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## PLEASURE

ab

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#### The Pleasure City

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Cover: Zippy the Pinhead © 2005 Bill Griffith



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#### BY ELIZABETH S. PADJEN FAIA | From the Editor

## Good for You

onsensus is telling. What has been the consensus reaction when people hear that this issue's theme is "Pleasure"? Raised eyebrows. And though the raised eyebrows are usually accompanied by chuckles, smiles, or chin tucks that say, "You've got to be kidding," the consensus is clear: People think pleasure is naughty.

Pleasure is not far removed from delight - which, with commodity and firmness, has been a measure of good architecture for more than 2,000 years; if you are not a recipient of a Pritzker Prize, you may not know that Vitruvius' famous phrase is even inscribed on the medal. So why the tittering?

Although pleasure often connotes innocent enjoyment, it also suggests the voluptuous and sybaritic. It especially suggests physical enjoyment - a visceral, physical reaction, the stimulation of the senses. Perhaps you were once an adolescent who snickered as your English teacher patiently tried to distinguish "sensuous" (referring to the senses) from "sensual" (often referring to sexuality). Most people never get that straight, a symptom, perhaps, of the fact that our culture is hopelessly confused about the role of pleasure in our lives.

And if we're confused about the role of pleasure in our lives, we are even more confused about the role of pleasure in our buildings. We deliberately avoid the language of the senses as we discuss architecture, choosing instead the vocabulary of aesthetics, occasionally enlivened by metaphorical references to other disciplines, such as semiotics, biology, and geology. Architecture, we therefore suggest, belongs to the life of the mind.

But the perception — the enjoyment — of architecture is frequently anything but intellectual. Tamara Roy AIA notes, "While architects can explain the intelligence and organization behind a space, it is not until they verbalize how it will feel the shimmering of light, a scent in the air, the coolness of stone, the life that is lived there - that clients can become engaged." If her essay in this issue seems to have an unusual

"voice," it is because the language of the senses rarely finds a place in architectural magazines.

A bit of graffiti in a college architecture studio once said: "If you can't solve a problem, change it." Sometimes the act of redefining a problem - tweaking its premise or its parameters - leads to a better solution. Producing consistently good buildings is clearly a problem we have yet to solve; a look at new development across America suggests that building attractive, sustainable communities is even more daunting. What would happen if we made pleasure an assumed attribute, if not the point, of architecture? Can we learn to describe buildings as sensuous environments without feeling foolish, or worse, anti-intellectual?

Some designers, planners, and urbanists are already at work, recasting cities and mixed-use environments as entertainment centers. Entertainment is undoubtedly pleasurable, but to evaluate environments only in terms of their entertainment value presents an economic view that misses much of the point. Architecture sits at the nexus of the mind-body connection a relationship that we have largely ignored, even though it represents the frontier of research in other fields.

#### Can we learn to describe buildings as sensuous environments without feeling foolish, or worse, anti-intellectual?

Bostonians might find that our Puritan roots are a stumbling block in such discussions - not because of the Puritans' mythic suppression of pleasure, but because of their more notable and enduring legacy: the concept of commonwealth. The pursuit of pleasure is inherently selfish; it seems at odds with promoting the common good. But if we can design environments that joyfully and deliberately give pleasure to their occupants, we will create places that are good for us all.

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA Editor



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#### Letters Letters Letters

I was particularly taken by the May/June 2005 issue on Boston City Hall. When I was head of public buildings at the General Services Administration, I got involved in the Norman Leventhal/Mayor Menino effort. I offered to consider redeveloping the site of the low-rise part of the JFK Federal Building if it would help make better development sense of the plaza. That evoked some interesting opposition, both from within and outside GSA. We hired Koetter Kim & Associates to help us move our square footage to a different part of City Hall Plaza (and help accommodate a hotel and additional commercial development).

Your editor's letter was just right, especially in its observation that the neglect of the building and the failure to do anything signifies an atrophied civic spirit, or "civitas," as my mentor Senator Moynihan would have said. It's small solace that the disease is not unique to Boston. Washington's Beaux Arts city hall was decrepit for decades. But here, GSA and the city successfully, if warily, partnered in the building's renovation and expansion.

> Robert A. Peck, Hon. AIA Greater Washington Board of Trade Washington, DC

We very much appreciate the thoughtful comments by the participants in the roundtable discussion on Boston City Hall.

Though we do not object to any criticism of our controversial building, we are happy that positive voices are also being heard and not only the frequently shallow comments that make the news.

We are therefore most grateful to you for establishing a more balanced view of City Hall in the context of the city's history and for the handsome presentation of the building in the pages of this special issue.

> Gerhard Kallmann FAIA Michael McKinnell FAIA Kallmann McKinnell & Wood Architects Boston

In order to possess a distinctive school of architecture ["School Spirit," September/ October 2005] like Russian Constructivism or Bauhaus, a geographic locality must have unifying social, financial, and political forces. At the very least, it must have a succession of great architectural personalities, like Sullivan and Wright in Chicago. Boston has none of the above. The market forces typically care about myopic profitability much more than quality of architecture. Our community engagement has shown an extremely disparate set of values that can only create the proverbial horse designed by a committee. The lack of artistic courage that distinguishes the overwhelming majority of practicing architects cannot breed anything better than a decent mediocrity. Boston's academia could at least create an abstract school of architecture, but that has not been happening either - and, as an alumnus of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, I can attest to that.

Twenty years ago, Houston, jealous of neighboring Louisiana, had a local design competition that called for the creation of a distinctive Texas style. I won first prize because I took that joke seriously and designed a house in the form of a cowboy's head. Perhaps that's what your magazine should do — organize a state-wide competition for the New England Yankee style.

#### Anatol Zukerman NCARB Newton, Massachusetts

It was a pleasure to read Jeff Stein's interview with Nasser Rabbat [September/ October 2005], not just for personal reasons (it brought back fond memories of the course that I co-taught with Nasser for many years at MIT), but because the professional design community needs a conversation of this kind more than ever today.

At a time when design practices are increasingly more global, the general lack of information (and the abundance of misinformation) about other places, cultures, and architectures (Islam in particular) is often appalling. What is so refreshing about the interview is that it calls for a critical and cosmopolitan perspective with which to approach "other" architectural traditions.

Challenging the common view of Islamic architecture as a self-contained and fundamentally different tradition known to Westerners only by its "otherness," Rabbat brings the Islamic tradition back into the fold of world architecture by highlighting shared roots in classical Mediterranean civilizations. Such cross-cultural premises provoke many further questions: Can one look at, say, an 18th-century Ottoman Baroque Mosque in Istanbul and still talk about European and Islamic architecture as two separate traditions? If identities are always composite and always in flux, does it even matter who influenced whom? Is "influence" always about a dominant party giving its cultural goods to an inferior "other," or is it a creative exchange that involves interaction and choice?

One can also ask in reverse: Is "Western civilization" itself as pure, distinct, and selfcontained as typically assumed? John Hobson, for one, says "no" in his recent *Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*. Similarly: "What can be more 'English' than a cup of tea?" asks Stuart Hall polemically ("Old and New Identities" in *Culture*, *Globalization and the World System*) only to remind us that it is tea from India, China, or Ceylon and sugar from the Caribbean that are the ingredients in this "Englishness."

If there is no real history of "the West" without the histories of "others," are we going to embrace these intertwined histories of exchange, influence, interaction, and hybridization that have united cultures (and architectures) across vast geographies, or are we going to confine ourselves to essentialist myths of cultural and national identity that continue to divide them? These are all profound questions for everyone to ponder, and *ArchitectureBoston*'s special issue on "Identity" is an excellent start.

> Sibel Bozdogan, PhD Boston Architectural Center Boston

In her discussion of "Density 2: Rethinking the Urban Village" [September/October 2005], Kimberly Jones says "architects and planners need catharsis as much as anyone.""Catharsis" is a Greek word describing a hero's recognition of his or her tragic flaw and consequential cleansing of the impurity. I don't think that is what she meant. I think she meant that she wanted us to have more conversation with community representatives about the advantages of mixed-income housing in high-density development and why they are so resistant to it.

Maybe Ms. Jones is unfamiliar with MassHousing's \$6-billion portfolio of mixed-income rental and single-family housing, or the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston's mixed-income portfolio. The conference planners don't see themselves as heroes, and we didn't bill the event as a community forum. What we intended was a conversation internal to the profession, to more deeply explore some of the ramifications of density. In case she hadn't noticed, we had outstanding financial support from Massachusetts banks. What is damaging about her critique is the chill it sends up the spine and through the pocketbooks of those who, through direct donation or pro bono work, generously sponsored the event. Missing the overarching value of the event really stings for those who sincerely tried to bring something fresh to the discussion. Can we count on ArchitectureBoston to underwrite the cost of the next conference? If money is something you cannot contribute, perhaps you could provide the space for a roundtable with the developers, architects, and other planning professionals involved in the event to discuss the emerging perspective on compact mixed-income, mixed-use development. Unlike Ms. Jones, they found the event a positive demonstration of how design professionals can work together advocating for sustainable community design.

#### Diane Georgopulos FAIA MassHousing Boston

Editor's note: Kimberly Jones' acknowledgment of the sponsors was cut from her text for space reasons. In addition to the BSA, they included: MassHousing; the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston; Northeastern University; the AIA Center for Communities by Design; and 14 other supporting corporations and institutions. Jones responds:

Indeed, this was a valuable gathering, organized by individuals committed most impressively to the best of goals. My review contained reactions I felt might further our shared cause of creating good communities.

I am writing to express my thanks to the BSA and the other hosts and sponsors of "Rethinking the Urban Village." As Deputy Chief of Staff for Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, I coordinate six city departments with a singular vision of making Chicago economically and physically a sustainable city role model. The most important contribution I can make to that end is to promote smartgrowth initiatives in the city."Rethinking the Urban Village" provided me with a valuable forum to confer with my planning peers from around the country and leaders in finance, design, development, and other fields about the opportunities and challenges inherent in adapting a rich heritage of urban neighborhoods to the needs and aspirations of a 21stcentury city. A conference such as this provides a great opportunity to learn from the experiences of other disciplines and municipalities.

