work influenced them. While this produced a grab bag of answers, particularly noticeable were the names of three critics who write for general audiences: Paul Goldberger of *The New Yorker*, Herbert Muschamp of *The New York Times*, and Blair Kamin of the *Chicago Tribune*. (The *Tribune* and *Times* were also widely cited in response to a fill-in-the-blank question asking critics' opinions of the best newspaper for architecture criticism.) These names are unsurprising—Goldberger and Kamin are Pulitzer Prize winners, and Muschamp is probably the most widely read architecture critic in the main-stream press. But the frequent mention of Kamin, whose prize came as a result of his coverage of Chicago lakefront parks development, fits with the general theme of critics' placing a high value on engaging larger urban issues in architecture writing.

#### AN URBANIST AESTHETIC?

The survey did not turn up unambiguous evidence of a general critical aesthetic, but certain results were suggestive. Though critics may be happy with developments in architecture over the past 25 years or so (the rough extent of what's considered the postmodern era in architecture), four-fifths of those surveyed disagreed with the statement, "We can be proud of the new built environment we have developed over the past 25 years." This seeming contradiction likely points to the difference between "architecture" and "built environment."

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Issues of sprawl and suburban development rated highly among our surveyed critics. More than nine out of ten critics believe government should make “sprawl” a policy priority. They don’t see themselves as writing only about the products of high-end architecture, and most cover issues like “downtown redevelopment” and “issues of urban sprawl and the environment” (almost all said they regularly or occasionally cover those two topics).

In light of those concerns, the high popularity of writers who go beyond individual buildings to write about the city as an environment or organism is understandable. Though they may not have much in common ideologically, well-rated writers Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, Venturi and Scott Brown, Duany and Plater-Zyberk, and Le Corbusier all share a concern with the city.

An urbanist orientation is the most general thread running through the answers, possibly shedding light on the low ratings of architects who focus on the building as theoretical problem or art object, in contrast to architects who focus on the urban fabric. The urbanist orientation of the critics is supported by several responses to the open-ended question, “What do you think a piece of architectural criticism should accomplish?” The phrases “larger context” and “built environment” appeared in several critics’ responses to the question, suggesting an engagement with more than just individual buildings seen in isolation.

One response that could stand for many others stated that criticism should serve a didactic role: it “should teach readers how to think critically about their homes, buildings, communities, and the built environment in general.”

Several responses drew out political concerns. “Criticism should push especially hard for quality public spaces, because those are the only spaces the poor have. The rich can cloister themselves in private resorts or gated enclaves, but the sidewalks, parks, and streetscapes of our cities belong to everyone,” one critic wrote, speaking for others among the vast majority of critics who claimed liberal political beliefs. Another critic confessed, “I think excessive growth and development is the major problem facing society today. We should be figuring out ways not to build, not acting as if the aesthetics of what does get built is the important issue.” ●

