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East Oakland School of the Arts
Stoner Meek Architecture and
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DESIGN REVIEW

arcCA

architect in the community issue   07.2   design review

Content

Cover photo: Dan Perez

arcCA, the journal of the American Institute of Architects California Council, is dedicated to exploring ideas, issues, and projects relevant to the practice of architecture in California. **arcCA** focuses quarterly editions on professional practice, the architect in the community, the AIACC Design Awards, and works/sectors.

Comment

A year ago, for our second quarter "architect in the community" issue, we focused on Los Angeles, site of that year's AIA National Convention. This year we focus on the Bay Area. The reason this time is not temporal but topical: this issue of *arcCA* is devoted to Design Review, a process for which San Francisco and surrounding communities are noted—or, one might say, notorious.

In this issue, you will find three perspectives on design review in San Francisco: a highly critical appraisal by development and planning consultant David Prowler (originally published in the newsletter of the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR), January 2007); a story of a series of design workshops presented to the San Francisco Planning Commission on behalf of AIA San Francisco; and some encouraging front-line experiences of design review by architect Owen Kennerly, AIA.

As background for these studies of design review, we offer two complementary historical perspectives by two of California's premier architectural historians, David Gebhard and Mitchell Schwarzer.

You will also find other Bay Area-centric articles: a proposal for "Design Review Guidelines Guidelines" by San Mateo architect Ellis Schoichet, AIA; an interview with San Francisco architect Sylvia Kwan, FAIA, who was a contestant on this season's *Survivor;* AIA San Francisco's selection of the city's best-loved buildings, reported by John King, urban design writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle;* an elegant and economical renovation for the East Oakland School of the Arts, by San Francisco's Stoner Meek Architecture and Urban Design (in "Under the Radar"); and, for our "Coda," a brief look at changing design review criteria, as seen in mid-twentieth century and early twenty-first century additions to a late-nineteenth century San Francisco landmark.

We also look at a landscape much-neglected by the architectural press: that of the suburban office park, reflecting on the role of design review in the formation of the Sand Hill Road Corridor in Menlo Park and Palo Alto.

And, as always, we try to have at least one nutsy-boltsy, how-to article, this one on how best to behave at a design review hearing, Wendy Kohn's "Confessions of a Design Reviewer."

We look forward to your responses.

Tim Culvahouse, FAIA, editor
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Contributors

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David Gebhard (1928-1996) was a professor of art history at UC Santa Barbara and curator of the UCSB Architectural Drawing Collection. His books include *The Furniture of R.M. Schindler; Lloyd Wright, Architect; Rudolph Schindler; Los Angeles: An Architectural Guide; Albert Frey, Architect; Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California; Cowtown Moderne; The Architecture of Gregory Ain; The Architectural Drawings of R.M. Schindler; Buildings of Iowa; Casa California: Spanish-Style Houses from Santa Barbara to San Clemente; Bay Area Houses; Los Angeles in the Thirties;* and *Charles F.A. Voysey, Architect.*

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David Meckel, FAIA, is Director of Research & Planning for the California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco. He may be reached at dmeckel@cca.edu.

Born and raised in New York City, Owen Kennerly, AIA, received his Master of Architecture degree from U.C. Berkeley. He worked in the office of San Francisco architect Daniel Solomon as a Senior Associate before starting his own firm, Kennerly Architecture & Planning, in 1999.

David Prowler was a VISTA tenant organizer, a San Francisco Planning Commissioner, a Community Planner in Chinatown, and the Mayor's Project Manager for the Giants Ballpark and Mission Bay. He now advises public agencies, non-profits, and developers on development and planning. He is President of the Board of the Homeless Prenatal Program. He may be reached at david@prowler.org.

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Mitchell Schwarzer, PhD, is the author of *German Architectural Theory* (1995), *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media* (2004), *Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Area: History and Guide* (2007), and the upcoming *Home Egonomics: America's Obsession with Real Estate.* He is Chair of the Department of Visual Studies at California College of the Arts. He may be reached at mschwarzer@cca.edu.

re: 07.1, "Patronage":

I just finished reading "Institutional Patronage: An Interview with David Meckel, FAIA" in the latest issue of *arcCA*.

I greatly appreciate the way in which you reframed the notion of "patronage" to include the university. This stimulating interview shined a spotlight on the powerful role California College of the Arts and other schools play as they engage with the social, political, and economic fabric of the community, city, and region. Meckel very effectively conjugated the many ways in which the university, in this case CCA, can creatively leverage its assets to the benefit of many beyond the academy.

I applaud the creation of an entity like the Center for Art in Public Life as an armature from which to address issues of social justice and community development through the arts. That interdisciplinary program serves the diverse populations of the San Francisco Bay Area in very explicit, powerful ways.

In my experience, CCA also promotes the value of design to many in the immediate community with the innovative and accessible architecture of its campus facilities. CCA offers a prime example of how to recycle previously used parts of the city and reuse them in imaginative new ways.

I also offer my kudos to David Meckel for articulating the less obvious, but equally important, ways in which the everyday practices of professors, students, and administrators make vital contributions to the larger community as well.

I know UC Berkeley, through its Center for Cities and Schools (CC & S), also encourages and supports the relationship between quality schools and healthy cities/communities. CC & S garners the resources of the university to build capacity and support communities in customized, context-specific ways, such as its Y-PLAN program for college students and high school youth, and by directing scholarship to meaningfully engage the local community and the region.

I personally feel nourished, stimulated, and reassured by the commitment to citizenship and "patronage" by CCA, UCB, and other academic institutions in the Bay Area. This article helped to explain the reasons why.

Shirl Buss, PhD, Associate AIA
Sausalito

First, and foremost, I want to applaud the recent "Patronage" issue of *arcCA*. The topic is one that is rarely discussed within the everyday discourse of architecture—and, as you have so powerfully illustrated—is, and always has been, a significant force in giving shape to the architecture of our civilization.

Recently, while being dwarfed by the statue of Columbus as I was standing atop Telegraph Hill and marveling at the splendor of the Bay Area, I was reminded how the history of America might have been quite different if it hadn't been for the patronage of Ferdinand and Isabella.

My reason for recalling this prescient act of patronage is to point out that the importance of patronage in the field of architecture extends beyond the creation of actual buildings. This point is one that I wish would have been further elaborated upon in the recent *arcCA* issue.

In my own case, as an architect working specifically toward improving our society—rather than being involved in the creation of actual buildings—the long-term support of a patron has been the single most significant factor in enabling the sustained success of my work. Indeed, over the twenty years that I have founded and developed the projects of the Symposium

on Healthcare Design, The Center for Health Design, and most recently The CARITAS Project, the quality of the environment for healthcare could not have advanced to the point that it has reached today without the patronage of the Nemschoff family.

It is a direct consequence of this patronage that scores of architects have advanced their practices; multitudes of healthcare facilities have developed environments that materially contribute to the health and healthcare of their patients, staff, families and visitors, and local communities; and the very personal health-related circumstances of many individuals have tangibly benefited.

When *arcCA* is ready to dedicate an issue to the pioneering healthcare work of California architects, I would be delighted to assist in identifying those seminal exemplars that serve as benchmarks against which to measure further progress.

Wayne Ruga, AIA
Deerfield Beach, Florida

In the last issue of *arcCA*, 2006 AIA President Kate Schwennsen defended the AIA's decision to censor ADPSR's presentation of prisons and politics at the 2006 AIA Convention by arguing that the international dis-

graces of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib were of "questionable relevance" to the panel discussion "Exploring Prisons as a Design, Ethical and Social Policy Issue."

In 1984, ADPSR members were thrown out of the AIA Convention in Phoenix for distributing materials about the threat of nuclear weapons; yet in 1993 ADPSR was awarded the AIA's Institute Honor for being "a strong, resounding voice for social and political justice."

Many observers, including Federal District Judge Thelton Henderson, who holds jurisdiction over California's prison system, consider the U.S. prison system to be the #1 social justice problem in our country today—and therefore fully within ADPSR's historical role in the profession, as recognized by the AIA.

Accordingly, I expect an apology from the AIA, but I hope sooner than the nine years it took last time. In the meantime, in recognition of the clear relevance of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib to our national political culture, I encourage *arcCA* readers to pledge not to design prisons at www.adpsr.org/prisons.

Raphael Sperry, AIA, LEED AP, San Francisco,
President, Architects Designers and
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The
Community
as Client:

Architectural Review in America

David Gebhard

To respond successfully and creatively to community design review, the architectural and landscape architectural professions must become aware of the forces that lie behind them. Too often, members of the profession tend to respond in the empty phraseology of supposed freedom of imagery, whereas the reality of the situation is usually a social, political, and ideological one.

A Unifying Vision

In the late summer of 1892, the New York architectural critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer visited Chicago's World Columbian Exposition, then well along in construction. What interested her most was not the success or failure of the Beaux Arts Classical imagery, but rather what lessons the Fair could provide for the planning of American cities. She wrote, "Anyone of us can point to good and beautiful buildings in American towns; but can anyone think of a single satisfactory large group or long perspective? Beautiful groups, beautiful perspectives, a stupendously beautiful panorama is what the Fair will show us. It will be the first real object-lesson America has had in the art of building well on a great scale; and it will show us how, on a smaller but still sometimes a very large scale, our permanent streets and squares ought to be designed."

The vision of architect-planner Daniel H. Burnham and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted brought about the unification present at the Fair, which offered a unique opportunity for them to function in a manner foreign to the nineteenth century American laissez-faire scene. They could play the game of architectural/planning arbitrator, similar to the role played by Baron Georges Haussmann in the replanning of Paris during the regime of Napoleon III.

As Van Rensselaer had anticipated, the Fair served as an impetus for America's long-term involvement with the City Beautiful movement. Yet, while a few City Beautiful-inspired civic centers and other fragments were built across the country during the first four decades of the twentieth century, the grand city plans of Burnham and others never came to fruition, due to their

often prohibitive costs and the array of difficulties posed by the private ownership of land and buildings. Equally determinant, though, was the sentiment of clients, their architects, and a large segment of the public, which openly embraced a laissez-faire approach to design. Van Rensselaer's, Burnham's, and others' vision of an architecturally unified city lacked reality, for in the end it did not provide any acceptable mode of architectural review. Europe and England could and did impose such controls via the continued presence of a leftover feudal bureaucracy that could operate as architectural/planning arbitrator. Americans, with their traditional suspicions of government, found it difficult to conceive of granting such authority to an appointed governmental bureaucrat or even to elected officials (though there have in this century been occasional exceptions, such as Robert Moses of New York).

Ultimately, the demise of the Beaux Arts-inspired City Beautiful movement was due, not to its ideological defeat at the hands of the Modernist, but to its inability to provide a workable method of carrying out its ideals. The typical City Beautiful solution (the creation of a Fine Arts Commission) might work in the public arena of Washington, D.C., but it did not function well in other American cities, large or small. Such commissions could work effectively only within the limited public realm involving groups of governmental buildings and parks, or on a very small scale with a new town or suburban development planned and controlled by private capital.

Planned Communities

Many privately established communities laid out in the second and third decades at least initially entailed firm architectural control and review. In the teens there were the copper mining towns of Ajo (Arizona), Tyrone (New Mexico), and others. During the heady boom days of the '20s, Florida witnessed the creation of many speculative cities, including Opa-Locka, Boca Raton, and Coral Gables. California experienced the same phenomenon, with communities such as Palos Verdes, San Clemente, and Rancho Santa Fe. Upper middle class suburban residential developments, like St. Francis Woods and Forest Hills in San Francisco and Bel Air and Westlake Village in Los Angeles, accompanied these planned communities and preceded them in some instances.

These communities began with some architectural controls. A few developed and maintained a highly visible review process. In Palos Verdes, this process specified the Mediterranean/Spanish Colonial Revival image—both in gardens and buildings. The seriousness of the developers of Palos Verdes appears in the "name-brand" professionals they involved in the process: the landscape architect and planner Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the planner Charles Cheney, and the architect Myron Hunt. Generally, these private communities dealt with the need for architectural review via legal covenants (C C & R's), not by any action on the part of a governmental body.