> Samuel Assefa Deputy Chief of Staff Office of the Mayor

Correction: The project shown in the photo on page 18 (right) of our September/ October issue was designed by over, under.

We want to hear from you. Letters may be e-mailed to epadjen@architects.org or sent to ArchitectureBoston, 52 Broad Street, Boston, MA 02109. Letters may be edited for clarity and length, and must include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Length should not exceed 300 words.

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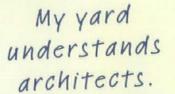
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Editor



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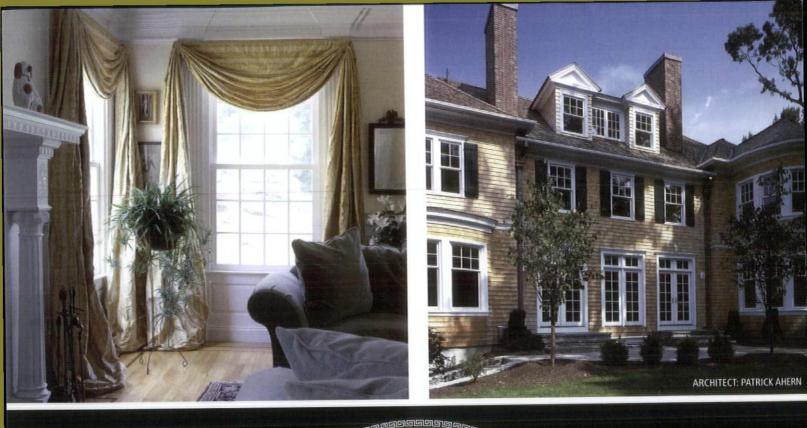
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#### LECTURES, EXHIBITIONS, AND EVENTS OF NOTE | Ephemera



Robert Smithson: Mirror Displacement (Cayuga Salt Mine Project), 1969/2004.

#### **Robert Smithson**

Whitney Museum of American Art New York City June 23 – October 23, 2005

#### Andy Goldsworthy. Martha Schwartz.

Adrian Geuze. Alex MacLean. Maya Lin. It's difficult to think of anyone who makes art of the land today who hasn't been influenced by Robert Smithson.

Smithson created an extraordinary breadth of work in a short time: he died in 1973 at age 35, in a plane crash while scouting a site. Generally called an "earthworks" artist, he's remembered most for being the first to bring the site into the museum, as well as taking art out to the site. After being underwater for many years, Smithson's most famous work, *Spiral Jetty*, is now visible again in the Great Salt Lake.

Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, *Robert Smithson* is the first major retrospective of his work. Walking through the Whitney galleries, a visitor might not realize that the work, representing an astonishing range of media, was created by one person. Smithson's figurative early work quickly evolves into work of optical effects, which soon matures into work that the spectator must become part of to complete. Human beings are part of, but not the center of, Smithson's universe.

The exhibit text is minimal; it simply identifies the pieces, with some quotations from Smithson. The attempt is to let the artist's voice come through, which is understandable but tricky; during my visit, the catalogue and a knowledgeable docent helped it all make sense.

If one remembers only one word of Smithson's, it's this: entropy. Often made of organic materials, these pieces — like the landscapes they're part of — are always in flux and will never be seen in exactly the same way twice. The result is a challenge for curators and conservators, but a fascinating experience for the viewer.

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, teaches the architecture studios at Smith College and works with Rogers Marvel Architects in New York City.

#### My Father, the Genius

Directed by Lucia Small DVD, 84 minutes 2005, small angst films

In My Father, the Genius, filmmaker Lucia Small reintroduces the world to her father, Glen Howard Small, a narcissist who believes he can "save the world through architecture." Glen Howard Small made a splash in the late 1960s with his biologically inspired, sustainable, utopian designs and is clearly an architect with extraordinary vision. But behind every revolutionary design idea exists the petulant man who abruptly walked out on his family and has forsaken nearly every colleague. Penniless at 61, he charges his daughter with documenting his odd legacy, from which this charming, thoughtful film arises.

Understandably then, Lucia Small's film seems wary of conferring on her father the title of "genius," irreverently questioning whether an architect whose remarkable ideas remain unbuilt merits such a moniker. More profoundly, it also questions the filial fidelity owed to a selfdescribed "genius" never interested in family, only in saving the world.

Kevin Neary works for the Boston Society of Architects.



#### Peter Rose FAIA Conversations on Architecture

The Boston Society of Architects June 14, 2005

There is no question that Peter Rose is an exceptional architect. He is also an exceptionally frustrated architect. Perhaps his Canadian heritage has made it hard for him to sit by while this country becomes increasingly suburban, conservative, and privatized.

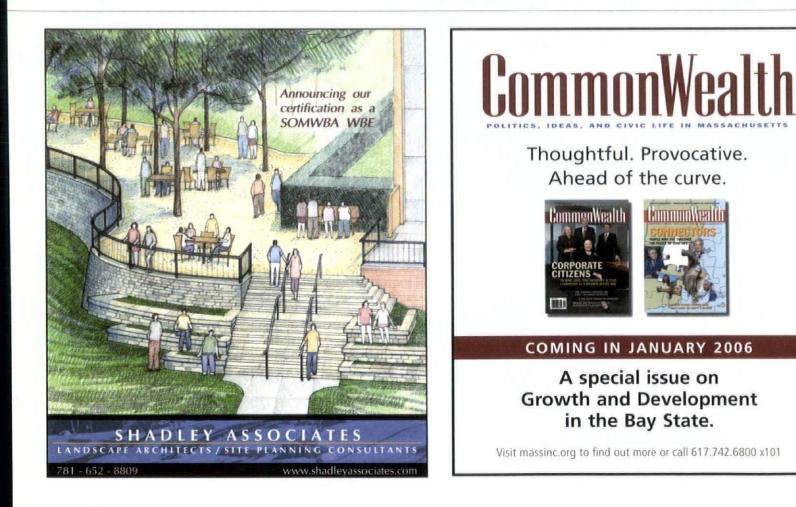
His presentation of current projects at a recent BSA Conversations program quickly led to a heated discussion of recent studio work at the Harvard Graduate School of Design: the deconstruction and analysis of Boston's subway system where three transit lines intersect. Under his tutelage, students built astonishingly detailed computer simulations and physical models of what happens above and below grade between the Charles River and Downtown Crossing.

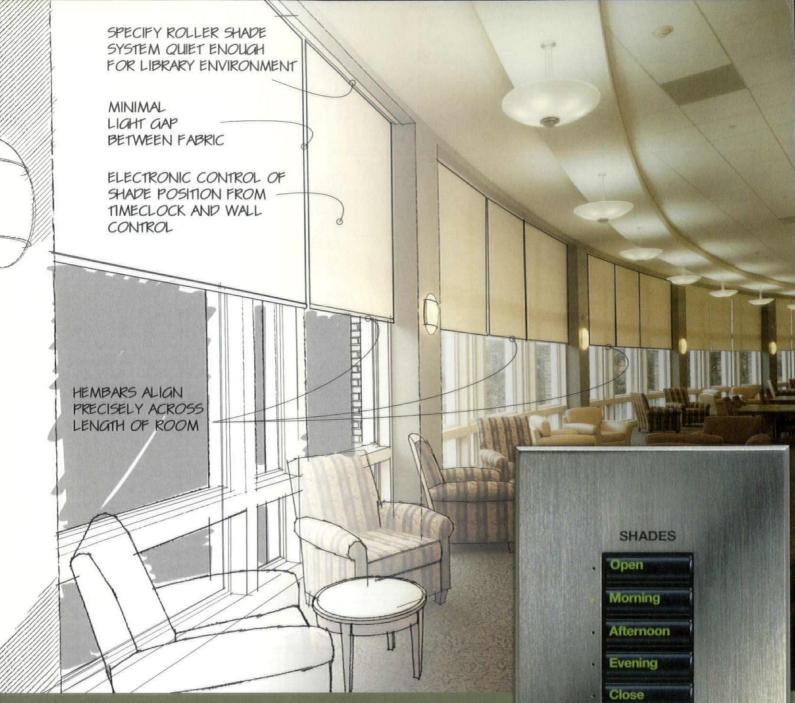
Rose believes that good underground transportation networks lead to dynamic

and multi-cultural cities. He should know. His career was made when, at the tender age of 40, he won a competition to refashion the Old Port in Montreal. In 1982, the waterfront was a post-industrial graveyard for grain silos and sheds (documented by Le Corbusier), which were cut off from the city by 40 feet of abandoned train tracks. Rose's plan saved the great silos from demolition, and today they're the first things you see when you approach Montreal from the southeast. His decision to protect, celebrate, and even illuminate these early modern colossuses prevented the waterfront from becoming an insipid, benched, and bricked "anywhere."

Known as the designer of the impressive Canadian Centre for Architecture, Rose left Canada in the '90s to teach at Harvard. He has brought his idealism with him. He wants to know why no one looks at the public transportation system here as a work in progress, rather than a barely functioning irritation. He wants to know why Canadian architects are so involved in planning and politics, while American architects wait for the commissions to come. Proving that Americans are pragmatists, everyone in attendance recommended that Rose become an activist right here in Boston to turn ideas into action. If you agree with Rose that Boston is hardly a finished and perfect piece of work, then you should give him a call. He's looking for a small flock to ruffle some feathers.

Rachel Levitt is a designer and writer.





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BY JOAN WICKERSHAM

#### The Lurker

## A Final Thesis Crit

**The degree candidate:** Adriana Ramacciotti, a graduate student at the Boston Architectural Center, who is preparing for an evening presentation of her master's thesis project. For the past few months, she's been in the studio until 11 or 12 every night. Like most BAC students, she also works full-time at an architectural firm.

**The setting:** A narrow classroom at the BAC, crammed with chairs. Adriana's site model occupies a table at the front. A delicate model of the building, with every louver intricately represented, sits on another table off to one side.

The thesis project: An arts center for the town of Belmont, which includes exhibition, studio, and living spaces, as well as a restaurant and indoor and outdoor theaters.

#### The afternoon and evening:

**3:15** Adriana is pinning up plans and elevations on the walls. Her father, an urban planner from Argentina who has come to spend the week with her, is straightening the rows of chairs.