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## VOICE FROM THE FIELD

JON JERDE, FAIA, THE JERDE PARTNERSHIP

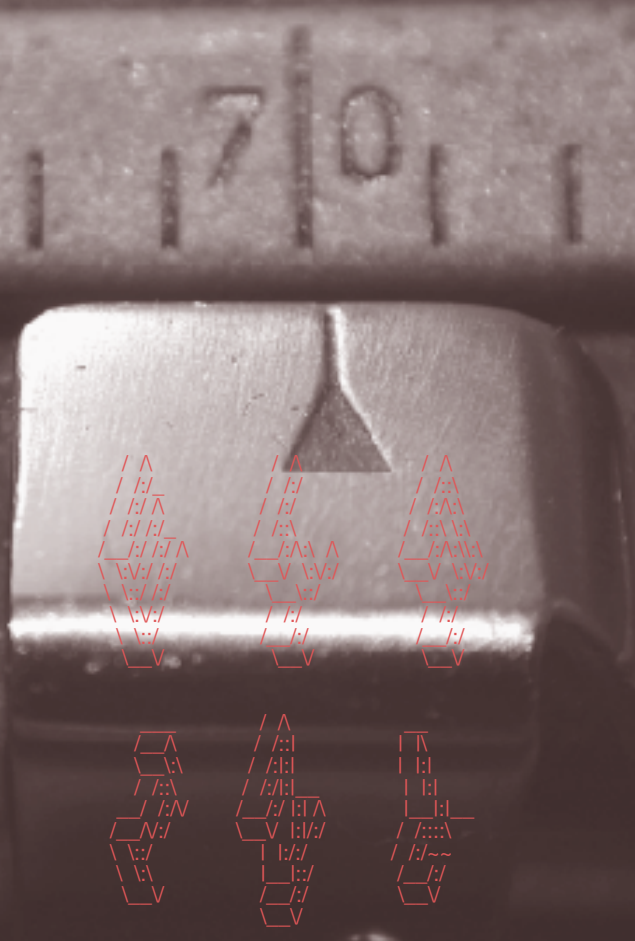
[DESIGNER OF HORTON PLAZA, 1984 OLYMPICS, BELLAGIO, ROPPOGI HILLS, AND OTHER PROJECTS]

“There is no doubt that architecture criticism in U.S. newspapers can expand the audience for architecture, both in provoking interest and in educating the general public and prospective clients. The large audiences for architecture and design exhibitions at museums around the world is evidence that this interest exists. What must change, however, is the narrow focus of the existing coverage and the architecture-speak which eludes accessibility for most readers.

“Architects, for the most part, have been entranced by the static object throughout the history of architecture. Architecture critics cover almost exclusively the sculptural monuments of the celebrity architect; this focus neglects important ideas and work that are redefining what architecture is today. The Jerde Partnership, for instance, fabricates rich, experiential places that inspire and engage the human spirit. Hundreds of millions of people experience these projects. Yet, our work is more likely to be covered by the general interest media, such as CNN’s ‘Newsstand’; ABC News’ ‘Nightline’; or *Wired* magazine. The language and the content must engage the interested reader. Many architecture critics write for a narrow, elitist audience and focus only on a handful of celebrities whose work and ideas may or may not be relevant or appropriate for the newspaper audience.”



## What's in Your Pitch Grid?



Pat Reilly

In the PR business, architectural definitions can help clients visualize how public relations works. A “communications architecture” shows how your public relations program reaches the audiences important to you; a “messaging blueprint” defines the parameters of how to talk about your firm; a “messaging foundation” is what you start with to build your story.

To help explain the PR business to architects, I’ll reverse the analogy: seeing an article about your firm or work in the media is equivalent to an open house celebrating the completion of your building. The work started months or years before and involved a lot of strategy, creativity, persistence, and hard work. So does PR.

While a comprehensive public relations program involves far more than media relations—managing relationships with the media important to the success of your firm—that’s what people think of when they hear the term “public relations.” Effective media relations leverages business developments and maximizes unplanned opportunities or events that may be of interest to the media. For the purposes of this article, we’ll focus on improving your attempts to generate media coverage and the basics that gov-

ern incoming queries from the media.

Start with a blank sheet of paper and write a six-month forecast of business developments: What structures are you scheduled to complete? What projects might you bid on? How have your financials improved from last year? Keep it simple: include who, what, where, when, how, and why.

On a separate sheet of paper, draw four columns. In the first column, list the media outlets where you would like to see a story about yourself, your firm, or your work. Include all media: trade journals, local newspapers, and broadcast media, as well as favored reporters or columnists. In the second column, write down two or three specific stories from each of these media outlets that you have read, listened to, or watched. In the third column, break down the elements that defined those stories (e.g., historical background on a building, a massive budget, architects starting their own firm, the analysis of a design challenge).

You'll see that each outlet categorizes itself by the business elements it features; i.e., a *Wall Street Journal* story will always include financials on the building, projected cost of completion, etc.; a profile of an architect or firm will include something unique about the architect; a local newspaper will include details about how the work impacts the region.