Tourism

Another impetus, which has had a far more lasting impact on establishing architectural controls and review, has been tourism. In the United States, tourism brought together two seemingly unlikely groups in society: those who were ideologically arguing for a romantic, self-conscious cultivation of regional differences made visible via planning, landscape architecture, and architecture; and those who had an economic interest in seeing tourism promoted.

The earliest "grand" episode of architecture promoting tourism was in Florida in the mid-1880s. The key figure was New York investor Henry M. Flagler, who through railroad acquisitions developed the Florida East Coast Railroad system and commissioned the New York architectural firm of Carrere & Hastings to enhance the historic Spanish atmosphere of St. Augustine through their designs for two resort hotels, the Ponce de Leon Hotel (1888) and the Alcazar (1890). A few years later, in 1893, the city suffered a severe fire, which destroyed a large section of its central core. Regional romanticists joined with the business community to argue that the city should be rebuilt entirely along Spanish lines; the basis of their argument was that an enhancement of the Hispanic image would entice more winter visitors to the city.

The real and mythical enhancement of exotic non-Anglo images developed almost as early in the American Southwest and in California. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, which traversed New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California, quickly took over first the Mission Revival image and later the Pueblo Revival and the Spanish Colonial Revival images. Architectural icons of the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads eventually joined the Santa Fe in this endeavor of regional salesmanship.

Preservation

An offshoot of this created regionalism, with decided implications for architectural controls and review, was the development of an interest in historic preservation. The pointedness of this connective link shows in the early establishment, in 1894, of the California Landmark Club, by Charles Lummis (who was the first editor of *Land of Sunshine,* the promotional magazine of the Santa Fe Railroad) and Arthur B. Benton, the designer of Hispanic resort hotels such as the 1903 Mission Inn in Riverside and the 1910 Arlington Hotel in Santa Barbara. Their argument for preserving the Mission churches and adobes of California was identical with those for creating Mission Revival railroad stations and hotels, namely that it would help to entice visitors to the state.

The close linking of historic preservation and architectural controls and reviews grew appreciably in the late 1920s and on into the

1930s. Charleston, South Carolina, initiated its first ordinance in 1929, and New Orleans created its Vieux Carre Commission in 1936. The rationale for historic preservation eventually became, especially after 1945, one of the key arguments for the creation of historic districts. Their administrators reviewed all proposed demolitions, modifications, and new developments. In recent years, historic preservation commissions have, to a considerable degree, replaced planning commissions as the principal planning body in many communities, including New York City itself.

Beauty and Character

Before turning our attention to incidents of official governmental design review, two added arguments for design controls should be noted. The first is aesthetic, the "obligation" of each community to cultivate the beautiful. The second has to do with the desire of citizens in a community to preserve, not only the historic flavor of the place, but equally its scale and ambience. Such controls were entailed in several private developments in the nineteenth century, including Llewellyn Park, New Jersey, of 1852-53 (Llewellyn Haskell and Alexander Jackson Davis) and Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's 1868 suburban development of Riverside, Illinois. With the rapid acceleration of urbanization and density of development experienced across much of the American landscape since 1945, the issue of scale and present character has often turned out to be the underlying reason (sometimes stated, often not) for design review and controls.

The preeminent figure responsible for establishing the rational and eventually legal arguments for aesthetic controls was the planner Charles H. Cheney (1884-1943). Cheney, a close associate of Olmsted and Olmsted, was a founder of the American City Planning Association (1917). He wrote the architectural review legislation for several communities, including Santa Barbara, Palos Verdes, and Rancho Santa Fe. Within every master plan drawn up for a community, he argued, there should be a section devoted to "architectural control of all buildings, signs, and physical appearances. The general architecture, mass, and appearance of all buildings, private as well as public, is essentially a matter of public concern." Cheney, with Newman E Baker, Harold Beardslee Brainerd, Thomas W. Mackesey, and Rollin L. McNitt, established the court-tested abilities for communities to initiate design review legislation.

Santa Barbara, California

Santa Barbara presents an early, extensive example of design review. (Others of roughly the same period, with similarly compelling historical and geographic settings, include Nantucket and Santa Fe.) This city plunged into the design review process in the years immediately after World War I, with a vision to develop the whole coastal zone of Santa Barbara County as a new version of the Mediterranean coast of Spain. The rationale for this vision was the region's strong Hispanic inheritance from the early nineteenth century. The Plan and Planting Committee of the Community Arts Association (a private organization) effectively pursued the concept of the planned city, of limitations on density and the height of buildings, and of the creation of a single, community-wide architectural imagery.

The Association realized from the beginning that its first task was to inform and educate the citizens of the community. They diligently pursued the design and construction of a series of small-scale examples, which could serve as apt demonstrations of what the city could look like if the goals of creating a unified Hispanic city were achieved. Accompanying these demonstrations were other educational programs—exhibitions, articles in the local newspapers and regional journals, and local and regional competitions.

Simultaneously, the Association engaged Cheney to prepare an array of ordinances concerned with planning, zoning, and architectural control. Santa Barbara's contingent of architects, George Washington Smith and others, was closely involved in their preparation, providing proposals for plazas and streetscapes. By 1924, ordinances relating to zoning, building height, and density of development were in place. Immediately after the 1925 earthquake, the Association prevailed upon the City Council to enact the design review ordinance previously drawn up by Cheney. During the year of its existence, the Architectural Review Board set up by the ordinance processed some 2,000 building permits.

From the late 1920s through the immediate Post World War II years, architectural control in Santa Barbara reverted to the private Plans and Planting Committee headed by Pearl Chase. The continuation of Hispanic imagery during these years illustrates how effective she and her committee were. With the renewed press of building activities after World War II, they prevailed upon the city in 1949 to institute once again an appointed architectural review board (eventually placed within the City Charter). To maintain tighter design controls over the downtown area, Chase and her colleagues induced the City to establish the Advisory Landmark Committee (1960), whose major responsibility was to act as a design review board over the city's central core. In 1977, this committee was reorganized and given much more substantial authority to review all projects in the downtown, El Pueblo Viejo District.

As early as the late 1920s, it was recognized that planning and review should not be limited to the City of Santa Barbara alone, but should eventually encompass the whole county. In 1931, the suburban community of Montecito received its historic planning and review ordinance. In the 1950s, Santa Barbara County became the first county in California to establish architectural review. ◉

Design Review in San Francisco:

Three Perspectives

David Prowler, John Schlesinger, AIA,
Owen Kennerly, AIA

Here's how it's done in San Francisco.
David Prowler

Here's how it's done in San Francisco. The Planning Department staff or the Planning Commission, or even the Board of Supervisors, decides to draw up a new plan for an area. Maybe it's because there have been too many controversies there, or because it seems like a good idea either to change or to preserve the character of that neighborhood. There is some squabbling about the boundaries, and then the process of creating a plan begins. The public is invited to give input at community meetings, given handouts, shown slides, and given a chance to ask questions or make criticisms. Six months later, the planners come back with a modified version of the original idea, pass out handouts, show the slides and ask for comments. This gets repeated for a decade.

Or perhaps somebody wants to develop a piece of property. Maybe they hold a community meeting and present the idea (which is probably pretty far along). Some people like it and drop out of the process, while opponents rally for a showdown. In the meantime, the Planning Department staff cranks up a study of all the environmental damage the project could do. Years later there's a hearing, then appeals.

Average San Franciscans are cut out of the process, nobody seems to have a clear idea of what urban planning can and cannot do, and sometimes it seems that the process itself is the product.

It's not a great system. We can do better.

Why the system doesn't work
It's hard not to notice at community meetings and public hearings that the crowd doesn't look much like San Francisco. Look around on the bus, in the streets, at clubs and at the grocery store. Are these the people engaged in the discourse about the future of our city?

There's a good chance you don't go to community meetings or hearings either. I don't blame you. But people do want to be heard and, believe it or not, we'd have a better city if they were.

It's easier to see why people don't participate than why they do:

* Irrelevance: Unless their view or parking space is in danger, most people just don't see what city planning has to do with their lives. How would you explain to a single mom in the Tenderloin, a teenager in the projects, a couple starting to look for a place to buy, or a grocer what planning can do to make their daily life better or worse? It's too abstract.

* Inertia: Plans are underway all over the city: Treasure Island; Mid-Market; the so-called Eastern Neighborhoods, which encompass fully 25 percent of the city; Market/Octavia; Transbay. But they seem never to end.

* Confusion: Most people don't understand that planning sets guidelines and rules but doesn't cause or prevent growth or change, or address economic or cultural needs. We expect both too much and too little. Of course, we can't see what a plan prevents, because it doesn't happen. And we can't really identify what a plan caused, because the genesis of any change is so complex.

* Language and cultural barriers: Not everyone is comfortable speaking out. Maybe you don't come from a culture with a tradition of community meetings and a government that wants your ideas. Thirty-nine percent of San Franciscans were born in another country—more than the number of San Franciscans born in all of California. And these immigrants came here for a reason. They found their previous countries intolerable and made a decision to leave their roots and move on. Not to organize or participate in some political system: to leave. Why expect them now to try to influence land use decisions?

Maybe your English isn't so great and you are shy about public speaking—46 percent of San Franciscans speak a foreign language at home.

And plenty of San Franciscans are working hard and have kids at home—they just can't slip away for a two-hour meeting of PowerPoint presentation and comments.

* Isolation: There is a nationwide decline in public participation. Used to be, people participated much more in civic life—they routinely attended PTA meetings, block clubs, League of Women Voters meetings, labor union meetings, even lodge meetings. Now, even poker is a solitary activity.

Often, it's the same handful of people at every meeting, saying the same things.

There is a subculture of people who attend community advisory committee meetings and hearings, just as there are subcultures of participants at sex clubs, book clubs, and AA meetings. We assume that people who join the planning club are better informed about the city's issues and care more about the future of the city. But are they?

People come to community meetings and hearings for a lot of reasons. Sometimes it's to learn and share good ideas, but sometimes the reasons are a little more obscure. Fear of change. Issues around control. Racism. Jealousy. Anger. One thing I learned when I was a planning commissioner: you can't solve psychological problems with land use decisions.

The way we plan now works well for some.

Planning commissioners and elected officials get to step into the vacuum and make deals. Consultants get hired as guides. The lengthy review processes help maintain the status quo. But meanwhile we have a type of "redlining by planning." Who could know what can be done in a neighborhood while the rules are up in the air?

Not only are these exercises expensive and lengthy, they also squander the goodwill that residents have toward planning, burning out participants and driving away others.

Maybe it's time to step back and ask what we expect from the public dialogue about the city. We can create a space to learn from San Franciscans about the cities they live and work in.

I write "cities" because we each experience the city differently. I have a map of Paris that illustrates this. It has no streets or landmarks, just the outline of the city and two colors labeled "J'y vais" and J'y vais pas": I go here, I don't go there.

The Vietnamese nail salon worker who lives in the Tenderloin and works in the Richmond, the widow who hasn't left the Sunset since I. Magnin closed, the student who lives at Parkmerced but spends all her time on Valencia Street, the kid from the projects who goes to Wallenberg High School, the undocumented dishwasher—each has his or her own way to use the parts of the city they use, with

little overlap. And each has a different relationship with the history of San Francisco and different hopes for the city's future. We can't weave these narratives together in a meaningful way by starting at the end of the story, with the buildings and the spaces between them.

We need to look not just at the ways people use the city, but also at how they use buildings. What is an office in a city where 18 percent of the residents are self-employed and others work from home? What is a café where half the customers are working on laptops?

How to involve such a heterogeneous crowd in the discourse?

* Don't be afraid of new voices. It's easy to fall back on the self-identified "leaders," because they're predictable and easy to find.

* Trust that out of an open, welcoming environment some better ideas can come.