**3:26** Her friend Rick arrives. She hugs him. "I'm so tired. So, so tired."

"You're doing better than I was at this stage," Rick says. "I was still coloring drawings as I was carrying them down the hall."

**4:40** Adriana tacks up one last drawing. "I didn't have time to do another view of this."

"Don't say that in your presentation," Rick warns. "Don't say anything negative."

**4:50** Adriana's boyfriend, Jerome, strides in, carrying coolers and big boxes of food. Adriana spreads a cloth over a table at the back of the room, and they lay out enormous platters of canapes, fruit, and cheese. "You brought too many cookies," Adriana says suddenly.

"You asked me to bring cookies." "But this is enough cookies for the entire school."

**5:10** Adriana walks to a nearby convenience store, for ice to chill the champagne Jerome has brought. On the way back, in the elevator, she runs into a tall man carrying two tall cups of coffee. Adriana asks, "So how's he doing?"

The tall guy shakes his head. "He's nervous. I told him that he's a lot further along at this stage than I was."

"It's tomorrow?"

The tall guy nods. "I told him, 'It's amazing what you can get done in the last 12 hours."

**5:25** In the darkened classroom, Adriana starts rehearsing her PowerPoint presentation. The title slide is on the screen: "COMMUNICATING THROUGH WALLS." She looks at it. "What do I say about this?"

Rick: "Welcome to my thesis."



**5:40** Adriana is working on her introduction. "I need to say that people make culture, and this center responds to the neighborhood and the moving vista of people...."

Her friend Luciana shows up and looks around the room. "You might want to get rid of some chairs."

**5:50** Adriana runs through her talk several times. Rick and Luciana ask questions and prompt her: "Who are the users?" "It might be good to refer to the model when you talk about the louver system." Her father gestures to her to speed up. Her face is tense and flushed. She notices that the pedestrian bridge isn't shown clearly on the drawing, and darkens it with a pencil. "And I just realized the plan doesn't show the street." Luciana: "Don't say that."

Rick: "Ix-nay. Ix-nay. Point to the edge of the plan and say, 'Waverly Street is here.'"

Jerome: "Look, you can't keep stopping. Just do your stuff like we're not even here."

**6:29** Adriana has kicked everyone out and sits alone with the door shut, starting the talk again, muttering, "What is our feeling when we walk by walls, see through them, use them? These are the questions that led to the concept diagram...."

**6:55** She suddenly decides the room is too crowded, and carries out half the chairs.

**7:03** A woman arrives for the presentation and greets Adriana and Jerome with kisses. The room begins to fill with people.

**7:13** A man wishes Adriana luck, walks past the model of the building — and knocks it to the floor. A splintering noise: the glass roof breaks off. "Oh, my God," he says, "I am so sorry."

"No, no, no, please. Don't worry, it's fine." Adriana is kneeling, trying to smile, gathering pieces in her hands.

**7:14** Rick runs to the studio for a bottle of glue.

**7:18** Adriana unobtrusively glues the roof back on.

**7:31** "Good evening, everybody," Adriana begins. There are about 20 people in the room now: other students; friends; Adriana's boss from work. The critics, sitting near the front of the room, include her thesis advisor; her thesis representative, who has been overseeing the project to make sure it meets the BAC's requirements; and a Belmont architect who has been acting as the client. Adriana turns off the lights and delivers her PowerPoint presentation, introducing the site and explaining the building, its design and rationale. Her talk is poised and organized, incorporating all the points her friends have prompted her on this afternoon.

**7:52** Adriana wraps up her introduction, and turns the lights back on. "Feel free to ask questions."

Her thesis representative says, "I'd like to know what our client thinks."

The client: "Have you done a cost estimate on this?"

Adriana: "I'm assuming around 10 million."

**7:55** The thesis representative asks Adriana to talk more about the impor-

tance of the walls. "Why this particular mix of materials?"

Adriana explains that the dramatic sculptural glass walls occur in the most public spaces — the gallery and restaurant. "The walls are talking. These, on the studios" — she points to the louvered sections of the model — "aren't saying much. These are quiet, these are private. This is where the work is happening."

8:00 The client says, "I see a fourth floor." Adriana nods. "Duplex units, for families."

The client squints at the interior elevation. "Is that a corridor?"

"Yes. You can hang your art, and people can walk by for exhibitions."

"You also have people walking by and looking into your bedroom." The client points at the windows piercing the wall between the residences and the corridor.

Adriana: "I took that into account when I determined the height of the windows. But those windows are important, to take advantage of the light."



**8:06** One of the critics suggests that larger doors on the individual units would help the residential and studio spaces spill out to the building's open space. "I think it's an easy conversion. You're assuming artists live in an orderly bourgeois way — work here, live there. But what they really want is space that's flexible."

**8:20** The client questions the lack of internal access from the building's third-floor residences to the third-floor workspaces in the opposite wing. "What if I want to work at night?"

Adriana: "You have to go outside."

"I might find that a frustrating way to go back and forth."

Adriana says firmly, "I thought interior security was more important."

**8:24** A critic points out that the blackbox theater only has one exit, although two are required. "I can put another one here," Adriana says, pointing at the plan.

"But that's the residential section. What about privacy?" Adriana looks at the plan for a long moment, then nods. "I'll have to think more about how to solve it."

**8:35** A sudden stern voice from the audience. Rick. "I think it's a weakness that your central wall doesn't show up well on the plan." Adriana looks startled at this unsolicited severity, but Rick's critique turns out to be a ploy, to set up the praise he delivers next, in the same gruff tone: "Because, really, the design of your central wall is *so powerful* that you want it to show up clearly on the plan."

Adriana takes the cue, explaining that the thick central wall allows a bike path to go through perforated openings, "so you can pass through the building even when the building isn't open."

**8:39** The thesis representative begins to sum up. "Maybe you need a few more quick diagrams clarifying and explaining the idea of the wall. But it's there — the design is exciting and sensitive. We've been picking on it, but you should be congratulated."

"I agree," the client says. "Very successful. I didn't mean to pick on —"

"No, that's OK," Adriana says.

"I actually think we should show this to the town board of selectmen and get a discussion going."

Adriana smiles. "I would love that."

"But it's important to figure out things like fire exits first, because they'll notice. They'll say, 'It's a death trap,' and they'll get stuck on that and never really look at your concept."

**8:44** "Nice project," one of the critics says in conclusion. Applause.

8:45 Adriana says to Rick, with obvious relief, "I defended."

"You sure did," he agrees, putting his arms around her.

From the back of the room, a series of muffled happy explosions, as Jerome uncorks the champagne.

Joan Wickersham lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



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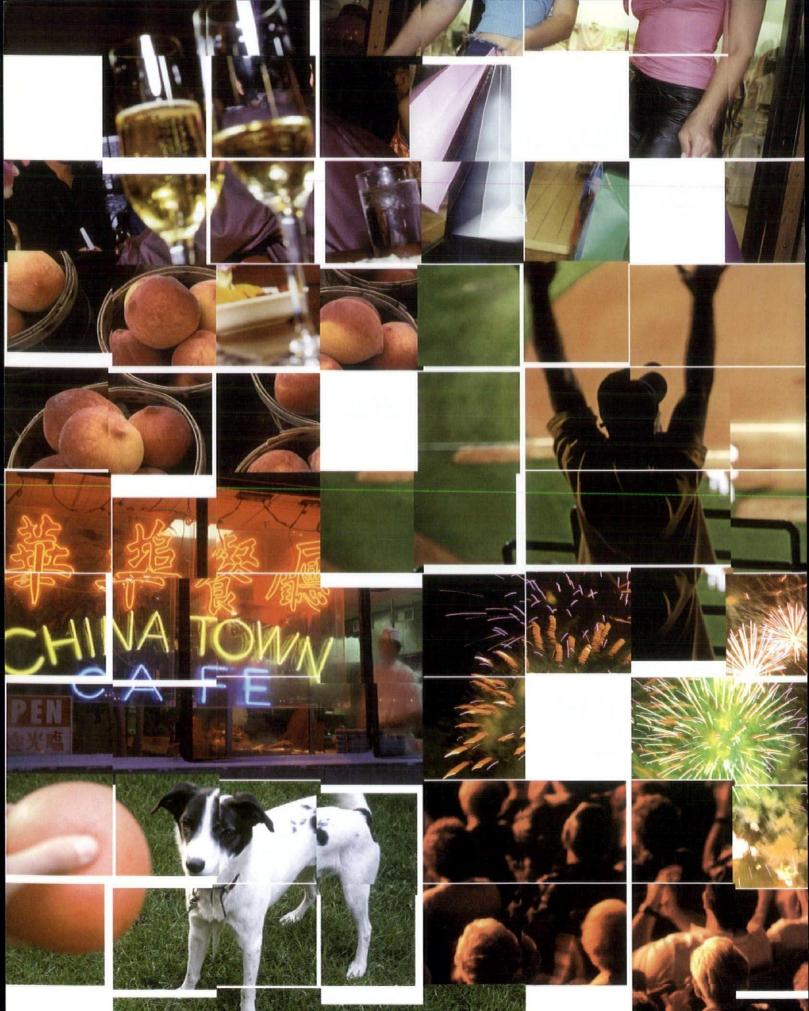
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## PLEASURE

#### Sensuous and sensual, joyful and lively, delicious and delightful...just plain fun. Could this be Boston?

#### **Participants**

Janice Mancini Del Sesto is the general director of the Boston Lyric Opera, which presents a full season in the Schubert Theatre. The BLO made history in September 2002 when its production of *Carmen* on Boston Common played to 140,000 people in two evenings.

**George Emlen** is a freelance conductor, composer, and arranger, and is the music director of Revels, a performing arts company specializing in celebrating the seasons, now in its 35th year.

**Barnaby Evans** is an artist in Providence, Rhode Island, and is the creator of WaterFire, a regularly scheduled, multi-media "fire sculpture" installation that attracts up to 65,000 people on a single night. He was a 2003–2004 artist in residence at MIT.

Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is the editor of ArchitectureBoston.

Bryan Rafanelli is the president of Rafanelli Events, a leading producer of corporate, nonprofit, and private events, based in Boston and Palm Beach. He studied architecture at the Boston Architectural Center.