Now, look at your six-month map of business developments. If you were to "pitch" one of the media outlets in your second column, what business developments from your map would fit the criteria you identified in each of their stories in column three? Be tough with your business developments: you are proud of the addition you designed to the Hansons' Ranch, but it's a pretty basic design. Would you really expect to read about this addition in one of the publications you listed as most important to you?

Add the relevant business developments from your six-month map into the fourth column, and you have your Pitch Grid—the decision-making system to guide your outbound media relations. When you have the business elements of a good story, one that you would like to read, that's when you should contact the media.

Building a professional relationship with a reporter begins with trust. If you haven't introduced yourself, it is perfectly acceptable to draft a short e-mail or drop a note in the mail introducing you and your firm. Be succinct and include who you are, what

your background is, what work you've done, and your area of expertise.

Include all your contact information: work phone, mobile phone, home phone, e-mail. Instruct your receptionist to forward all media calls to you and that it is okay to give reporters your mobile number. Once you've made that initial contact, grow the relationship by respecting their time: don't waste it with individual news releases or phone calls that don't fit the criteria you've identified in your Pitch Grid.

When a reporter calls you, be sure to respond promptly. Reporters work on instant deadlines; if you don't respond promptly, you may lose the opportunity and they may not call again. Always write down the reporter's name, affiliation, query, and time of call.

If you aren't sure how to respond to an incoming call, or if you don't want to respond to a query, it's better to let the reporter know rather than ignore the call. Ways to do this are: "I don't believe I have enough information to answer that question," "I don't have an opinion," or "I don't know." Uninteresting quotes don't usually get into print. Be sure to use the opportunity to mention what you *can* talk about from your Pitch Grid.

Now that you've built your basic Pitch Grid, be creative. Why not suggest a story about the history of right angles and use your latest design as an example of a modern take on an old classic? Or think of some other feature you've always wanted to read about. Just make sure there is an element that keeps you and your work in the story. Whether or not they use your idea, the media will appreciate a well-thought out suggestion.

Studies show that news articles are eight times more effective than advertising. While you can never guarantee a news story, creativity—built on a solid foundation of facts, strategy, persistence, and trust—is the surest way to your media relations success. ●



# Under the Radar

Sacramento Court

Paulett Taggart Architects





Sacramento Court consists of four new 3-story townhouses around a small entry court, built over a 40 car garage.

The facade is composed of two bays of dark wood windows, framed by a warm brick. One enters from the street through the exterior stairway which opens out onto a central courtyard and fountain. There are two units in front and two in back, each with its own entry from the courtyard. The wood windows move through the interior as translucent dividers between kitchen, dining, and hall, reinforcing the continuity between the exterior and interior spaces. The existing masonry garage is being seismically upgraded and reconstructed to support the housing above.

**Architect:** Paulett Taggart Architects, Paulett Taggart, San Francisco  
**Team:** Martha McQuade, Ed Andrews, Evan Nakamura, Chris Weir, Chris Cote

**General Contractor:** Sneed and Co., San Rafael  
**Structural Engineers:** C+D Consulting, San Francisco  
**Stair Engineer:** Endres & Ware, Berkeley  
**Mechanical:** Lefler Engineering Inc., San Rafael  
**Lighting:** Foster Lighting Design, San Francisco  
**Photography:** Nic Lehoux, Architectural Photography, Vancouver, Canada

left page top: A unit's powder room.

left page bottom left: First floor plan and longitudinal section.

left page bottom right: Common courtyard serves as entry to units.



top of page: Looking up at interior spiral stair.

above left: New Sacramento Street façade.