* Trust that if ideas come from such an environment, they'll come with a constituency of people committed to seeing them through. And even if it takes longer to get there, the civic leadership—commissioners, staff, the mayor, and supervisors—might be a little more likely to take stands. Maybe there even would be fewer appeals at the back end.

* City planning itself needs to be marketed. Show how planning can be relevant to people's real lives. Make it less cumbersome, and show the value of results to city staff and officials, as well as the public.

* Maybe land-use planning shouldn't be done in a vacuum. Maybe the discourse has to include crime, culture, jobs, and education all at once.

* Experiment with media. Maybe the dialogue would be more inclusive by tapping into where

people really communicate, such as beauty parlors and laundromats. Maybe planning can be done with something like bookmobiles. Or groups of random people invited to talk about how they use the city, over dinners. Or a storefront. Maybe we should have an Office of Public Involvement helping all city departments, not just the Planning Department. Or even just hire professional facilitators to look at the goal of each planning venture and design the right process for the job.

* Use the Internet. We plan our vacations online; keep in touch via e-mail and text messaging; share our thoughts on blogs; and buy, rent, and sell on Craig's List. So why do we expect people to spend afternoons at City Hall waiting for an item to be called, only to then get just three minutes to speak? I get the Planning Commission calendars online; why not enable people to click the calendar and comment? Comments could go to commissioners directly or in digest, staff could respond, and maybe people could post responses to each other.

* For people to feel welcome, you've got to speak their language. And the context has to be culturally comfortable, too. How do groups make decisions in the Philippines, in Latin America, or in China? It's not enough to use the same old "7 p.m. Thursday in the community center/PowerPoint/question and answer/thanks for coming/we'll get back to you" format. It doesn't translate.

* Let's learn from how planning is done in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and even other North American cities. It's mind-blowing to see what planning has achieved in Berlin, Barcelona, or even Portland. This might require

bridging the gaps between practice, academia, and groups like SPUR.

* Let's be frank and clear about what land-use planning can and cannot do. It doesn't by itself create buildings or good jobs. The City is trying to preserve blue-collar jobs by zoning to prevent housing (it's been characterized as "zoning for gold mines and expecting gold"). But how about linking zoning with a strategy to create these jobs?

* Set timelines and develop the discipline to stick to them. The Giants' new ballpark had a deadline: Opening Day. It was a challenge, and we stepped up to it. It was a blessing, too.

* Forget about consensus. We're not going to get it, and too often the planners or the Board of Supervisors delay decision-making while waiting for it. But it gets farther away. We need leadership, not consensus.

* Be clear about what is on the table and when a decision will be made. Make sure people understand the goals and the trade-offs.

* Reconsider CEQA. We discuss projects and plans within the framework of CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act, which mandates addressing only how much damage a proposal can do to the environment, not how can it help the city meet goals or help the regional environment by concentrating growth where there's infrastructure. Here in San Francisco, we hold up even small-scale projects, such as the 17 residences and retail uses proposed at the empty lot at 19th and Valencia streets by the longtime residents and owners of a popular Mexican restaurant. Really, in a built-up city, along a transit street where just about every other spot is housing over stores, how much

environmental damage could a project like this do?

* The planners should do a better job of differentiating between those projects that pose policy questions for the Planning Commission and the City and the smaller ones. As it is, single-family projects with disputes about a few feet can take up as much staff and commission energy as high-rises. Most of these disputes are what's called Discretionary Review cases. All these share one thing: they comply with the Planning Code 100 percent, but some neighbor is still unhappy. So the Planning Commission hears the case. We need a better system of triage, and we should show some more respect for the Planning Code and allow projects that comply to move forward.

* We need other venues for working out land-use disputes and just talking with each other. Maybe the Community Board has more of a role to play in working out disputes among neighbors. Or perhaps there is a need for a semi-social format where downtown types and Mission types and City Hall types and regular people who care about the city can get together and have a discussion, and maybe a drink.

* The biggest challenge is a cultural one, and culture is the hardest thing to change. The attitudes of the San Francisco planning culture:
  • Opponents are heroes.
  • We can't move forward without consensus.
  • A decade is a reasonable amount of time to produce a plan.
  • The voices we hear are sufficiently diverse.
  • We are so afraid of change that delays, appeals and meaningless environmental review are goals in themselves.

I was struck by a description of Italy by the essayist Beppo Severgnini: "Controllers and controlled have an unspoken agreement. You don't change, we don't change, and Italy doesn't change. But we all complain that we can't go on like this."

But we are a city of newcomers, who will inevitably change the culture. It's time to open the process and be alert to new attitudes about the city and about change itself.

After all, it's inevitable.

The Language of Design Review
John Schlesinger, AIA

"It's massive, out of scale, and not in character with the neighborhood," is an all too familiar rallying cry used by those opposing proposed projects. Whether or not the proposal deserves this moniker is incidental. It has become the opening lunge in a well-choreographed verbal fencing match, to which we design professionals are obligated to parry with a riposte, using our cache of architectural terms. The language commonly used in these jousts often employs familiar phrases that bypass an honest discussion about the virtues of the design. It exacerbates the problem when the public and the design professional define the same terms differently, resulting in these groups speaking different languages.

Using "mass," "scale," "character," "neighborhood," "traditional," "contemporary," or other words for the sake of an argument becomes a roadblock to encouraging design innovation and excellence. In addition to the

match arena where testimony is given during public hearings, we find these phrases in guidelines that local jurisdictions may publish. When fortunate enough to be given the salute, "it fits in," we are relieved at having passed the test of design review. At the same time, we are often perplexed as to whether we have prevailed as a result of our hard work or merely received a back-handed compliment for endurance.

Who is granted the right to participate in this conversation? San Francisco does not follow the format of a singular design review board, where the primary debate is between appointed or elected officials and a project sponsor. Here, everyone gets to play. The City Charter mandates that any interested party—be it a neighborhood advisory panel, citywide interest group, or individual citizen—may weigh in on the merits of a project. This may occur well before it reaches a city agency, or after it has been submitted for formal review by the planning staff, the Landmarks Advisory Review Board, Planning, Redevelopment, or Port Commissions, Board of Appeals, and Board of Supervisors.

These front-end and back-end design reviews generate considerable amounts of exchanges between project sponsors, the public, and city officials, some of which are healthy and some of which are not. The plethora of review sessions often results in positions, either in support of or against a proposal, taking on a life of their own, like that of a slogan whose true meaning may have long been forgotten.

The current public review process and more stringent design controls had their roots in the late 1970s and ultimately reached their

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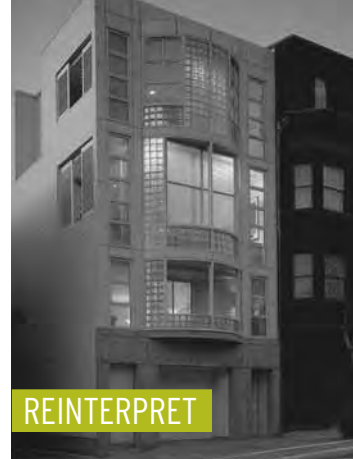
climax in the mid 1980s, when a voter revolt over the surge in building in both the downtown area and neighborhood districts created new limitations on development. Changes to the allowable size of developments and a more rigorous project review process were implemented.

By the early 1990s, AIA San Francisco realized the need to assist in reducing the enormous backlog of smaller residential projects that were being delayed as a result of the new regulations. The *Advisory Design Review Panel* program provided a pro bono mediation service by AIA San Francisco members. Project sponsors and opposing neighbors met on neutral ground, discussed points of contention, and were presented recommended solutions by the panel members. More often than not, compromises were reached, and the projects proceeded without further hearings or delays. As the chair of the first panel and one of the managers of the program, I recognized that a prevailing reason for its success was the use of a common architectural language without terms that would otherwise alienate the general public, bringing a comfort level to all participants by operating with similar degrees of understanding. City Commissioners took note of this success, embraced the mediation process and almost always adopted the Advisory Design Review Panel's recommendations. After a three-year run, the program was cancelled due to political pressure from those who felt sidelined by the power of compromise.

Within the last few years, the political climate has changed, and some local officials have recognized the need to reconsider what criteria should be used to review architectural designs. Given this opportunity, AIA San Francisco's Public Policy Committee proposed a series of design workshops for the Planning Commission. The premise for these presentations was simple: Without new methods of evaluating a proposed project, the City remains risk-averse to new and potentially innovative architectural solutions. By introducing a new vocabulary to the debate, the level of discourse, at least among those whose charge it is to rule on the appropriateness of a project, would perhaps become more democratic and less vituperative.

My first presentation in February 2006, with an introduction by Mayor Newsom endorsing this effort to the Planning Commission, was followed by two additional workshops over the next seven months. A narrative of these presentations may be seen on AIA San Francisco's web site at http://www.aiasf. org/Job_Resources/Public_Advocacy.htm.

Two themes organized the effort. *Understanding Context* addressed the need for expanding the range of approvable design by using familiar terms in a new way, placing designs into three general categories: buildings that *emulate* characteristics of their neighbors, those that *reinterpret* certain elements of nearby buildings in a new way, and those that *contrast* with their surroundings while maintaining a high value of architectural and urban design. *Designing for the Public Realm* continued in the same spirit with larger projects, while also addressing urban design issues, such as density and amenities in the open spaces between buildings.

With a high level of interest, these work-

shops continue in a variety of ways. The Planning Department has embarked on its own staff training program, in which we continue to participate. The new definitions we have established for *emulate, reinterpret,* and *contrast* have entered San Francisco's design review lexicon.

As with any new language, complete immersion helps the willing, but also disenfranchises those who are not able or interested in plunging into unknown territory, particularly when their verbal skills are put at a disadvantage. Incremental steps outlining key objectives, such as citing context and contributions to the public realm, introduce a more legitimate checklist for project review. The true test will be whether over the next couple of years there will be a critical mass of participants, be they project sponsors, the general public, city staff, or public officials willing to sign up to talk the talk. *En garde!*

Design Review: Let's Talk
Owen Kennerly, AIA

We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office. – Aesop

Too often, architects feel cast in the role of the petty thief, lambasted for daring to push design beyond the conventions of a narrowly defined context. The most notorious instrument of their suffering is the Design Review process: that bureaucratic meat-hook commonly charged to "protect," "preserve," or "enhance" neighborhood character and to "discourage" "disruptive" projects that threaten to

erode the fabric of community identity or the natural environment.

To the Optimist, these intentions are civic and noble in their quest to elevate the quality of the built environment. To the Cynic, Design Review constitutes an act of aggression on the equal rights of expression and property. Worse still, the ambiguity of its purpose enables the Design Review process to be co-opted by those seeking to obstruct, extort, or otherwise take control over forces they perceive to be not in their interest. In this context, design is the last thing Design Review is about.

So the question remains: Can Design Review, by its very nature, accommodate the visionary or even the benignly different? Or is it, at best, a blunt instrument to stop the very bad? The answer, of course, depends on the people involved.

What follows are specific examples in which the Design Review process enabled the path to a successful design project. The cases presented offer a range of building types and settings and include the following: a single family house remodel in the town of Ross in Marin County, a commercial rehabilitation and addition in Berkeley, and mixed-use urban infill in San Francisco. These cases share common aspects of their design review processes:

1. That the intentions of the process and those implementing it are indeed noble—i.e., not manifesting ulterior motives or agendas. In each case, there are no stylistic prescriptions enforced, while each asserts the protection of neighborhood character as its primary goal. Of the three, Ross is exceptional in that the protec-

tion of environmental resources is also cited as a specific purpose.

2. That those charged with its implementation are thoughtful listeners and, by way of education or interest, embody an informed and nuanced perspective on design issues.

3. That the specifics of the process itself allow for active dialogue with these individuals in which their role is not unlike that of a good client—one who brings specific needs and values to the table while recognizing the expertise of the design professional and his or her ability to create a solution that would not otherwise have been considered.

Recognizing the symptoms of these aspects—or lack thereof—in advance can help the architect and client strategize the way forward.

What is a successful design project?