Janet Marie Smith, an architect and planner, is vice president of planning and development for the Boston Red Sox.

**Joe Spaulding** is president and CEO of the Wang Center for the Performing Arts, which offers theatre, concerts, film, dance, and opera in the 3,600-seat Wang Theatre and the 1,500-seat Shubert Theatre.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** The city in our society seems to be at a turning point. No one really has to live or work in a city any more; people now tend to be there by choice. As we reinvent the role of the city in the 21st century, it might be valuable to consider the connection between pleasure and cities — the physical, sensuous pleasure of being in the city.

We tend to think about the city in terms of a collection of constituent industries, which in our minds are somehow segmented. You individually represent the culture industry, the sports industry, the tourism industry, the performing-arts industry, the hospitality industry. What would happen if we said instead that all of you together represent the pleasure industry? What if you all belonged to one trade association? Hotels, restaurants, spas, museums, galleries, even shops and pushcart vendors might be members, too. Each of you helps to shape the way people experience life in the urban environment. You give them a reason to be there: the pursuit of pleasure. And because you tend to work closely with so many people — people we might call the consumers of the city you know things that urban designers and planners don't know.

What is your sense of Boston's capacity for pleasure? There is admittedly an oxymoronic aspect to this. Do Bostonians need to work on having fun?

**Barnaby Evans:** The Puritan dourness still echoes along the stone façades. Things have changed a lot, but it's still there.

**Bryan Rafanelli:** We're a closeted pleasure city. There are people here who might spend \$2,000 per person on a party with



"I live on the waterfront, I walk 10 minutes to my office, I shop in the North End, and I can walk to Back Bay in 20 minutes. The experience is rejuvenating."

— Janice Mancini Del Sesto

extraordinary features, artists, performers. Anything that's unique, that money can buy, they want. Would you know that that's happening here? No. But it is.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: I might be one of the people, as you suggest, who shape the experience of the city, but I'm also a consumer of it. I live on the waterfront, I walk 10 minutes to my office, I shop in the North End, and I can walk to Back Bay in 20 minutes. The experience is rejuvenating, and other people are discovering that, too. I'm finding that more people say they want to move back into the city — for the pleasure of that experience and lifestyle.

**George Emlen:** Our greatest asset is that we're mixed-use and compact — the city offers a huge variety of things to do in a relatively small geographic area. The challenge will be taking that to the next level and incorporating that character into new parts of the city. The Rose Kennedy Greenway, for example, presents an enormous opportunity for mixed use — being able to eat, shop, discover cultural opportunities, enjoy the physical environment, socialize, watch people.

**Bryan Rafanelli:** What's fascinating about all these opportunities is that suddenly we're a city that offers lots of choices, and now the challenge is to help everybody understand what they are and help them choose.

**Joe Spaulding:** And encourage them to participate. Once they do, they start talking about it. You can see the effect of that energy when you go to a Red Sox game and see what has happened on Lansdowne Street. It's unbelievable.

Janet Marie Smith: Fenway Park always had the reputation as an idyllic neighborhood ball park. So when I arrived here and began trying to figure out who our natural allies were in our pursuit to save Fenway, it was stunning to me that the entertainment businesses that were so naturally aligned with us were viewed as such a negative by the city — by residents, by universities that didn't want their students hanging out in clubs. Every city in this country that I've worked in has tried to please its sports and entertainment industry. Here, it was considered a nuisance.

We extended an olive branch to the neighboring clubs and said, "Look, our beer trucks aren't bothering you and your concertloading isn't bothering us; why can't we work on this together?" It was amazing how quickly those businesses began to transform from latenight clubs into restaurants with full kitchens and sidewalk dining. All it took was a little bit of investment in the streetscape, and the city's willingness to give permits for sidewalk use. Still, it's a marvelous city. It amazes me that there's not a deeper appreciation of what's here.

Joe Spaulding: We think of ourselves as the Athens of America, but we don't know how to tell people about it or help them participate in the life of the city. It's an issue even for those who live in the city how do we encourage them not to sit at home and watch a 52-inch flat-screen TV, to get out and experience something first-hand?

**Elizabeth Padjen:** I suspect that all of you are facing competition from sophisticated home media systems. If I watch a Red Sox game at home, I actually see much more of the game. I can rent a really good opera DVD and watch it at home. Even parties and events face competition when busy people decide they would much rather stay at home and watch their flat screens in their jammies. What can you do to hype the live experience, to encourage people to leave the house? How conscious are you of the need to choreograph the experience to make it special?

Janet Marie Smith: People are actually very social creatures, and that's one of the most hopeful indicators for cities. One of the wonderful things about sports is that they offer one of the few places people go to for the purpose of congregating with people they don't know. One of the reasons cities are reinventing themselves not as centers of commerce or places to live but as urban entertainment centers, is that we all at some level think that sort of interaction is fun; it feeds that social craving most people have.

That's part of what we try to do with the Red Sox — create an engine for making that social interaction happen. You can't always count on winning, so you have to create an environment that people simply want to be in, regardless of what happens after they cross the turnstile.

Joe Spaulding: With our Radio City Christmas production last winter, we had 229,000 people in 29 days over 60 performances, and 50 percent of them had never been to the Wang Center. One of our goals is to get those people to come back to experience live theater. We are constantly thinking about how to re-engineer ourselves to provide pleasure with the different pieces we do. The arts keep us a civilized nation, and I think people appreciate that experience.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: One of the things we're trying to do is to expand the opera experience by making the experience of going

into the city fun. How do we help patrons find the easiest and cheapest parking? How do we make it feel like something very special, from the second they walk in the door? Opera tends to be more interactive than, say, ballet or symphony, in that you laugh, you cry, you clap. There's stimulation on a number of levels — the staging, the music, the story. How can we heighten that experience?

When we did *Carmen* on the Common, the first fully staged free opera in Boston, we expected 5,000 to 10,000 people a night — and got 65,000 people the first night, and 75,000 the second. We had giant screens, supertitles in English, study guides in six languages; we'd done previews all over the city. Something in the way we promoted it caused it to become a major event. I'll never forget the young guy stuck in a cab for about half an hour, trying to get across town. The driver said, "Opera's on the Common," and suggested he get out and walk because they weren't getting anywhere. The guy thought the driver said, "Oprah's on the Common," so he figured he might as well go over and see Oprah. He showed up — it was a sea of people — and said, "I understand Oprah's here." One of our volunteers said, "No, but opera is." He decided to give it a try. And then came back the second night.

**Joe Spaulding:** Why did 93,000 people come to see our *Hamlet* on the Common? It's a tough Shakespeare play, and it's hard to present well. I was amazed at the diversity of the audience — all races, lots of young people on their blankets, everybody comfortable. We need to provide an equivalent experience indoors as well. The hard part of that is getting people to pay for it.

**Barnaby Evans:** One form of social interaction is the sense of *communitas* that comes when we're all gathered together. I sometimes think that's what people are most looking for when they come to Providence to see WaterFire. Joseph Campbell writes that people aren't looking for the meaning of life, they're looking to feel alive. And somehow, experiencing the multi-sensory impact of diverse sounds, smells, interactions, and emotions with a group of people as part of an almost ritualistic gathering is very powerful.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Perhaps some of the success of *Carmen* and *Hamlet* on the Common is that they recast the perceptions some people have of certain art forms — that they're boring, they're stuffy. And yet the tradition of gathering to view a performance

resonates across many cultures. I suspect one reason for the popularity of Revels, for example, is that it draws on those traditions. It seems to draw on a very primal recollection of a certain kind of pleasure in ritual.

**George Emlen:** I don't know whether it's about ritual and tradition or whether it's simply the visceral pleasure of experiencing the confluence of sound and color and light. People do seem to want to be among other people in a place where something exciting and interesting is happening. Here in Boston, we've got a lot of the pieces of the puzzle in place already, but we need to lower the obstacles. We have to reduce the ticket prices in some instances. We have to make it easy to get in and out of the city. And we need to provide decent parking.

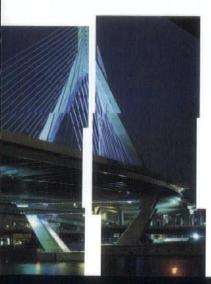
Janet Marie Smith: Having worked here for three years now, I'm still baffled by one thing: the city can be such a help, but then there are so many little stumbling blocks along the way. For example, if you want a mixed-use, vibrant neighborhood, but you can't get a liquor license, your only candidate restaurants are fast-food joints. If you really want to create a lively urban atmosphere, some of the restrictions have to change.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** You all are talking about an entire experience, not just an event — an experience that extends well before and after an event in both space and time in order to create a complete environment that is somehow pleasurable. I suppose the theatre district itself is an example — there's the experience of eating, walking, and milling about before and after a performance that is itself a multi-sensory experience.

**George Emlen:** And, of course, if the environment works well on that level, you don't even need a performance. It will attract people on its own.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Let's talk about pleasurable experiences of the city that have nothing to do with performances and events.

**Barnaby Evans:** Walking along Newbury Street can be delightful. It's a little predictable and corporate now, but you can go to a gallery, you can sit outside at a restaurant. You can't get a place to park, but never mind that.



"Almost one in three Bostonians was born outside the United States. So, those of us who are entertainment programmers have to think very differently from the way we thought 10 years ago. It's pushed us to do some exciting things."

- Joe Spaulding



**Joe Spaulding:** Harborwalk is amazing — you can follow a walkway all the way from Cambridge down along by the Museum of Science, through what was the old Big Dig site, all around the harbor, then all the way out to Castle Island.

**Barnaby Evans:** I think walking is key to experiencing the pleasures of the city — it allows you to interact with the texture and detail of city life. And then there are all the subtle social interactions — the silent dance-like right-of-way negotiations create a ballet that enlivens the street.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Let me throw senses at you. For example, smell: give me some examples of pleasurable smells in the city.

Joe Spaulding: Food and flowers at sidewalk vendors.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: The smell of the sea air.

**Barnaby Evans:** Perfume, when a woman walks by — there's an invisible trail that follows her, revealing her presence.

**George Emlen:** I agree with Jan — the scent of the ocean does it for me.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Let's try sound. Most people say they hate city noise. What are good sounds in the city?