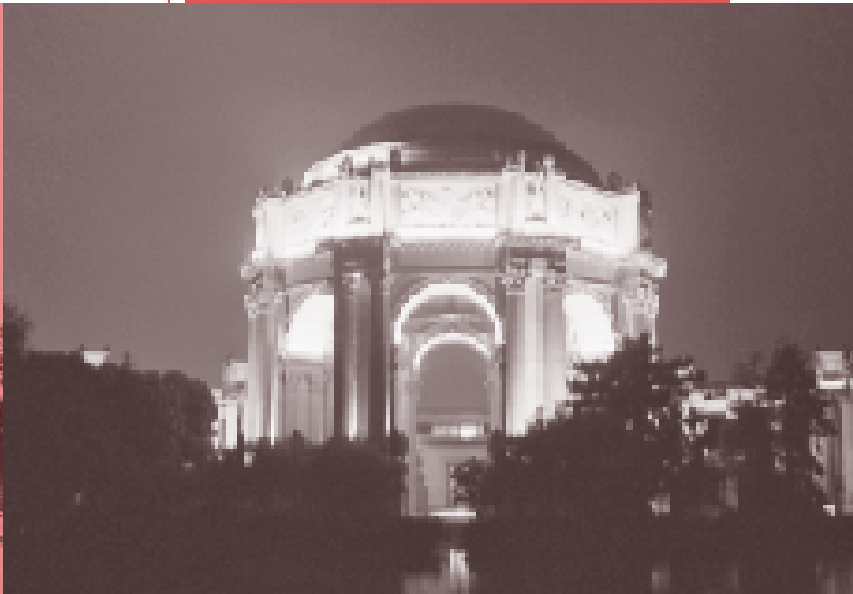
above right: Existing garage at beginning of construction.

# Credits

arcCA welcomes submissions for 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 your submissions to the editor by email at [tculvahouse@cca.edu](mailto:tculvahouse@cca.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 the equivalent information by regular mail to: Tim Culvahouse, AIA, Editor, arcCA, c/o AIACC, 1303 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, California, 95814, Re: "Under the Radar.")

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## Palace of Fine Arts Campaign

Sara Shreve

Last year the Maybeck Foundation signed a ground-breaking contract with the Recreation and Park Department of the City and County of San Francisco. The Department owns Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts and has for decades struggled with its maintenance. The Foundation became the private fund-raising partner for the Palace of Fine Arts restoration. Since signing the contract, it raised over three million dollars for the Palace and has advised the Department on a Historic Structures Report and Restoration Master Plan. A National Register application has just been approved by the State.

"It is a huge effort in tough financial times. But we are off the ground and moving forward rapidly," says Foundation Executive Director William Marquand. "San Franciscans love the Palace—that's the bottom line." Restoration work on the Palace lagoon and grounds is scheduled to start in late 2004.

Originally designed by architect Bernard Maybeck for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915, the Palace's poetic classicism is comprised of four main components: the freestanding colonnade and rotunda, the gallery building, and the landscaped lagoon.

The Palace is the site's only memento from the 1915 Expo. Thanks to the decades of dedication of prominent citizens

such as Phoebe Hearst, the Palace was saved and at first served as a park, tennis facility, and storage. In the 1960s, a city-wide movement, unprecedented in scale in the U.S., helped fund the reconstruction of the main structures. Maybeck's plaster and wood buildings were given new life in concrete. Yet funding fell short. The broad sweep of classical columns and pediments on the gallery façade were omitted.

The 1960s reconstruction efforts coincide with the growth of the preservation movement in America. Although the Palace of Fine Arts efforts were outside of other preservation movements in San Francisco, it was an early example of a large-scale project gaining funding largely through community support.

Many problems face today's Palace. The reconstruction left no maintenance endowment, which, compounded by years of heavy use, has hastened the decay of the site. Standard repairs such as a seismic retrofit, vegetation, and graffiti removal are compounded with the erosion of the lagoon edges and the rapid deterioration of the rotunda ceiling due to leaks. Long-range goals for the Palace include the establishment of an endowment for its maintenance and the reconstruction of the gallery façade. ●