Beyond meeting the client's budget or appeasing the bureaucrats, a successful design project in this context is one that reconciles the perceived opposites of individual expression and collective identity. It is a project that allows the possibility of the unknown to change perception and to expand the idea of beauty in the context of a beloved community. A tall order, indeed.

A House in Ross

Santos Prescott & Associates were engaged by the new owners to rescue a grand shingle-style mansion from 1970s "improvements" and to deliver the building stylishly into the 21st century. What from the start constituted careful interventions to open up circulation

and to craft an elegant new glass and steel stair tower ran straight into concerns from the Ross Design Review Board about historic assets, suitable materials, and a clash of styles. Through a process of discussion and negotiation, what resulted is a project neither town officials, architects, nor clients could have foreseen: a blend of the old and new in which each is heightened by the other. The glass entry and stair tower was softened with a veil of cedar louvers—scaled to match the shingle coursing and providing needed protection from the western sun. The window material, entry stairs, and related landscaping all contribute to the final effect and were heartily supported by the Design Review Board. Project architect Bruce Prescott attributes the success of the process to the initiative and candor of the Town Planner, Gary Broad: "Because Gary understood the issues likely to be raised by Design Review, the team was able to engage in a productive dialogue to maintain the design intent while satisfying the town's standards." Lessons Prescott took away from the process include "working with staff before the meeting to ensure issues are understood and to keep design flexibility to allow additional changes."

Elephant Pharmacy

It always helps when the subject building to be remodeled is a dog. But in Berkeley, nothing comes easy, for below the tattered '70s skin of the Copeland's sporting goods store on Shattuck Avenue lurked a Mission Style market waiting to be liberated. Kava Massih Architects, working closely with Anne Burns of Berkeley's Design Review Committee, crafted

a refined and elegant hybrid that at once reconciled the historic concerns of the city with the progressive image sought after by the client. The architect understood—either intuitively or explicitly—that the restoration of the building's prior identity as embodied in its barrel tile roof would balance the bold glass and steel façade inserted below. In the end, according to Kava Massih, "Anne didn't superimpose her own likes and dislikes on the project." She did, however, communicate the design intent to the staff committee and returned with feedback requiring that the façade be more articulated. Cedar display vitrines and glazing stops were integrated into the steel system, while a modern entry trellis at either end of the building and a glass and timber porch along the south bridged the stylistic gap with obvious but unsentimental references to Berkeley's Craftsman Style heritage. Other Kava Massih projects, such as the Sierra in Oakland's Jack London Square district have survived heavy scrutiny because the individuals charged with reviewing the design were fans of the architect's work to begin with. "It's not easy when you're Morrisey and they want you to sing like Frank Sinatra . . . . If they like your work, that's half the battle."

Infill Housing in San Francisco

"A single building out of context with its surroundings can be disruptive to the neighborhood character and to the image of the city as a whole."

Such is the call to arms in the San Francisco Residential Design Guidelines. Most of San Francisco does not have a formal Design Review process as described above. Instead, staff planners, concerned neighbors, commissioners, and supervisors weigh in with respect to the ambiguous intents and prescriptions of the Design Guidelines. The guidelines have been criticized for promoting the simplistic mimicry of neighboring structures. The language hasn't changed much over the years, but the diagrams and drawings within have been updated to allow for stylistic diversity while the definitions of "context" have grown richer, acknowledging "neighborhoods of mixed character." Our recent infill work in San Francisco owes a lot to the growing sophistication of the planning staff, led by Commissioner Dean Macris. In addition to the pioneering 1990s work of architects Stanley Saitowitz, David Baker, and Tanner, Leddy, Maytum & Stacy, much of the planning staff is hip to quality contemporary infill in cities like Vancouver, Amsterdam, Chicago, and New York. As a result, we are no longer subjected to hard-boiled interpretations of the Design Guidelines in which every project gets distilled to an insipid collage of its neighbors.

Two recent examples—one built and the other just starting construction—are a mixed-use building at 14th & Guerrero Streets and a new, eight-unit infill building on Nob Hill. The Guerrero Street project went through the planning process virtually unopposed. Working with staff planner Matt Snyder, we derived an assertively modern vocabulary from a quintessentially San Francisco syntax. Key elements for staff support included the gracious retail frontage and corner entry (enabled by a loophole in the code that allows the required rear yard to be used as a driveway); and the corrugated copper cladding for the corner was enthusiastically supported. The ubiquitous bay window was here interpreted as a boomerang volume that flexes over the property line within the prescribed bay window envelope.

The Nob Hill project was put through its paces, however, as we went before the Planning Commission for conditional use approval as well as two variances. When challenged directly by a commissioner about the project's decidedly modern design, I cited the Design Guidelines' reference to mixed neighborhood character, which begs the question of how best to "fit in" with a context that includes Brutalist high-rises, stucco Victorians, and the Terragni-esque Masonic Auditorium. The ensuing discussion among the commissioners and Zoning Administrator Larry Badiner centered on the purpose of the Design Guidelines to distill qualities of scale, proportion, access, and material and not to prescribe style. We received unanimous approval. ◉

The Architecture
of Patronage, Part II:

The Rise of the Anti-Patron

Mitchell Schwarzer

The modernist avant garde project fell apart for the same reason it had come into existence—an inevitable compulsion to challenge any and all authority. The opposition of artists and architects to industrial capitalism was based on the fiction of their possessing higher insight into the reality of modern times, and their assumption of the mantle of truthful cultural transformation from the business and political elites, their onetime patrons. Avant garde artists and architects had sought to become their own patrons, followers of their solo imaginations and magnetic dreamscapes. But, as the times wore on, it became apparent that there was no way to deny such insights to others. Inasmuch as the avant garde edifice was built upon the unique perceptions of the artist or architect, its goal was an emancipation of perception for everyone. This liberation had to be part of a broader liberation of humanity, one that in turn would submerge the avant garde.

The permanent youth rebellion begun in the 1950s in the United States (through such mass-media rebels as James Dean, Marlon Brando, and Elvis Presley) contains at its core key notions of the avant garde and the bohemian. Later, in the civil rights and student movements and counterculture of the 1960s, opposition and rebellion became a mass phenomenon. Terms like "the establishment" or "the system" came to represent the "other" of popular avant gardism—the little boring man in a gray flannel suit, the cracker riding with a shotgun on a southern road.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, things became less black and white. Opposition began to point here, there, and everywhere. Amid the woman's-, gay-, disabled-, elderly-, animal-, environmental-, and men's-rights movements, insurrection was mainstreamed. It was not long afterward that it was commodified.

Over the past fifteen years, in an era when Marx and Malcolm are out of vogue and DeCaprio and Xena brushstroke the nation's youth culture, big business is acutely aware that bohemian rumples and avant garde insurrection sells. A commercial for Miller Beer features shelled hipsters in a sub-normal, basketball suburbia grooving to the music of tasteless beer. The Gap tells

us that since Kerouac and Cassidy wore khakis, their intoxications and ramblings can be zipped into ours. Nike advertises athletic shoes through juxtapositions of alienation and otherness that are the perverse legacy of Dali and Beuys. And Apple Computers, in the most famous television commercial of all time, acquired cyber-coolness by smashing the Goliath of big brother; somehow, if you use a Macintosh you will think differently.

But have industrialists gained the upper hand in the arts? Are the art and architectural worlds now led by the titans of Disney, IBM, and McDonalds? Are billionaires like Larry Ellison and Bill Gates commissioning cutting-edge works of architecture? With few exceptions, the answer is no. Corporate sponsorship of the arts has not replaced the one-to-one relationship between patron and artist that existed before the avant garde rebellion. That earlier relationship had created an urbane and humanistic culture in the West, a set of works of art and architecture that were able to represent their societies precisely because those societies were more homogeneous, hierarchical, and far less pluralistic. Current arts and architectural patrons generally have much narrower ambitions and much more complex sce-

narios to contend with: including the rainbow of people excluded from the earlier white-male embrace of patron and artist.

Today, patrons like the Medici or even the Carnegies are rare, almost impossible. Business decisions are no longer the product of a single voice or family, one working long-term in the same place to produce a consistent product. Patrons in that old sense had sought immortality in beautiful art and redemption through majestic works of architecture. Old-style mercantile and later industrial patronage implied an admission of guilt in contributing to society's problems and a large measure of responsibility for fixing them. By contrast, today's service- and information-oriented economy admits no guilt and takes scant responsibility. The buzz from these industries is superficial hipness. Since companies seek almost nothing but profits and utility, why would they deeply invest in beauty and pleasure? Contemporary business looks at art from the point of view of sponsorship, not patronage. Companies are interested in how architecture and art can help sales, and yet what sells is determined most by market research. The visual arts are icing on a greenback cake.

The idea of either patron or artist as guide

to society's future is anachronistic. Neither has the upper hand in dictating the nature of reality. Both are caught alike in a web of opposition and rebellion. It's almost as if art and architecture have entered a neo-Middle Ages.

Alongside the commodification of avant garde rebellion and the transformation of patronage into sponsorship is a repudiation of avant garde creation, privilege, and freedom. Within the art and architectural worlds, the now-historical avant garde has been attacked as institution. Outside, artists and architects are opposed by the emergence of a curious anti-avant garde—the critical public, composed of hypersensitive viewers, over-users, nosy neighbors, all-too-special interest groups, and endlessly-proliferating lawyers. A century of celebration of marginality has opened the gates for an assault from the margins. The promotion of excess has invoked excessive intervention into the works of artists and architects. Avant garde opposition to middle-class entitlement has become public opposition against any and all privilege, including that of artistic and architectural experiment.

Nowadays, bold and radical plans are suspect. Grand designs to refashion urban movement, audacious sculptures to reconceive pub-

lic space, and all manner of artistic schemes to reorient or disorient perception are combatted and squelched by coalitions whose unity is based on mortared oppositional consciousness. In a world where everyone's a potential patron or artist, critical avant garde concepts like progress and originality are upended 180 degrees. The new tired buzzwords are context, convention, and community. The anti-patron has arrived.

Anti-patrons do not generally commission art or architecture. Instead, they throw design guidelines and lawsuits in the path of change. For a new museum to get built, for a bridge to be designed, or for an outdoor sculpture to be installed, it must run a steeplechase of interest groups and weightless bureaucracies. Art and architecture are subject to review and redesign by committees, public meetings, as well as opinion polls. The nation's patron, the National Endowment for the Arts, is more famous for the attacks mounted against radical art than for its paltry financial support of art. Even at the new Getty Center in Los Angeles, epitome of old-time patronage, neighborhood groups forced changes in building massing and the color of cladding materials. Why should the reflected glare of art ruin anyone's afternoon at the backyard swimming pool?

Over the past quarter-century, the once self-contained relationship of artist and patron has been riven by pluralistic and confrontational cross currents. The arts are understood less as a foundation or critique of reality than as an immersion within reality's fractured existence and polarizing eccentricities. Thus, while visual artists no longer represent dominant societal interests, as they did during the great age of artistic patronage, they can no longer claim exclusivity in confronting those interests. It's hard to be spectacularly oppositional when the numbed gloss of combat holds court on the Jerry Springer show and the Kenneth Starr inquisition.

Who, then, has an oppositional voice today? Can critical insights be heard in a sea of shouting individuals? Are avant garde movements passé? Must art and architecture find new directions, apart from the accomplice of patrons or the antagonism of the avant gardes?

A future that seems inescapable is ongoing artistic confrontation with mass society. But because the arts can no longer be detached from overall cultural production, because artists and architects are knotted with sponsors and critics and viewers, this confrontation will be different from those of the past. It will not be a pure, heroic struggle for utopia. Instead, it will take place increasingly on a flat, cliché-ridden terrain, one that is less metaphysical landscape than metatextual mediascape. After all, the earlier axes between artist and patron or artist vs. society have multiplied into swarming vectors. The world is gray and stained. The ragged constellations of the mass consumer and culture industry are now the insufferable yet inseparable relationship for art and architecture.