**George Emlen:** The obvious things are street musicians. And I don't see them much in Boston except in the subway, but I do see them in Cambridge. There is delight in the unexpected coming across somebody playing an accordion with the case open and coins tossed inside. I've stopped and listened in disbelief at some of the talent that I hear. It is nice to come around a corner and hear a fiddle playing. That to me is a real sensual pleasure.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: People say the sounds of the airport bother them, but they make me feel more alive because I'm a part of what's happening all around me. I feel the same way about the sounds of the foghorn or the ships coming in.

**Barnaby Evans:** The sound of the rain in the city is gorgeous. Water splashing in fountains. Birds. People's voices.

**George Emlen:** I don't think of this city as a loud city. You don't hear horns here, the way you do in LA, New York, Miami.

"I think walking is key to experiencing the pleasures of the city — it allows you to interact with the texture and detail of city life."

- Barnaby Evans

**Joe Spaulding:** Or the sound of nothing, which is what I heard recently in Pittsburgh. There was nobody there.

Elizabeth Padjen: Taste.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: Street food and vendors. But we now also have wonderful, sophisticated restaurants. When I first came to Boston, there were only two places for a fancy dinner or a business lunch: Locke-Ober or the Ritz.

**George Emlen:** There are also pleasurable memories of taste: the sundaes at Bailey's.

**Bryan Rafanelli:** I'm thinking taste level, too. The taste level of the city — in all things — is skyrocketing in terms of sophistication.

**George Emlen:** We probably still labor under the reputation of baked beans and cod.

Joe Spaulding: That's changed a lot.

**George Emlen:** And now we have a multiplicity of ethnic food. Ethiopian, Moroccan, whatever you want.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: And that's because of the backgrounds of the people who now live here who have opened those kinds of restaurants. That's contributed to a new culture of pleasure.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Several of you have mentioned that the city has changed. Have Bostonians themselves changed? Or are you seeing greater influence and participation by people who have moved here?

Joe Spaulding: I've heard that almost one in three Bostonians was born outside the United States. So, those of us who are entertainment programmers have to think very differently from the way we thought 10 years ago, in terms of what we are producing and how we reach those audiences. It's pushed us to do some exciting things.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: When we did the study guide for Carmen on the Common, we asked some community leaders what languages we should use in translations. In addition to English, we provided Vietnamese, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and French, for the Caribbean island people. A couple of decades ago, you didn't see people in traditional ethnic dress, but now you do. That sort of diversity is changing the experience of the city for the better.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Some people would say that some of the activities and events we've been discussing are elitist — ticket prices or perceived class associations bar some people from participating in them. There is nevertheless the opportunity to create a shared, pleasurable experience that serves as a common ground for everybody. Common ground in itself can be a pleasurable experience — witness the success of Downtown Crossing and Fenway/Kenmore Square. How do we create environments that are accessible to all?

Joe Spaulding: I would say that we are not elitist at all, because each of us is part of a collaborative effort to reach out into the community. If Bryan's "exclusive" fund-raising party gets people of means to contribute a ton of money to a nonprofit organization, and that effort then allows us to offer free performances of *Carmen* or Shakespeare, then that's a very good thing. No doubt, \$474 tickets to see the Rolling Stones at Fenway Park are pretty exclusive. But the Red Sox Foundation is helping out with all sorts of efforts in the community. I think that people in Boston collaborate and partner and think outside the box better than anywhere else I've been.

**Barnaby Evans:** What is interesting is that when art forms that might be considered elitist, like opera or Shakespeare, are brought into the public sphere outdoors, they are enormously successful. They're open to anyone, so you get over that inertia where people might not feel comfortable going into a theatre, and you generate great excitement.

**George Emlen:** Our Revels solution is to present a free outdoor summer show on the solstice. What we put on stage is reflected in what we see in our audience. We do a Chinese element, a Brazilian element. This year we had a captivating Tibetan performer. Kids from Jamaica Plain came up and performed pre-Hispanic dances from Mexico. It was riveting because it was real. People are bringing their own cultural traditions to our stage, and we were enabling them and at the same time expanding our audience, because it included friends of the people who were on stage. And because the show happened to be right on the Harborwalk, people who were just passing through stopped out of curiosity and stayed to watch.



**Barnaby Evans:** With WaterFire, we quite deliberately use highfidelity recorded music, for several reasons. One is that it allows us to have tremendous musical diversity: you can go from gospel to opera to ancient Norwegian in the flash of an eye. But the other aspect is that, as part of an effort to create a civic engagement with people, I want to break down the sense of an audience seated with all eyes forward watching a performance on stage, and instead create a live urban environment where all the participants are part of the experience. There's too much of a passive audience culture in America, maybe from our watching television so much, that you don't see in Europe. By presenting music without a performer, my hope is that somehow the people walking through this urban environment feel that they are each their own agent or are actors creating an experience and contributing to an urban performance.

And I think that it is at least partly successful. I am amused by how often people misinterpret that, assuming we simply can't afford live music. In fact, we do offer live music, such as salsa or the tango festival, but we do it a block away, so people have the freedom to wander and discover things. I think a sense of freedom and flexibility and surprise and innovation are an important part of pleasure in the city.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** It's almost like treating music as scent — it permeates the entire city.

**Barnaby Evans:** Yes, and it creates the diversity of experience that people enjoy. It's a great deal of fun to go into an urban square and see hip-hop and living sculpture over here and a sax player and break-dancing over there. William Whyte, the urban sociologist, talks about "triangulation," where two strangers speak to each other about a third element, and the third element is typically, in urban spaces, a performance. Whyte says that what's most successful in breaking down the barriers between those two strangers is a terrible performance. People are comfortable saying, "Boy, this guy's really bad!" Suddenly they're engaged with one another.

**George Emlen:** Our fall RiverSing is an example of the sort of participatory experience you're describing. The concept is to gather people on both the Boston and the Cambridge sides of the Charles River around sunset on the fall equinox, and they just sing back and forth. We held the first one a year ago, which

"We are all artists transforming a space into a special experience and, in doing that, we are also transforming the city."

- Bryan Rafanelli

I conducted, together with a giant puppet, from the Weeks footbridge. It really worked. It's like environmental art, in a way, working with a natural land form. People loved singing and loved listening for the sound coming back from the other side. We had an incredible, beautiful night; the moon was rising, and people were simply transfixed.

**Elizabeth Padjen:** Will audiences continue to be satisfied by the sorts of simple pleasures that you've just described? Or will they demand more and more sophisticated technology in order for these outdoor spectacles to continue to attract them?

**Bryan Rafanelli:** The *Hamlet* on the Common experience was extraordinary. It was state of the art. I'll never forget it. I thought to myself — because people say this to me all the time — wow, this is incredible; what are you going to do next? In my business, you're only as good as your last event, and the bar is constantly getting raised. And yet the best part of that production was simply closing my eyes and listening.

Joe Spaulding: A stage production of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas," based on the movie, is opening at the Wang in December. Technology plays a small but very important role in the experience: it's snowing everywhere — on the stage, in the theater, in the lobby. You might call it a cheap trick, but it is an experience that theater-goers have not had. When I first saw the production in San Francisco, and it started snowing in the theater, tears were streaming down my face — and I'm in the business.

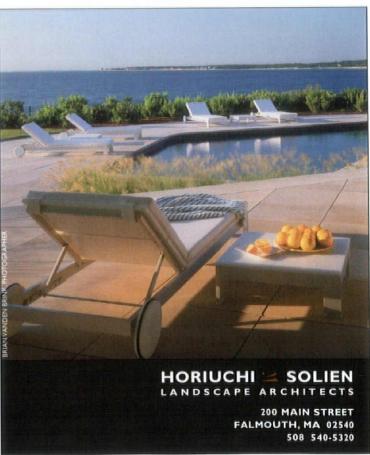
**George Emlen:** It's technology in the service of a simple experience, so it's a bit of a contradiction. Look at supertitles. They've transformed opera. They're a technological device that we now cannot do without.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: And the giant screens and sound systems that make productions visible and audible outdoors make outdoor performances a totally different experience, even for those familiar with the work.

**Bryan Rafanelli:** Technology has its role, but what impressed me with WaterFire was that the simplest experiences were somehow heightened. It was so smart. I was blown away by the music, then the fires. And that's the other side of this. What can we, as artists, come up with that doesn't cost a million dollars, that doesn't require a huge investment in technology?

**Barnaby Evans:** But even in the midst of all the high-tech wizardry around us, there's still the pleasure of the aroma of a cup of coffee, of something baking in the oven. Fortunately, we still have this almost visceral reaction to very simple experiences, which really ground us.





**Elizabeth Padjen:** When I think of WaterFire, the first thing that comes to me is an olfactory memory: the scent of the wood smoke.

**Barnaby Evans:** Many people speak of the pleasure they get from WaterFire's scent of wood smoke. Smell is an extraordinarily powerful sensual input that we often overlook, despite Proust's remembrances. William Morgan, an architectural historian and critic who had been living in Louisville, went up and down the East Coast with his wife, looking for a place to move to. They discovered Providence and WaterFire and loved it and decided to relocate. When they got back home, they wondered if they were crazy to move away from their home of 25 years and considered staying put in Louisville. Then they went up to the bedroom and opened their suitcase and smelled the wood smoke from WaterFire on their packed clothes. They looked at each other and said, "Let's move to Providence." And so they did.

Janice Mancini Del Sesto: I wonder about cities that become known for certain events — is there a downside to success? For example, has WaterFire's success and growth in attendance made it less pleasurable for those who saw it in its earlier incarnation?

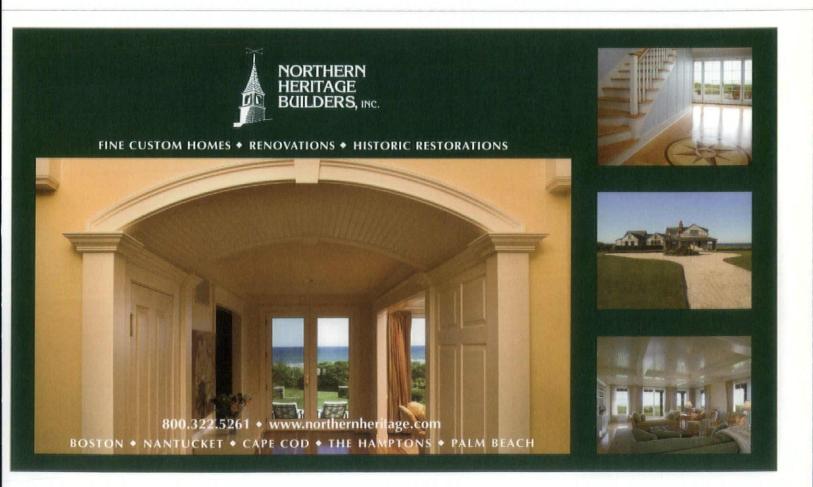
**Barnaby Evans:** There's no doubt that success has changed the nature of the experience. It has become a more festive,

communal, social ritual, which has its own pleasures. But we still light the fires until 1 a.m. so people who want to have that more spiritual, quieter experience can still find that after the early crowds have dispersed.

Popularity has been a problem for many European festival cities — they feel the experience has been diluted by the presence of tourists who don't really understand the historical basis of the rituals. Some cities now produce two versions: one on the weekends for the tourists and then at another time, the real version, which often involves many social rituals.

**George Emlen:** I suspect that may be less of an issue if an event truly grows out of its connection to the place. I suppose that's why I keep thinking of the Rose Kennedy Greenway — that space is so special that it offers an unusual opportunity to reconnect people with the city through the kinds of pleasures we've been discussing.

**Bryan Rafanelli:** When you were describing RiverSing, you said it was like environmental art. That's a perfect description. It *is* environmental art, and to some degree, that's what we all are doing. Maybe it's a theatre, or a river, or the Boston Common, or an entire city district, or in my case, a hotel ballroom or soundstage or tent in a field. We are all artists transforming a space into a special experience and, in doing that, we are also transforming the city.



## Options.

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# Real Photographs by Timothy Hursley Hantasy

Read no farther. Instead, look quickly at the following images.

What did you see? A common room in an assisted-living residence; a family rec-room or den; the bedroom of your teenage daughter; the bathroom in a sophisticated loft condo; a previously unpublished Postmodern riff by the late Charles Moore.

In fact, these photographs, all taken by noted architectural photographer Tim Hursley, document some of Nevada's legal brothels. These six images were admittedly chosen for their ordinariness; prostitution of course is not ordinary. But what these places share with many of their more familiar counterparts is that they are designed environments, created for a purpose and incorporating signs and symbols that evoke associations with other places, other contexts. Because Nevada's sex workers typically live on the premises, these facilities are at once commercial stage sets and temporary homes. The question, then, is whether suggestions of luxury, elegance, and down-home comfort appeal more to the customers or to the employees.

Hursley brings a cool objectivity to these scenes, making photographs that are nevertheless compassionate portraits of the invisible women who inhabit them. Classical motifs, comfy trading blankets, hip glass-block, elegant damask, tea sets, Marilyn posters these are tools of artifice in countless homes across America. Together, these six images are less about the shock of their subject matter and more about the shock of the familiar.

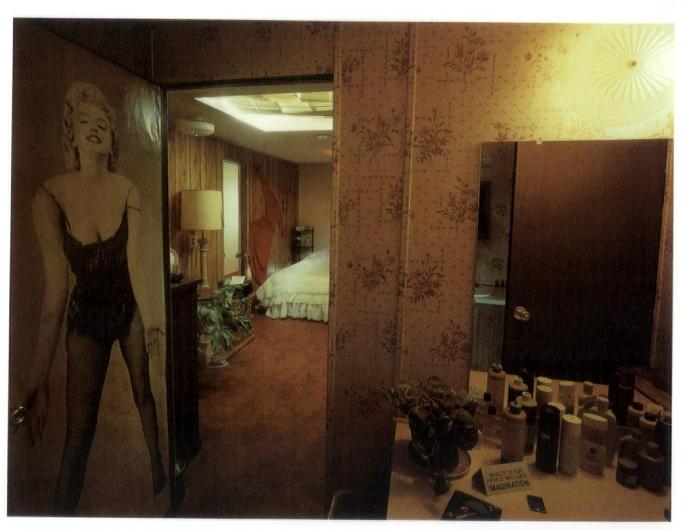
- Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA

Brothels of Nevada: Candid Views of America's Legal Sex Industry, by photographer Timothy Hursley, with text by Alexa Albert, was published in 2004 by Princeton Architectural Press. Hursley's photographs from Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002) appeared in the Summer 2002 issue of ArchitectureBoston.



Parlor, Shady Lady Ranch, Goldfield, 2002





Girls' Room, Chicken Ranch, 1986



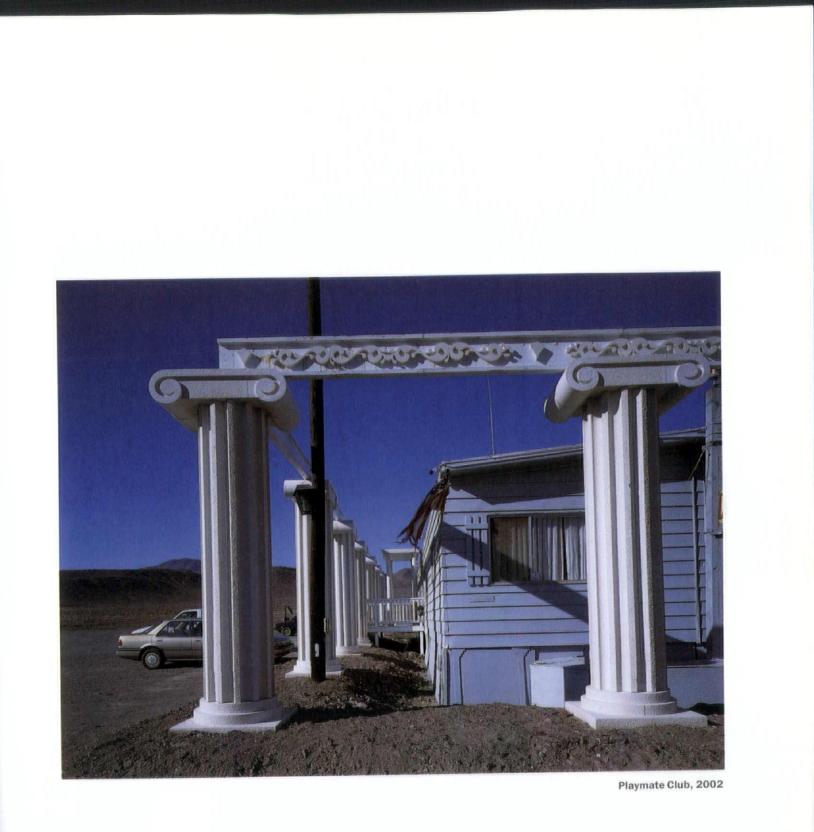
Parlor, Salt Wells Villa, 2002



VIP Room, Old Bridge Ranch, Reno, 2003



Parlor, Resort at Sheri's Ranch, 2002



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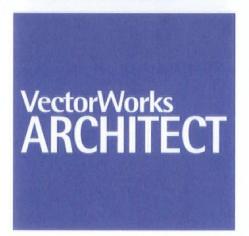
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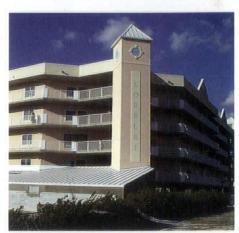
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## deepwater. baths in other times and places



#### By Tamara Roy AIA

Some sensations in life linger in the memory long after they've passed and, for me, many of those have centered around the bath. I can't tell you why for certain, but for those of us for whom water has the power to temporarily quell our tendency to hurry through life, bathing is a welcome source of rejuvenation that we need and pursue. In many places, communal baths add rich layers of social and spiritual meaning to an already potent sensory experience.

Most Americans don't think they have time for baths. Our way of washing — the eight-minute shower — is something we do without noticing, even though we may have a shelf full of scrubs and gels we never get to use. Other cultures place higher value on relaxation than we do, and there is much we can learn from them. There is also an increasing number of spas (i.e. private bath houses) in this country, which suggests that at least some affluent Americans realize the benefit of slower soaking.

Even so, bathing is still seen as an indulgence at odds with centuries of American puritan tradition. Most Americans worry about hygiene and dirty water, or showing their bodies to others. Gay bath houses and common cultural references such as New York's Russian and Turkish baths may have created the perception that bath houses are not part of mainstream American culture. And while spiritual cleansing, in the form of baptisms in many faiths, is very common, it is not generally a ritual that is built into the daily rhythm of adult life.

And yet, there's little question that baths themselves can be pleasurable physically and emotionally. Remember the last time you had a nice bath? (If you only recall the painful scrubbing of hair and feet from your childhood, you're missing something big.) I immediately start to smile at the thought: I've closed the door to the bathroom (very important if you have small children). I've filled the tub, taken off my day's worth of wrinkled business clothes or dirty jeans and I'm standing there, naked, poised to stick my toe in. If it's a cold day, the water is steaming hot, or if it's humid weather, it is cool and refreshing. Sometimes I light candles. Then I slowly, slowly, lower myself in and close my eyes....

One of the very best things about the bath is that you have to *slow down*.

#### **Greek and Roman Public Baths**

In the book *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, historian Fikret Yegul gives a full portrait of the design, use, funding, administration, and popularity of public bath houses in ancient Greece and Rome. He writes, "[Bathing] went far beyond the functional and hygienic necessities of washing. It was a personal regeneration and a deeply rooted social and cultural

## Other cultures place higher value on relaxation than we do, and there is much we can learn from them.

habit — in the full sense of the word, an *institution*." Romans woke up around 5 a.m., worked until noon, lunched, rested, and then went to the public baths around 2 p.m. They would exercise at the baths, where there were running tracks and a gymnasium, and then bathe in cool, marble halls. Then they might attend a lecture also at the bath house — or go to a banquet. Men and women were assigned separate hours for bathing, using the same facilities. Can you imagine if our days could be structured like that?