In Early Modern Europe, in the epoch of patronage, the visual arts became an open system, a set of journeys toward beauty reasoned atop a changing world. Later, in the age of the avant garde, the traces of this system released other trajectories that obliterated their own foundations and contours as they exploded toward new insights. For the future, it would be naive to think that anyone could turn down the heat generated by centuries of such activity. Enmeshed in the diversity and contradiction that are the postmodern condition, art and architecture are perpetually boiling over, regardless of who pays the heating bill. ◉

Confessions of a Design Reviewer:

Ten Guidelines for Coming Out as an Architect

Wendy Kohn

First, let me admit that my appointment to the Lower Downtown Design and Demolition Review Board of Denver, Colorado was, at least initially, like going undercover. Having faced Review Boards myself—designs and ego up there on the dartboard of public review—I jumped at the opportunity to take a seat on the other side of the table. I would adopt a persona befitting a city commissioner, keep my architectural allegiance to myself, and learn all the secrets to keeping one's best design work intact through a public review process.

The LDDDRB meets for the mandatory review of 200 sq. ft. penthouse pop-ups, the adaptive reuse of existing 1900s-era industrial warehouses, and the new construction of mixed-use buildings on huge 266- by 400-foot city blocks. The review is intended to safeguard and guide the development of one of the most extensive warehouse districts in the country. Nothing can be built in Lower Downtown Denver without this Board's approval.

I listened respectfully behind my name sign for the first several meetings, as the approval of truly horrific building designs stumbled over minute details, like the material expression of the driveway bollards. Interesting contemporary gestures were universally mocked as "totally incompatible" with the historic context. Architects were cut off mid-sentence with "we really must move on." I began having grad school flashbacks. Members of the public, usually the neighbors, read repetitive arguments over increased traffic and blocked views. "This is reality," I kept telling myself. "This is your chance to argue for good design, for diversity, for cities." But something blocked my arguments inside my head, and they expressed themselves publicly only as hot red cheeks and sweat pouring from my temples, as I was later, embarrassingly, told.

I was amazed to observe that no one in the room was impartial; in each meeting, every single speaker had an agenda. City staff wanted the Board to uphold their internal review and definitively to address any controversial item. Developers, for whom timeframe was fundamental, wanted, first, maximum envelope approval and, then, predictability—no complicated design

roadblocks to slow down construction. Individual Board members' agendas ranged from actively promoting "olde tyme" architecture, to consistently preventing any explicit design critique or advice (which might be construed as a "hint" to the architects) from entering the record. And the public looked to the Board to keep their neighborhood exactly as it looked right now, outside the boardroom window.

As I began to comment, I realized that I had an agenda too. This meant I couldn't keep my cover, forced me to come out. Like the architect applicants across the table, I needed to be able to talk about architecture as a proponent of the power of design and invention, without being dismissed as grandiose, ethereal, or naive.

I was fascinated by the additive effect of the Board's decisions: we were incremental urban designers. Although the design guidelines explicitly stated that no single decision could be cited as precedent for future decisions, it was clear that if our decisions were haphazard, the city's most active and valuable historic precinct would become a jumble.

Therefore, my agenda was to broadly construe the idea of "compatibility" (which appeared in the design guidelines like a nervous tic, even several times a sentence). I considered every submittal for its resounding effect on the shape of the city. Does this design promote an enriched and vital urban life for this neighborhood 50 to 100 years into the future?

Often, initially, I was chided by other Board members "We are not here to discuss philosophy." It took some time for me to figure out how, without burying all the passion, imagination, and persistence architecture practice breeds in us, to respond to such objections. But the ongoing melee of architectural presentations and their dissection by the Design Review Board finally led me to a conviction.

The key to facing design review as an architect, from either side of the table? Learn how to be an architect in public. It can require different techniques from the work of making buildings, giving lectures and presentations, wooing and working with clients. By the time I finished my term, I looked forward to design review meetings as intensely meaningful, collegial, and powerful discussions of what I most care about: shaping our constructed environment. And I seriously respected my colleagues on the Board.

Here are my top ten guidelines for coming out as an architect in the public realm of design review:

1. Watch your mouth. You risk alienating your audience merely by using the word *"parti."* While a Design Review Board may be responsible for approving your *parti*, neighborhood residents and at-large members often sit on review boards, and they don't feel especially confident with design-speak. Don't waste good will by making your audience work too hard to understand you. Your goal should be to talk architecture in plain language. (It might help to pretend you haven't been to design school.)

2. State your design intention and principles early on. At best, the design review process can be collaborative; at worst, adversarial and contentious. One of the greatest pitfalls is the Board's rejection of fundamental design assumptions late in the design process.

The most successful approval I witnessed won universal buy-in from the Board at the very first meeting. The architects outlined their analysis of the site and design issues, presented their basic diagram as a direct response to this analysis, and asked the Board to comment on their "reading" of the city. Throughout the ensuing review sessions, Board members evaluated the design development for its faith to the initial principles—just as did the architects.

3. Don't pander. It's worth understanding the multiple agendas at work, but group discussion is dynamic. As a Board member,

I rarely made a motion that hadn't been influenced by the arguments presented. And remember: Past performance doesn't guarantee future results. It's not the stock market, but the Board's focus does shift based upon the previous meeting, politicking in-between meetings, political currents in the city at-large, financial pressures from developers and public agencies, an empty coffee mug, or a rumbling stomach.

4. Frame the agenda. Your presentation should lead with a clear statement of what approvals you are seeking in that session, what guidelines you have identified as applicable to that design scope, and where you are asking the Board for interpretation or exceptions. You stand to gain from a focused discussion, initiated by you.

5. Respect time limits. Practice making the big, important points in the time specified. Once time's up, do not go on. Courtesy goes a long way during long meetings. If limits are unstated, confer with city staff in advance.

6. Stick to your submittal. Last-minute "updates" of the work you've already put before the committee often backfire. Board members and city staff have studied your submittal carefully, or at least have tried to digest it quickly during your presentation. A freak blizzard of design information disorients everyone—and looks like a snow job.

7. READ THE GUIDELINES. Most guideline documents display all the literary tricks of classical poetry. Read them for metaphor, paradox, tautology, and innuendo. You should know the sections applicable to your design submittal—and the opportunities for interpretation—better than the review board when you present your work.

8. Don't bury the evidence. Make drawings that specifically address the guidelines, and clearly identify how your design conforms and where you are asking the Board to grant exceptions. Make diagrams and other drawings to highlight conformance to relevant regulations. It is tempting to downplay what you foresee as the sticking points. But if you try to camouflage the issues, you'll appear untrustworthy. If you do slip something by the Board, at best you risk costing your client in delays when the oversight is caught later; at worst, you risk the great expense and hassle of a rescinded or appealed approval.

9. Confer early and often. Seek an advance meeting with city staff to review your proposed design direction, identify applicable design guidelines, and flag potential zoning issues. In most cases, city staff can give you an extremely accurate sense of where to place your effort in preparing for the review process.

It's also a good idea to attend at least one Board meeting prior to your first submittal. See what the Board is currently focusing on; appraise the most effective presentation methods for the space, room size, and attention spans; observe the nature of Board discussion and questions put to applicants.

10. Respect the process. It can be arduous and annoying, but in most cases design review is an honest attempt to improve the quality of the places we design and inhabit. It requires a partnership between the applicant and the Board, and the respect you show your potential partners will likely be reciprocated. Do the Board the courtesy of making a polished, professional presentation. Do yourself the courtesy of rehearsing the review session and preparing your responses to predictable criticisms. Ideally, design review will not be design defense, but an extended work session with an expanded client group—the public. ◉

Survivor:

The Ultimate Design Review Process

Kenneth Caldwell

Sylvia Kwan, FAIA, talks with Kenneth Caldwell about her unreal experience on reality TV.

Sylvia Kwan, one of the founders of the San Francisco-based firm Kwan Henmi Architects, was spotted by casting agents for the television show Survivor *in a Los Angeles restaurant. Although she scoffed at the idea when first approached, her family convinced her to try out. Building an elaborate structure was part of the show, but the design review process wasn't especially difficult. Indeed, her expertise at leading the process may have resulted in her early departure from the show. In that way, reality TV doesn't reward leadership. Nevertheless, she doesn't regret the decision to participate. We sat down with her to relive some of her experiences and see what lessons there might be for architects and everybody else.*

arcCA: It's fairly unusual for architects to be on television. We've seen them portrayed just a few times in sitcoms; *Mr. Ed* and *The Brady Bunch* come to mind. You were the first architect on *Survivor* right? You were representing a profession of well over a hundred thousand to some twenty million viewers. How do you think you came off?

Sylvia Kwan: Some of the other contestants said I was bossy, but I think I expressed leadership skills when they were needed, which was what it took to get the village built so the whole enterprise could begin. In a very basic way, I think I showed that architects can organize people around a good cause.

arcCA: What was your role in building the shelter, and what did you change?

Sylvia Kwan: Normally, the architect creates the site plan, develops the program, and designs the building. In this case, the drawings that we received were pretty much working drawings. They had the site plan, floor plans, roof plan, and kind of a structural plan.

Someone said, "Oh, well, Sylvia's an architect"—and I said, "Yeah, I'll take a look at the plans." And then I said, "It's fine that I'm an architect, but are there any contractors out there?" Because we had just met, remember. And that's when Gary, Papa Smurf, raised his hand. And he said, "Oh yes, I'm in construction." What you didn't see on the show was that he told me he hated architects.

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arcCA: An auspicious beginning. The theme of this issue is design review. Can you comment on that in relation to building the shelter?

Sylvia Kwan: I began pacing the site to measure it. The site plan showed that the shelter should be right at the mouth of the cave. We walked around and realized that the mouth of the cave probably was solid rock, and that's when we decided that we had to move the shelter away from the cave in order to get the supporting poles in the ground. We didn't know whether we had to adhere strictly to the set of plans, so I was nervous about the change. It turned out that there were a number of mistakes throughout the set of plans that required changes.

arcCA: So one of the first things you did was make a site adaptation! What other changes did you make?

Sylvia Kwan: The kitchen didn't work where they had put it. It was a good reminder to really study a site and spend time with it. I changed the kitchen location, but I set it—you now know my favorite word—orthogonally. I was really teased for that. I set it in a very symmetrical pattern around a central courtyard. The fire pit was built in the wrong place and we moved that. I kept thinking, "Maybe they are going to grade us on how beautiful this village is."

arcCA: You're kidding.

Sylvia Kwan: For example, there were palm fronds that were already knit together for the roof. There were no directions that told us one thing or another. The only clear instructions were, "If you don't finish this village, the game will not start."

I reviewed the drawings for a number of things. Number one, where was the prevailing wind coming from? That's one of the first things that you have to know in an island environment, is that the prevailing wind is a big factor in comfort or total discomfort. So I checked the tops of the trees and the way the palm trees were bending. I wanted to make sure that the shelter roof line responded to the direction of the prevailing wind to protect us from wind and rain.

The second thing I checked was the direction of the sun and how it would come from morning to afternoon, to make sure that the shelter was going to be in shade during the hot parts of the day, and then in the evening the breezes would come through and cool it. The third thing I checked was that it was very important for the shelter to be level. And thank God, they gave us a level.

arcCA: Did your fellow tribespeople get into reviewing the design?

Sylvia Kwan: Since only a few of us knew anything about building, no. But there were some suggestions about things that we could add to the design to make life more pleasant.

For example, we added two horizontal ropes that were used for a clothesline and also some nails to hang things on, but I had to remind them to place them above eye level so they didn't hurt themselves. In that way, it was similar to reality. The architect figures out the idea and the design review process influences the details.

arcCA: Looking back, do you see yourself then as the leader of that effort, and was that maybe a negative thing in the context of the game?

Sylvia Kwan: I learned that what it takes to be a good architect is not the same as what it takes to win a reality TV show and end up being the final survivor.

arcCA: So, the very characteristic that has allowed you to succeed in practice is something that maybe isn't valued in entertainment. Can you talk a little more about reality versus a reality show?

Sylvia Kwan: All the things that matter in real life and that distinguish you and make you a special person, whether you're a natural leader or you're talented or you're respected for whatever you do, or you're older and maybe wiser, all those things don't matter as soon as you pass through the "Alice in Wonderland" door of *Survivor*. Suddenly all of those things can become a liability.

arcCA: What did you do to prepare for the reality of this non-reality?

Sylvia Kwan: I trained a couple of times with a Boy Scout troop leader to learn how to build shelters, how to lash poles with vines, how to start a fire, and how to identify what's edible and what's poisonous.

arcCA: You did this on your own?

Sylvia Kwan: Yes. I was prepared for a much more rudimentary kind of shelter. My husband Denis was also a Boy Scout, and he taught me a lot. We actually built a half-scale model of a shelter on our front lawn. I felt confident that I knew how to build a shelter. But of course, I got there and all that was out the window because of the plans they gave us.

arcCA: Do you think your participation in the show will

It sounds sort of hokey, but after we finished the shelter, people began to sing.

That reminds you about the power of architecture, even humble architecture.

change or influence a broader public perception of architects?

Sylvia Kwan: I think if you look at the show that I did at *Survivor Live,* you will hear Jeff Probst, the *Survivor* host, say something complimentary like, "I cannot think of a single survivor that's had more influence at the beginning of a show—to get the show rolling—than Sylvia did because of her experience and expertise as an architect, to build this very complicated shelter and village." I think the public can take away different things from this show. Architects can be practical, they can exhibit leadership, and some of them are women.

arcCA: I think most people understand that architects are involved in aesthetic decisions in designing the building environment. But what else do you think you showed?

Sylvia Kwan: In one way it gets back to basics: health, safety, and welfare. Even in a strange environment like *Survivor,* those factors come into play.

I think that viewers are going to get that an architect is an organized person who has the ability to visualize. We can put something on a piece of paper and make it a three-dimensional reality, something that looks good, is structurally sound, and protects you. One of the best things about this particular season is that it shows a real architect doing a real project instead of the faux architects you see in movies and on TV. A realistic portrayal of an architect in popular culture has finally been made, albeit by accident.

arcCA: What was your biggest personal challenge?

Sylvia Kwan: Learning to swim. When the

casting people approached me in a Los Angeles restaurant, I said, "No, I can't even swim." I took lessons, but I really learned when I fell in the ocean because our raft capsized. That was before the show actually began, when they were taking footage of us paddling around the islands. I actually felt exhilarated, because I didn't panic and was able to swim safely over to the larger boat.

arcCA: How has being on this show influenced your practice?

Sylvia Kwan: It's a great way to connect. Many of my old clients are eager to talk to me and find out what it was really like. I think our clients are fascinated by how architecture really played a role in this event. I've been asked to speak at a professional conference on the topic of building alliances. Isn't that funny? I think some of the aspects of the show that are not like reality nevertheless actually underscore what is important in practice now. We have to be allied with contractors from the outset, whether it is design/build, CM at risk, or negotiated bid. When I see a logical alliance that's going to make total sense, and everything just falls into place, we will pursue it. One way that the show changed me, and in turn the practice, is that now I know not to fight so hard. You know, if something isn't meant to be, it's not meant to be. I used to knock my head against the wall. If it is a square peg in a round hole and you can't make it fit, move on, or re-engineer it later after a hiatus and everybody can take a breather.

arcCA: How did going away for seven weeks affect your firm?

Sylvia Kwan: The absence continued something that the firm had already begun. If I had been the CEO, like I used to be, it would have been impossible. We are in the process of transition and making new partners. This was a great opportunity for them to take care of their market area without me hovering around as the go-to person.

arcCA: So, it was a good thing in terms of succession.

Sylvia Kwan: Just like me learning to swim.

arcCA: What else did you find out about yourself?

Sylvia Kwan: What I took for granted as positive traits maybe aren't necessarily all they're cracked up to be. Those traits don't benefit you necessarily on a show like this. I found that I could not be deceitful, even though I said I could be for the show. After the second episode aired, my son called me and said, "Mom, my friends and I were saying how clueless you were." And by that he really meant guileless.

Before this show, my idea of camping was to visit our friend's rustic ranch and stay at the nearest inn. I found out that if I am ever on a deserted island, I probably could survive. I could find food. I could make a fire. I can build a shelter. That kind of knowledge has given me a whole other kind of confidence.

arcCA: Even though you got voted off after the third episode, tell us about a positive moment.

Kwan: It sounds sort of hokey, but after we finished the shelter, people began to sing. That reminds you about the power of architecture, even humble architecture. ◉

Sand Hill Road:

Property Values and Architectural Controls

Tim Culvahouse, FAIA

Elsewhere in this issue, historian David Gebhard describes how the appreciation of aesthetic character and historically significant environments led to the rise of design review in America, and the role that tourism played in that rise. Yet tourism is only one kind of attraction to built places. The Sand Hill Road Corridor in Menlo Park and Palo Alto is the epitome of another: the attraction of businesses to supportive environments. Design review plays an important role in the development of such environments—and their economic value.

Menlo Park and Palo Alto have distinct zoning regulations but similar architectural controls for commercial properties along Sand Hill Road. In Menlo Park, these properties, continuously adjacent to residential areas, have, practically speaking, no permitted uses. All allowable uses—professional, administrative, and executive offices; research and development facilities; and convalescent homes—are conditional, requiring a use permit. Development regulations are strict, allowing structures to cover at most 20 percent of the site, with no less than 30 percent of the site landscaped. Building height is limited to 35 feet, with a floor area ratio (FAR) of only 25 percent. Additional regulations may be required at the discretion of the Planning Commission. In Palo Alto, zoning itself is much less restrictive. For example, the Community Commercial district that includes the Stanford Shopping Center has the Shopping Center itself capped at 1.4 million square feet (a .46 FAR).

But both cities have demanding architectural controls. In Menlo Park, the Planning Commission is responsible for the controls, which

require "that the general appearance of the structures is in keeping with character of the neighborhood; that the development will not be detrimental to the harmonious and orderly growth of the city; and that the development will not impair the desirability of investment or occupation in the neighborhood."

Palo Alto's Architectural Review Board—comprised (unlike Menlo Park's Planning Commission) chiefly of architects—has a similar charge, with the addition that it "encourage the attainment of the most desirable use of land and improvements" and "promote visual environments which are of high aesthetic quality and variety and which, at the same time, are considerate of each other."

What architectural norms guide review? According to Bill Phillips, a financial manager for Stanford University's Real Estate Operations, Menlo Park has long valued the shallow roof pitches and deep eaves of Cliff May, crystallized in his *Sunset* magazine headquarters. In Palo Alto, the low-key modernism of William Wurster—who designed the Oak Creek Apartments and a medical office building at 1101 Welch Road—is also an influence. (With the exception of Stanford West Apartments in Palo Alto, the New Urbanism has had little impact in this area.)

Palo Alto goes beyond the general definition of architectural controls to spell out sixteen criteria for project approval, addressing compatibility with the Comprehensive Plan and the immediate environment; appropriateness to function; compatibility with areas having a unified design or historical character; harmonious transitions; compatibility with on- and off-site improvements; internal sense of order; desirability; open space; sufficiency and compatibility of ancillary functions; access and circulation; preservation and integration of natural features; appropriate use of materials, textures, colors, and details; functionality and unity of landscape; suitability and drought-resistance of plant material; and energy efficiency.

The last two of these criteria point toward an increasingly significant issue for design review in both cities: sustainability. Phillips notes that a board's focus shifts, reflecting both the ongoing assessment of prior decisions and emerging issues. Since roughly 2002, he identifies sustainability as the principal concern of the Palo Alto board.

Peninsula architect Bill Bocook agrees that sustainability is now a prominent concern for both cities, but that it has added to rather than displaced other concerns. Bocook's design for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation headquarters in Menlo Park was seminal in stimulating interest in green building in these communities, as well as at Stanford University. The first LEED Gold building in California and the fifth in the U.S., the project began in 1999 with a charrette involving officials from Menlo Park, San Mateo County, and Stanford, opening a discussion of sustainability. Green building consultant Lynn Simon and landscape architect Cheryl Barton contributed cutting-edge expertise to the effort.

How do these processes affect property values? Gary Wimmer, partner-in-charge of Ford Land Company, credits architectural controls with raising the value of Ford's several Sand Hill Road properties, not only by establishing standards for the quality and appearance of buildings, but also by restricting density. Lower density reserves significant areas for landscaping, which makes the setting more attractive; it also reduces supply. The combination of greater appeal and less availability intensifies demand, increasing property value. For example, in 1986, 3000 Sand Hill Road, developed in 1969 and owned and operated by Ford Land Company, garnered the highest rental prices per square foot of any office space in the country, including Manhattan. The project continues to be cited in articles worldwide as a premier venture capital mecca and office location. While Ford Land typically holds and leases the properties they develop, Wimmer believes he would feel similarly if he were building for sale. To him, as to Ford Land Company's founder, the late Tom Ford, the challenging design review processes of Menlo Park and Palo Alto are worth the trouble. ◉

Under the Radar

East Oakland School of the Arts, Oakland
Stoner Meek Architecture and Urban Design, San Francisco

East Oakland School of the Arts (EOSA) forms a geographic and cultural elision between a creek that connects the Oakland hills to San Francisco Bay and the tense urban jungle that is East Oakland. Supported by funding from the State of California, the former Castlemont High School campus has been divided into four "small schools," of which EOSA is one.

The project reuses an old, long-abandoned industrial arts building at the edge of the campus. Whether industrial or fine, the arts are about making things, and the building celebrates this spirit of anticipation, of the unfinished, of evolving creative and productive energy. The design vocabulary emphasizes building as backdrop, students and their work as foreground. The architects abstracted the form of the original industrial shed into fragments of walls rather than rooms, patches of sunlight rather than institutionalized enclosures, ambiguities of interiority rather than the explicitness of inside and out.

A concrete wall formed with wave-like boards—a symbolic representation of the creek—serves for sitting, for supporting a gallery, as a table for sculpture, as an articulation of an enclosed outdoor space, and as a reflection of handcraft and material. Images of the trees along the creek are imprinted through layers of fence and building as sculpture, etching, shadow, and text.

Five narrow windows along the north wall—which has been disengaged from the five bays of the building by a swath of openings running the length of the building—offer not views but instead a more subtle relation to the outdoors, through light and a place to read. At each win-

dow is a lectern that holds a book that has become a part of the school's curriculum. A quotation from the book's author is etched into the window, along with images of birds, some in flight, others perched on a line of text.

The architects share with the school community the belief that words carry far greater weight than buildings in the establishment of cultural and social values, so the architecture is a backdrop for words as well as for social exchange.

At the end of one of the academic halls is the complete text of Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech, stenciled onto the concrete wall in red paint, a block of text eight feet wide and twelve feet high. Above, two skylights illuminate phrases at random as the sun moves across the sky, and at these moments one will occasionally hear a student exclaim, "Let freedom ring!" ◉

Project Team

Architect: Stoner Meek Architecture and Urban Design
      Architects: Jill Stoner and Susannah Meek
      Project Designers: Dan Perez and
      Katharine Favret

Owner: Oakland Unified School District

M.E.P. Engineer: United Engineers of San Francisco

Structural Engineer: Santos & Urrutia Structural Engineers

General Contractor: Kudsk Construction

Tree Translation: Carla Dominguez

photography by Dan Perez, Stoner Meek Architecture and Urban Design.