At one point in the fifth century, there were 856 public bath houses in Rome alone. Many of the early baths were carved into stone hills and fed by natural springs, conserving water supplies. Local politicians often built and subsidized bath houses, believing that bathing led to contentment as well as the continuation of Roman values. Yegul points out that "barbarians, philosophers... and those (such as Christians) considered to be on the fringes of Roman society because of their beliefs disdained bathing" and that the expansion of Christianity coincided with a severe decline in the number and positive reputation of bath houses in Europe.

#### **Public Baths in Modern Europe**

While there are nowhere near 800 baths in Rome today, virtually every European country still has some sort of institutional bathing culture. I once lived in Amsterdam, in a neighborhood that had a public bath, which I visited every week. Many neighborhoods had one, and I liked the fact that it was not exclusive or expensive. Certainly for the Dutch, bathing well was not limited to the wealthy. For a small fee (\$2 or so) I was given a locker key, a towel, and access to tubs, saunas, steam rooms, and a juice bar. Without clothes, it is difficult to distinguish the poor from the rich anyway.

Over a few months, I developed several favorite sequences — steam to cold water, then sauna to a tepid bath, even an ice-cold immersion. What I remember most clearly, however, was discovering the trellised outdoor space. After a near-boiling whirlpool bath, I could sit outside in winter and be shrouded in the steam emanating from my own hot skin. It was sublime to lie on a chaise and watch others, their naked bodies wrapped in air and floating like angels in the clouds. At first, even faces were difficult to discern; our bodies only slowly returned to us as we cooled.

#### **The Spiritual Moment**

Although Christianity in the time of the Roman Empire may not have considered bathing to be part of a spiritual practice (except in baptisms, as previously mentioned), other religious traditions do. The Jewish mikva practice, for example, elevates the natural cleaning capacity of water to a symbol of preparation and purification - of the sacred bond between a married couple, or men before Yom Kippur, or the final stage in conversion to Judaism; the mikva bath is also a monthly routine for Jewish women to mark the end of their menstrual cycle and the rejoining of marital intimacy. It is understood to be a way to bring God into your life.

In the Japanese culture of Zen Buddhism, the fundamental notions of "letting go" and of living in the present are in many ways clearly exhibited in Japanese bathing rituals. A pure container of steaming water in the simplest of rooms — be it in the beauty of a mountain retreat built with local wood and stone or in an all-white tiled bathroom at home — inspires a feeling of tranquility and wholeness. Creating the physical space that encourages a pause — to take a breath and notice the loveliness of what surrounds us — provides the spatial layering of experience that typifies Japanese design.

At the personal level of daily bathing, the bath as a cleansing ritual with religious meaning also permeates Japanese society. Many families take baths after dinner, in a prescribed order: father, then mother, then children in order of age. Each person first washes using a nearby shower, so the shared water is not sullied with soap or dirt, and then climbs into the neck-deep tub full of extremely hot water and soaks. When everyone is finished, the used bath water is piped to the washing machine to clean the family's clothes. It is an effective (and sustainable) way to build relaxation and pleasure into a daily routine, as did the Greeks and Romans, while incorporating spiritual meaning as well.

#### A New Bath Culture?

There is something natural and essential about bathing that we skim over when we do it for purely practical reasons and in a way that lacks our full attention. When we combine that "skimming" with all the other facets of modern life — the skipped lunches, the rushing from here to there, the constant deadlines, and the lack of community inherent in our mobile society — we forget (until we go for vacation) that we are skimming over our *lives*. A good bath can help us to remember.

I miss the social spaces of the public bath and living within a culture that includes water as a vital element. To be comfortable bathing with others means to give up seeing them as different, as obstacles, as competitors. It serves to remind me of our shared humanity, under all the cloaks of class, race, age, and gender that we normally wear. It also reminds me to enjoy the present moment - in the bath, closing my eyes, breathing deeplybecause after all, the present moment is all we really have. And perhaps more than anything, it makes me feel good, in a simple and profound way, about being here, on this planet - with all the other people who smile as they ease themselves into the tub. When America is ready for a public bath movement, I would love to design it.

Tamara M. Roy AIA is an urban designer and architect with the firm ADD Inc in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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## A Matter of Taste: Pleasure Gardens and Civic Life

"To be natural is a very difficult pose to keep up." —Oscar Wilde, An Ideal Husband

By Phyllis Andersen

Popular taste is not a criterion that those who serve our public can respect." So said Mariana Van Rensselaer, the distinguished New York art critic and first biographer of H.H. Richardson. That remark, made in 1888, fueled the controversy that erupted over her criticism of flowerbeds in Boston's Public Garden. Describing them as crude hues in false situations, she took particular offense at "Crystal Palace Gem" geraniums: "The cherry-colored blossoms with yellow-green leaves are the most hideous products of recent horticulture." William Doogue, the Irishborn horticulturist in charge of the Garden's plantings, took exception to her criticism and also rebuked her social position, personal gardening habits, and Harvard-connected friends. Doogue defended his work as accommodating the general taste of the public, who loved his plantings. He protested to the local newspapers and the mayor and anyone who would hear him out.

Was all of this brouhaha caused by some ill-placed geraniums, or was it indicative of a deeper division in how

we imagine our public parks? We all know the story of the 1858 competition for New York's Central Park won by Frederick Law Olmsted and architect Calvert Vaux with a plan titled "Greensward." Their proposal offered a picturesque landscape evocative of the English countryside, combining rustic structures with meadows punctuated by groves, rock outcroppings, and sinuous water bodies. "Sylvan" and "verdant" were words used by the designers to describe their design as "a constant suggestion to the imagination of an unlimited range of rural conditions." The contrast with the majority of proposals from competitors — engineers, landscape represented a remarkable shift toward the narrative of the picturesque. Other, more traditional, plans presented highly embellished gardens with formal promenades, fountains, arches, statues of Greek deities and New York politicians, bandstands, and extensive formal layouts of flowering plants.

By the mid-19th century, the educated public understood that the picturesque

Beds of hardy and semi-tropical flowering plants set in formal geometric patterns, elements of the 19th-century "pleasure garden," can be seen today in the Boston Public Garden.

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Left: Central Park with San Remo Apartments beyond. Right: Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen.

landscape was the aesthetic ideal for public parks, allowing the mind to wander along with the body. Among others whose opinions counted, Thorstein Veblen pointed to an upper-class predilection for public parks that were rustic and natural. Enlightened park advocates rejected the "pleasure garden" model with its emphasis on flowery display, theatricality, sociability, and amusement — its artificiality and "claptrap and gewgaw," its lack of moral uplift and tasteful restraint.

Like sin and grace, the picturesque park and the pleasure garden are mutually defining. Olmsted used medical metaphors to promote his notion of the park ideal: parks should be an antidote to urban ills, healing places for damaged minds. Calvert Vaux's famous comment on Americans' intuitive love of the country was at the core of learned park discussions. Vaux spoke of an "innate homage to the natural in contradistinction to the artificial, a preference for the works of God to the works of man." Supporters of the pleasure-garden model Like sin and grace, the picturesque park and pleasure garden are mutually defining.

rejected the imposition of rural scenery on the city and embraced the seductive lure of sensual sound, color, and light — a sustained Fourth of July celebration, an extended summer fête.

The public pleasure garden originated in London in the 18th century with extensive public gardens established at Ranelagh, Marylebone, and Islington. But Vauxhall Gardens on London's South Bank most completely and intensely captured the public's imagination. A favorite watering hole for Samuel Johnson, it was frequently used as a fictional backdrop by novelists. It offered grand promenades, open-air temples imitating ancient buildings, an array of dining and drinking pavilions, small theatres, bandstands, tea gardens, and private bowers for romantic interludes. Linking the attractions were elaborate flower displays of local and foreign blooms selected for color, fragrance, and mood-evoking exotic origins. There were fireworks and beguiling night-lighting in an era when both were rare. In its heyday, Vauxhall Gardens attracted aristocracy, royalty, and anyone who wished to mingle and immerse in an environment designed to please.

New York entrepreneurs transported the Vauxhall Gardens concept, name, and menu of attractions to New York in 1805, to the area around Broadway and East 8th Street, which is now known as Astor Place. At the same time, the less-than-sybaritic Hoboken, New Jersey, created Elysian



Left: Flower beds surround the statue of George Washington in the Boston Public Garden. Right: Vauxhall Gardens in London, 1754.

Fields, a popular waterfront park that offered ferry service from Manhattan (and where, some say, the first organized game of baseball took place). The last of the New York pleasure gardens, Palace Gardens, located at West 14th Street and Sixth Avenue, opened in 1858 (the same year as the Central Park competition). It offered the usual array of dining pavilions, water features, and elaborate night-lighting.

Today, the tradition of the pleasure garden continues to influence the way we think about urban parks. Certainly the questions posed 150 years ago continue to resonate: Who owns the parks? The planners? The middle class? The working class having no other options? And just as important: What is the purpose of a park?

The success of the pleasure gardens was due to diligent management by the entrepreneurs who owned them and developed new attractions: balloon launches; water gondolas; music commissioned for special occasions. The eventual demise of the public pleasure garden was due in part to Today, the tradition of the pleasure garden continues to influence the way we think about urban parks.

competition from new urban amenities: restaurants; concert halls; theatres; tearooms; and cafés dispersed throughout the city. It was due as well to the growth of petty crime that, then as now, often attaches to public venues that draw huge crowds. And some pleasure gardens, having contributed to the growth and desirability of the city, became victims of their own success and were lost to real-estate development pressures. The prototypical evocation of a pleasure garden that was not lost is Copenhagen's Tivoli, which opened in 1843. Patterned on London's Vauxhall and named for the beautiful resort town near Rome, it still offers families a complete pleasure-garden experience with attractions interspersed among flower displays appropriate to the season.