Review

Our Valley. Our Choice. Building a Livable Future for the San Joaquin Valley

Great Valley Center, 2007, Heyday Books.
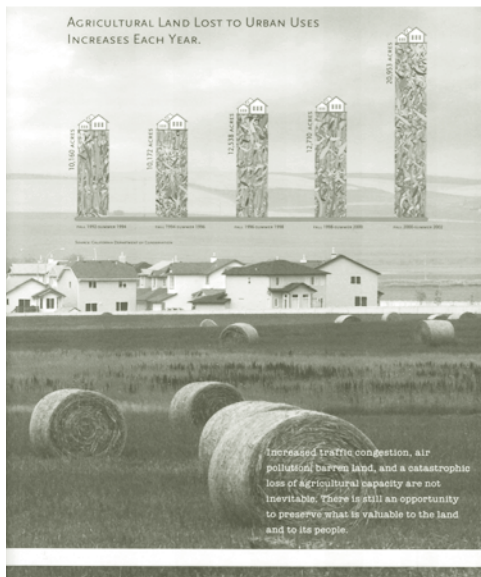

Margit Aramburu

OK, you want to tell 3.8 million people who live in a 275-mile long valley including eight counties that they need to wake up and *carpe diem.* You have a clear message, you have funding, and you have a ticking clock—and a new planning process—the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint. The Great Valley Center, the nonprofit organization that could, has written and printed a small volume that *shows* the way to the future. In its colorful, 112 pages in a comfortable, softbound, seven-inch by nine-inch volume, the past, present, and future are clearly laid out. But who is the audience for this volume, and will those who need to get the message receive and understand it? Local and state government, development interests, and more sophisticated policy wonks have already come to the party; it's the larger populous that now needs to be informed and engaged.

The Great Valley Center has done a yeoman's job finding funding, developing data, and convening annual conferences to inform a broader audience about the array of issues facing the San Joaquin Valley today. The Center's efforts were kick-started in 2001 with a $6 million grant from the James Irvine Foundation. The Great Valley Center's efforts resulted in the Governor's June 2005 Executive Order creating the San Joaquin Partnership: a task force of state cabinet members, agency heads, local government officials, and private sector members to develop a Strategic Action Proposal by Halloween 2006.

To obtain this commitment from the governor, however, the Great Valley Center had to set forth the facts on the region dubbed a future

AGRICULTURAL LAND LOST TO URBAN USES
INCREASES EACH YEAR.

Increased traffic congestion, air pollution, barren land, and a catastrophic loss of agricultural capacity are not inevitable. There is still an opportunity to preserve what is valuable to the land and to its people.

"Appalachia of the West" by the California Senate's May 2003 Ending Poverty in California committee. San Joaquin Valley has a higher growth rate, high unemployment (8.2% versus the state-wide 5.3%) and high levels of poverty (one in five Valley residents lives in poverty). Other studies identify high dropout rates from high school and high teen pregnancy rates. Growth of towns has spiraled, resulting in zero rental vacancy rates and schools made largely of modular buildings.

The October 2006 Strategic Action Proposal—*The San Joaquin Valley: California's 21st Century Opportunity*—further defines the challenges to the San Joaquin Valley: average per capita income 32.2% lower than the state average; college attendance 50% below state average; violent crime 24% higher than state average; access to healthcare 31% lower than state average; and air quality among the worst in the nation. And the Strategic Action Proposal sets out an admirable suite of initiatives for the next decade: grow a diversified, globally-competitive economy supported by a highly skilled workforce, create a model K-12 public education system, implement an integrated framework for sustainable growth, build a 21st century transportation mobility system, attain clean air standards, and develop high-quality health and human services. For the next two years, the drive would be overseen by a board of 36+ civic leaders and local, state, and federal officials and will be funded from July 2006 through June 2007 by $5 million included in the current state budget.

Our Valley. Our Choice. is easy and fun to "read": the book is largely photos and charts illustrating the past, present, and future of the Valley. It includes a pithy message from Great Valley Center founder and president, Carol Whiteside, and short essays on "People and Geography" by Gerald Haslam, "The Valley Farmer" by Tom Gallo, and "Building for the Future" by Reza Assemi. Whiteside leads with ten very valuable thoughts: have a big vision, consider the earth, make great plans, protect the edges, add value with good design, build communities that work together, start now, create strong neighborhoods, provide incentives, and keep focused.

But the release of this book can only be one of several ways to reach out to a population of many, diverse ethnic groups, many of them recent immigrants. The Valley has a high percentage of illiterate adults (the state average is 25%) and non-English speakers. And in an age when the Internet is replacing the printed word for many, the San Joaquin Valley has less access to computers and the Internet than other parts of the state. The challenge to the Great Valley Center will be to take the message clearly and succinctly captured by *Our Valley. Our Choice.* and translate it to its 3.8 million-member audience. The message will have to be on multiple media—radio, television, Internet, and newsprint as well as in book form. And the message will have to reach difficult-to-access folks—perhaps through local community meetings in different languages, or through churches, clubs, or other community gathering spots. Let us hope a creative and thoughtful outreach program is part of the process to guide a San Joaquin Valley-driven vision of its future. The professionals can plan and plan, but not until the community as a whole buys in will any plan on paper become a concrete reality. ◉

Gems of the city:

A list of S.F.'s top

25

John King

Put any group of 20 architects in a room and ask them to choose the buildings in their city that are of special significance, and I'll wager no two lists will be alike.

But when that opinionated mob is also the board of directors of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, its verdict arrives with a certain gravitas.

So say hello to the semiofficial list of San Francisco's top 25 buildings, divided neatly into five choices in five categories: religious, residential, commercial, historic and civic.

And let the second-guessing begin.

There are beloved landmarks such as the Palace of Fine Arts and controversial newcomers, including the steel-sheathed federal tower at Seventh and Mission Streets. You've got a block of century-old homes for the wealthy across from the Presidio, and low-income apartment buildings on Sixth Street and in the Tenderloin.

There's the big-eared Transamerica Pyramid and the sublime Palace Hotel—two very different icons from very different eras.

"Our goal was to find the gems in our city that can be enjoyed by both architects and the public," says Zigmund Rubel, president of the local chapter's board and a principal at the firm Anshen+Allen. "We also wanted a mixture of turn-of-the-century buildings and more contemporary works."

The list comes two months after the national AIA released the results of an online survey that produced what it calls "America's 150 favorite structures." Gimmicky as all get-out, but irresistible—which is why the institute's Web site received more than 5 million hits in the next three days.

This list doesn't involve a public survey. Nor is it the result of a consultation with the San Francisco chapter's 2,300 members.

Instead, the board was prodded to take a stand by chapter Executive Director Margie O'Driscoll.

(Note: The chapter covers only San Francisco and Marin counties. That's why the rest of the Bay Area is ignored.)

"Our objective was pretty clear," O'Driscoll says. "We want to inspire people to look at buildings and think about them critically, in both a positive and negative sense."

O'Driscoll wanted a brazen batch of just five faves—but architects are a breed that loves nothing more than to finesse details, so instead there are five discrete lists with five buildings each. The board gathered in March and started whittling away.

Many choices are irrefutable—you can't fight City Hall, at least not Arthur Brown Jr.'s Beaux Arts masterpiece—and other buildings deserve acclaim simply because they bring joy. For instance, the Conservatory of Flowers adds a magical whimsy to Golden Gate Park, even though the parts were assembled in 1878 from a kit shipped over from England.

Similarly, who can begrudge Bernard Maybeck's romantic Palace of Fine Arts? It's a revered survivor of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition—even though it happens to be fake, a 1960s concrete replica of the plaster original.

And this being San Francisco, there's a conscientious effort to be (architecturally) diverse. The Haas-Lilienthal House from 1886, the very embodiment of Victorian style, takes a bow; so does the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, a triumph of cool abstraction that opened in 2005.

We also see—and I doubt this was the board's intent—that San Francisco's allure lies in geography and neighborhood context as opposed to architectural innovation.

The Palace of the Legion of Honor is an exquisite 1916 knockoff of neo-classical Paris. The old Crown-Zellerbach Building at 1 Bush St. is an exquisite 1959 knockoff of the modern towers perfected by Skidmore Owings & Merrill in Chicago and New York.

Aside from 1917's Hallidie Building with its glass curtain wall, you won't find design breakthroughs; the best buildings on the list distill what came before, as with 1 Bush St. and the Palace of the Legion of Honor.

The Federal Building and the de Young are welcome experiments by renowned outsiders. The same goes for 560 Mission St.—a boxy blue tower from 2002 that shows how refined Cesar Pelli can be.

As for the second-guessing mentioned above, I'm thrilled to see Curran House and the Plaza Apartments on the list: Each of these young housing complexes is a humane example of high design for people with low incomes.

But where are San Francisco's jazzy office towers from the late 1920s? A skyscraper like George Kelham's Shell Building at 100 Bush St. has an intoxicating pizzazz you won't find at the Pyramid or 1 Bush.

Rubel concedes the inherent subjectivity of a list hammered out over a conference table in an hour of spirited debate.

"What we came up with is representative of San Francisco, and it's the result of consensus," Rubel says. "With more time, maybe we would have tweaked it a bit." ◉

top: Conservatory of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, 1878 (restoration architects, 2003: Architectural Resources Group), photo by David Wakely
bottom: Plaza Apartments, Sixth and Howard streets, 2006, Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects and Paulett Taggart Architects, photo by Tim Griffith

Selecting the 25

Zigmund Rubel, AIA
President, AIA San Francisco

In concert with the National AIA 150 survey of America's favorite architecture, the AIA San Francisco Chapter board of directors wanted to give San Francisco residents a chance to choose their favorite buildings. The *San Francisco Chronicle* and its urban design writer, John King, agreed to support this idea by running a survey of the public on the SF Gate web page during National Architecture Week.

The board's initial idea was to select 150 buildings within the city, from among which the public could choose, so that the number of choices would align with the sesquicentennial anniversary number. Yet technology was not on our side: the *Chronicle* advised us that its web site was only robust enough to handle a choice of five in a survey. The board's task became both simpler and more challenging: how to narrow down the list to five buildings in a city filled with so many distinct and memorable possibilities.

Margie O'Driscoll, AIA San Francisco Executive Director, gave the board our homework for the March meeting: each of us was to bring a list of five of our favorite buildings in San Francisco. Then we could fight it out.

Opening our discussion of how to choose five finalists, we agreed that they needed to be occupiable buildings—thus excluding, for example, the Golden Gate Bridge (America's No. 4 choice in the national survey). We also agreed that they needed to offer memorable experiences and to be either quintessentially San Francisco or notably rebellious. The board felt it important that the choices be understandable by the public through experience rather than as stylish objects. Getting to five, however, was daunting.

It occurred to me that we might make things easier by proposing five surveys—one for each weekday during Architecture Week—organized by building type, with five options for each type. The meeting quickly became more charged. The restraints of web technology were overcome, and architecture governed. The board agreed on five building types: Civic, Commercial, Historic, Residential, and Religious.

The list of buildings initially prepared was quickly distributed to the appropriate categories. We then brainstormed additional possibilities, using Mitchell Schwarzer's new book, *Guide to San Francisco Bay Area Architecture,* as a resource. When the categories became populated with an adequate number of choices, they were read aloud.

Negotiating and bartering took place. Some choices generated more conversation then others. In the end, the list represented a balance of traditional San Francisco building fabric, woven with stitches of newer buildings. The experience of architecture is timeless, the memories diverse, and the choices of buildings for the list represented a varied compilation of style, period, and utility.

TOP 25

The top 25 buildings in San Francisco, according to the board of directors of the San Francisco chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Religious

Grace Cathedral, 1051 Taylor St., 1928, Lewis Hobart

St. Mary's Cathedral, 1111 Gough St., 1971, Pietro Belluschi, Pier Luigi Nervi and McSweeney, Ryan & Lee

Temple Emanu-el, 2 Lake St., 1926, Arthur Page Brown

Swedenborgian Church, 2107 Lyon St., 1894, Arthur Page Brown

First Unitarian Church, 1187 Franklin St., 1888, George Percy/1970, Callister Payne & Rosse

Residential

Plaza Apartments, Sixth and Howard Streets, 2006, Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects and Paulett Taggart Architects

Curran House, 145 Taylor St., 2005, David Baker + Partners, Architects

3200 block of Pacific Avenue, houses from 1900 to 1913 designed by architects including Ernest Coxhead, Bernard Maybeck, Willis Polk and William Knowles

Russell House, 3778 Washington St., 1952, Erich Mendelsohn

Haas-Lilienthal House, 2007 Franklin St., 1886, Peter R. Schmidt

Commercial

San Francisco Federal Building, 90 Seventh St., 2007, Morphosis/SmithGroup

1 Bush St. (former Crown-Zellerbach Building), 1959, Skidmore Owings & Merrill and Hertzka & Knowles

Hallidie Building, 130 Sutter St., 1917, Willis Polk

Transamerica Pyramid, 600 Montgomery St., 1972, William Pereira

JPMorgan Chase Building, 560 Mission St., 2002, Cesar Pelli

Historic

Palace Hotel, 2 New Montgomery St., 1909, Trowbridge and Livingston

Circle Gallery, 140 Maiden Lane, 1948, Frank Lloyd Wright

Palace of Fine Arts, 3301 Lyon St., 1915, Bernard Maybeck

War Memorial Opera House and Veterans Building, Civic Center, 1932, Arthur Brown Jr. and G. Albert Lansburgh

Conservatory of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, 1878 (restoration architects, 2003: Architectural Resources Group)

Civic

M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, Golden Gate Park, 2005, Herzog & de Meuron and Fong & Chan Architects

City Hall, Civic Center, 1915, Bakewell & Brown

Yerba Buena Gardens: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 1994, Fumihiko Maki; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, 1994, James Stewart Polshek; Metreon, 1999, SMWM, Gary Handel + Associates

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 151 Third St., 1995, Mario Botta, Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum

Palace of the Legion of Honor, Lincoln Park, 1924, George Applegarth

Source: American Institute of Architects San Francisco

Design
Guidelines
Guidelines

Ellis A. Schoichet, AIA

In 2004-5, I volunteered to sit on San Mateo County's Planning and Building Task Force. I was invited to join the Task Force as a representative of AIA San Mateo County, of which I am a Board Member, currently serving as 2007 President. I accepted the assignment, because I have a keen interest in how oversight regulations and review processes affect my clients and the quality of the architecture that they can build. I hoped to have a tempering influence on the County's sometimes Kafkaesque review process.

The jury's still out on that, but since then I've been following efforts to increase the level of design regulation in the City of San Mateo, the County's Emerald Hills jurisdiction, and the Town of Hillsborough (not a comprehensive list). Beginning in Spring '06, it seemed an overwhelming task to evaluate and weigh-in on each proposal that came to my attention. The positive side to this rising tide of bureaucratic activity is that it forced me to reevaluate my thinking regarding public regulation of design. After carrying a knee-jerk negative attitude around with me for years, I took the time to examine the motivations of those who advocate design regulation, their growing impact on our communities, and what it all means to the architectural profession.

The trend is inescapable: as time goes by, architects face ever increasing levels of design regulation. As an architect who focuses a considerable portion of my practice on trying to create designs that are meaningful on many different levels, I find the language of some of the recent proposals deeply disturbing. They have an increasing tendency to eviscerate the practice of architecture, limiting discussion of the merits of a design to only the most simplistic level. Contrast an excerpt from the original enabling language adopted by San Mateo County in 1976 with the language of a 2006 proposal for revised design guidelines in Emerald Hills. The excerpt from 1976 describes the County's intent and goals in seeking to regulate the design of projects on private property:

"Regulation of design should not be so rigidly enforced that individual initiative is precluded in the design of any particular building or substantial additional expense incurred; rather, the regulation exercised should only be the minimum necessary to achieve the overall objectives . . . . Appropriate design is based upon the suitability of a building for its purposes, upon the appropriate use of sound materials and upon the principles of harmony and proportion in the elements of the building . . . ."

Compare the language above with the following excerpts from 2006:

"...a home . . . may appear massive or bulky, if the building shape and/or façade is too simple. Simple forms often appear more massive and larger, while houses with more variety in their forms appear less massive and often more interesting."

"...massive or boxy styles (such as Mediterranean stucco) are discouraged . . . . avoid revivalist styles."

"When planning a new home or second story addition, begin with a primary roof form. Consider additions to the primary roof such as secondary roof forms and dormers that may serve to reduce the home's apparent mass and scale, provide visual interest and have an appropriate number of roof forms. Additional roof forms shall be architecturally compatible with the primary roof form's slope and material."

The language reads more like a recitation of lay opinion and personal stylistic preference than a call for creativity and design quality. The last one is a special treat, apparently excerpted from a lecture on building morphology given by the design professor from Hell.

As this type of language seduces one community after another, I've become convinced that it is having a destructive influence on design quality rather than the hoped-for improvement. Framed too narrowly, these guidelines cross the line that should exist between a governing agency's rights to define goals and provide guidance and incentives, and property owners' rights to set their own agendas for architectural expression.

My unease with guidelines that attempt to design the structures they regulate stems from the way in which they erode the ability of a designer to propose creative solutions. In the end, they reward superficiality in the design of structures, penalizing those who pursue new or challenging approaches. I consider design guidelines to be a sort of "Cliff's Notes" for design—an abridged version, a quick summary of the broad and complex topic of architectural design. While they can be beneficial in some ways, in a bureaucratic setting it's just too easy to give them more weight than is justified:

The harried designer says, *"It doesn't really matter how it looks, it follows all of the guidelines!"*

The conscientious Planning Department staffer says, *"Boy, this sure looks great, but it doesn't follow the design guidelines unless you go back and slap a couple more dormers on it."*
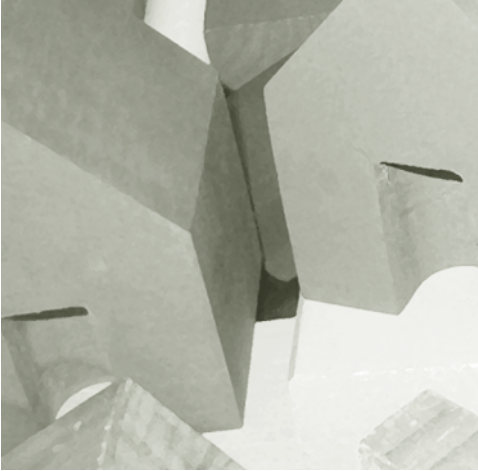
These examples may sound far-fetched to some, but in the trenches of Bay Area design regulation I've seen it all.

Design guidelines that are too specific limit the range of possible solutions to those that can be imagined by the individuals crafting the language. It is a *presumptive design* approach, in which those who write the guidelines presume to make decisions that in most cases are better left to someone familiar with the specific site conditions, owner needs, and neighbor concerns. No matter how well composed, a written standard can only be reasonably applied to a limited range of conditions. The narrower and more rigid the standard, the fewer conditions to which it will reasonably apply.

In the end, an intelligent, independent design review process may be the key element that makes design guidelines effective in regulating design without killing it. Despite the pitfalls, an independent design review body can provide the perspective and skills necessary to interpret design guidelines in the context of the actual facts of a case. Design review bodies can evaluate the applicability of guidelines to a particular situation and render decisions that balance the needs of all interests at play in the realization of a particular project.

A well-crafted, balanced design guideline and design review process won't dilute or eliminate the ability of competent architects to present creative solutions to the problems they face. When the guidelines and/or review process are orphaned from one another, or poorly structured and overly restrictive, designers are left an unpleasant choice. They can take refuge in the safety of known, tried-and-true solutions, or they can face a review process of indeterminate length and uncertain outcome irrespective of the merit of the design.

Based on the above reasoning, I propose the following criteria for evaluating design regulations. For lack of a better name, I refer to them as *Design Guidelines Guidelines:*

1. Legislation and/or administrative rules regulating design must establish an independent design review body as a companion to the adoption of design guidelines, and vice-versa.

2. Design guidelines should clearly state the goals of the community and encourage designers to work creatively to achieve these goals, rather than presumptively telling them how to design or defining what designs are acceptable. They should not be compendia of the opinions and subjective personal taste of neighborhood interest groups. They should provide for evolving sensibilities, changing tastes, and future technologies. And, where sample designs and other specifics are included in a design guidelines document, it should be clearly established that such examples and illustrations are suggestions not intended to be definitive or mandatory.

3. The design review body should be granted the administrative tools they need to stand up for quality design, to reject poor design, and to interpret and adapt guidelines to each individual situation. Broad representation on design review bodies is beneficial, but a significant proportion of the body should have some level of expertise in a relevant design field. Interpretation of design guideline applicability and/or compliance should not reside entirely in the hands of laypersons or Planning Department staffers. ◉

David Meckel, FAIA

NIMBY acronyms

NIMTOO   Not in my term of office
LULU's   Locally unaccepted land uses
NIABY   Not in anybody's backyard
NIMBL   Not in my bottom line
NOPE   Not on planet earth
CAVE   Citizens against virtually everything
BANANA   Build absolutely nothing at or near anyone
www.gov.ns.ca

A list of planning terms that would sound very provocative if voiced by R&B legend Barry White
Brown Act
CEQA
Density Bonus
Downzone
EIR
Impact Fees
LAFCO
Neg Dec
PUD
Prezoning
Definitions can be found at *www.ceres.ca.gov*

Top anti-development web site results from a 'Save the ...' search
Save the Rainforest
Save the Bay
Save the Redwoods
Save the Trees
Save the Dunes
Save the River
Save the 76 Ball
www.google.com

Search asking 'What does ADR stand for?'
Adverse Drug Reaction
Average Daily Rate
Administrative Dispute Resolution
Alzheimer's Disease Review
Ammunition Disposition Request
Architectural Design Review
Automatic Dialogue Replacement
www.thefreedictionary.com

Zoning terms developed in the last few decades
Flexible Zoning
Form Based Zoning
Incentive Zoning
Inclusionary Zoning
Overlay Zoning
Performance Zoning
www.apa.org

Results from an Avery Index search of 'design + review'
8 records related to San Francisco
4 records related to Seattle
1 record related to Santa Barbara

Example of a title of one of these articles:
"Aesthetics by Legislation: San Francisco's Attempt to Preserve its Image," by Mitchell Schwarzer, *Crit,* Fall 1986

Last journal to dedicate an entire issue to the subject of design review:
Arcade, Spring 2003
library.cca.edu

Some quotations about committees in general
"A committee can make a decision that is dumber than any of its members." David Coblitz
"Committee: a group of people who individually can do nothing but as a group decide that nothing can be done." Fred Allen
"There is no monument dedicated to the memory of a committee." Lester J. Pourciau
"To get something done, a committee should consist of no more than three people, two of whom are absent." Robert Copeland
"A committee is a cul-de-sac down which ideas are lured and then quietly strangled." Sir Barnett Cocks
www.quotationspage.com

Follow-up: big box beats modern icon
We reported in arcCA 06.3, "Preserving Modernism," that IBM Building 25 in San Jose, designed by John Bolles, FAIA, in the late 50s, was the subject of a California Preservation Foundation lawsuit against Lowe's, which plans to demolish the structure. Lowe's has prevailed (after two court rulings and two votes by the San Jose City Council), but as part of an agreement with the city must contribute $300,000 toward historic preservation projects.
www.mercurynews.com

1 Kearny Street
San Francisco
Office of Charles F. Bloszies, AIA

The 1902 Mutual Savings Bank Building, by William Curlett, is one of the few survivors of the devastating fire that followed the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. This French Renaissance Revival building was paired in 1964 with an addition by Clark & Beuttler in association with Charles Moore. Moore's abstract interpretation of the original building's massing reflected the struggle of early post-Modernism to discover an appropriate way to extend an historic building form. Today, Moore's structure, like Curlett's, is an historically protected building.

An approved addition by Charles F. Bloszies, flanking the original building, adopts a different strategy for contextual response. A contemporary language of glass and steel reflects both the pattern and the delicacy of the original façade, forming a visual continuity while recognizing the progress of construction technology.

At press time, it was unclear whether Bloszies's proposal to carry the new pattern of glazing into the now largely opaque shaft of the Moore addition would qualify for federal historic preservation tax credits. Whatever the outcome, this trio should form an instructive ensemble for students of the changing process of historical review—itself an historical phenomenon. ◉