The horticultural display of pleasure gardens, with its emphasis on seasonal flowering, evolved into today's civic horticulture - embellishment of cityspaces that are not within the purview of the professional landscape architect and most often maintained by gardeners trained through apprenticeship and guided by trade magazines. These plantings typically feature massing of large numbers of flowers of strong color-contrasts arranged in geometric or pictorial patterns. Some traditions, such as the theatrical display of plants in graduated tiers, evolved from the 18th-century English estate garden into the public pleasure garden, as still seen

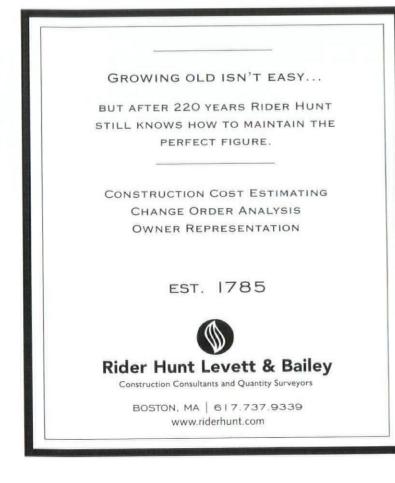
in Boston's Public Garden today. Civic horticulture draws on a rich planting tradition that evokes admiration of both the beauty of the plantings and the ingenuity of the gardener. The immense popularity of the Rose Garden in the Fens section of Boston's Emerald Necklace, of the planted borders in downtown Boston's Post Office Square, and the grand flowerbeds in Copley Square are fine examples of horticulture that enlivens the city, akin to Pop Concerts on the Esplanade.

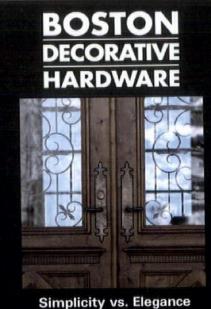
Although theme parks and amusement parks are obvious descendants of the pleasure garden, recent trends in urban public parks suggest that the pleasure garden is enjoying a renaissance of sorts. We are in the midst of defining a new urban-park discourse, one that rejects the picturesque and encourages new kinds of urban engagement drawing in the city, making use of technology, and embracing theatricality. Chicago's new Millennium Park, an assemblage of cultural attractions and We lay a huge responsibility on our urban parks. They must be didactic, educate about ecology, unify communities, and convey history.

elaborate planting displays, lists "theatre consultant and lighting designer" as part of the design team. The team of Kathryn Gustafson and Crosby, Schlessinger and Smallwood have developed a highly ornamental planting plan for the North End Park of Boston's Rose Kennedy Greenway. The Dutch horticulturist Piet Oudolf is acting as a consultant for a number of new urban parks in the United States, bringing his skill at highly textured perennial planting in changing seasonal patterns to a new audience. Yet, we still drag issues of public taste behind us, although now couched in concerns for environmental suitability, often with the same moral overtones that characterized the Central Park discussions of the mid-19th century.

We lay a huge responsibility on our urban parks. They must be didactic, educate about ecology, unify communities, and convey history. They must exhibit good taste and local values. But if we are to sustain parks in cities, they must embrace the imagination of the public. Disneyfication is now an indictment. But one suspects that William Doogue would have welcomed Walt Disney's words: "We are not trying to entertain critics. I'll take my chances with the public."

Phyllis Andersen is a landscape historian and the former director of the Institute for Cultural Landscape Studies of the Arnold Arboretum. She is a member of the editorial board of *ArchitectureBoston*.





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## BUILD LIT 101: A HOUSE OF ONE'S OWN

An entire literary genre has grown around the delights and disasters of house construction By Mark Ruckman

> Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House, 1948. Left to right: Myrna Loy, Cary Grant, and Reginald Denny.

Runners have told us about it for years. Hardcore bungee jumpers sleepwalk through their daily lives until their next one. But to date, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that demolishing a house causes an endorphin rush. Anecdotal evidence, however, from the crop of books on the market about building (or rebuilding) a house suggests that cutting off a wroughtiron railing with a Sawzall running at full tilt is a total high.

Houses have always occupied a place in American literature. There are the famous ones: the great, ruined house with seven gables that Nathaniel Hawthorne

used to express his disenchantment with the Puritan ideals still lingering in 19thcentury New England; Thoreau's little house in the woods where he went to "live deliberately." The House of Mirth (1905) by Edith Wharton and The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman are both works of fiction that center on house and home while incisively exposing the severely limited choices available to women in society at the time. It would be another century or so before a single woman living alone would wield a Sawzall and cut through a wall in her house to accommodate a relocated cottage and live to tell about it. (Lily Bart would be proud.)

#### **Build-Lit**

Cottage for Sale — Must Be Moved: A Woman Moves a House to Make a Home by Kate Whouley, Commonwealth Editions, 2004

Dark Harbor: Building House and Home on an Enchanted Island by Ved Mehta, Nation Books, 2003

"Fear and Loathing in Woods Hole: Building a Contemporary House on Cape Cod" by Catherine Cramer, ArchitectureBoston, May/June 2004.

*Gutted: Down to the Studs in My House, My Marriage, My Entire Life* by Lawrence LaRose, Bloomsbury USA, 2004

*House* by Tracy Kidder, Houghton Mifflin, 1985

**"The House on Stanton Road"** by Marcie Hershman, *ArchitectureBoston*, September/October 2002

The Most Beautiful House in the World by Witold Rybczynski, Viking Adult, 1989

*Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* by Eric Hodgins, Simon & Schuster, 1946 (reissue, Academy Chicago, 1987)

Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy by Frances Mayes, Chronicle Books, 1996

#### **Houses as Characters**

The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home by George Howe Colt, Scribner, 2003

The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton, 1905

*The House of Seven Gables* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1851

*Meanwhile, Next Door to the Good Life* by Jean Hay Bright, Brightberry Press, 2003

Red House: Being a Mostly Accurate Account of New England's Oldest Continuously Lived-in House by Sarah Messer, Viking Adult, 2004

*Walden; or, Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau, 1854

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1892

More recently, George Howe Colt's *The Big House* and Sarah Messer's *Red House* offered readers glimpses into the privileges and burdens of the family home by painting portraits of houses as containers of multi-generational family history.

Like architecture, American literary tastes evolve in response to dominant social and cultural interests and concerns. Some current critics speak of an American imagination so ground down by television that we are no longer able to imagine fictional worlds. This has led to the publishing industry's recent fascination with memoirs on one hand and to the proliferation of television reality shows on the other. Combined with our concurrent fascination with extreme makeovers and the racks of shelter magazines that greet us at the checkout line, the rise of the "build lit" genre seems to be a peculiarly American phenomenon. Is there another population anywhere in the world that takes such delight in - or is so endlessly entertained by - the prospect of building a house?

The novel Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House was first published in 1946. (That same year, Carl Buchan bought out his brother-in-law and partner, James Lowe, to create a national chain of hardware stores named after Mr. Lowe.) A New Yorker reviewer wrote that "Mr. Blandings" skinning by real-estate men, architects, contractors, and plumbers should provide the reader with a lot of sadistic satisfaction, if it isn't too uncomfortably reminiscent." The novel apparently struck a cord with postwar American readers and was even twice adapted into film: once in 1948, starring Cary Grant and Myrna Loy, and again in 1986 as The Money Pit with Tom Hanks and Shelley Long.

The "money pit" theme is front and center in Lawrence LaRose's *Gutted*, published in 2004. LaRose tells the story of the total renovation of his Cape Cod-style house in Sag Harbor, New York. The subtitle, "Down to the Studs in My House, My Marriage, My Entire Life," reflects LaRose's struggle to place his difficult and at times disastrous home renovation within the context of his overall life. LaRose, a writer whose previous book includes the bestseller, *The Code: Time-Tested Secrets for Getting What You Want from Women — Without* 

Marrying Them!, and his wife, Susan, a PR consultant for nonprofits, are determined to build their dream house in the cheapest way possible. We learn in the beginning of the book about their refusal to hire an "architectural idea factory inclined to invoice at lawyerlike rates" as they attempt an "end run on the design discussion" in order to get to work as soon as possible. This decision leads them to hire an architecture student to draft some plans at an hourly rate of \$25. They pride themselves on finding a cheap solution and helping someone "make his mark in the land of opportunity." The remainder of the book, while at times funny, is mostly a harangue about the problems that this and other penny-pinching solutions cause them. LaRose appeals to the sympathy of money-pit-wary homeowners without taking into account the real, underlying causes of problems in the home-building industry for those who take design seriously.

A gentler, while still penny-pinching, story is Kate Whouley's Cottage for Sale, Must Be Moved (2004). A compulsive reader of Pennysaver classifieds, Whouley finds a small vacation cottage for sale for \$3,000. Desiring more space so she can move her office out of her bedroom, Whouley arranges to have the cottage moved 20 miles and attaches it to her small house on Cape Cod. A bookindustry consultant accustomed to doing things on her own, she appoints herself project designer and assembles a local crew of friends and professionals to serve as builders, cheerleaders, and drinking buddies. Whouley plays the character of a frugal New Englander to the hilt and shares her excitement at uncovering building materials in the bargain bin at the Mid-Cape Home Center. The pleasure she takes in this project comes from sticking to her budget, learning new skills, and sharing the experience with a team of people whom she trusts and respects. Americans are used to tackling things on their own, but for some jobs there is no substitute for professional help. Lifting a house from one foundation and placingit on another is one of those jobs.

Witold Rybczynski's *The Most Beautiful House in the World* (1989) is another example of the build-lit genre. The author, a noted architect and writer, serves as architect, client, and builder on an intended boat shed that turns into a house. Rybczynski's



#### House: 20 Years Later

Twenty years after building a house, many couples find that their lives have moved on — to other houses, other towns, even other spouses. Judith and Jonathan Souweine, whose house project was the center of Tracy Kidder's 1985 bestseller, *House*, are still married and still living in the house that so many Americans know so well. More astonishingly, they are still friendly with their architect and their contractor.

Judith Souweine confesses that she hasn't thought much about the book in the last two decades. "We love this house, but the details that are in the book are not the important details of our lives at that time,"

she explains. "The book barely mentions our children — it's basically a snapshot of our lives as consumers. When you build a house, you are buying all the time."

The relationships that were the focus of *House* continued after publication. Tracy Kidder asked the Souweines' architect, Bill Rawn, to design a house on the coast of Maine and hired their contractor, Apple Corps, to build it. Despite the opportunity to build up a residential practice based on his



Cary Grant, Myrna Loy, and Melvyn Douglas.

new-found fame, Rawn deliberately chose another direction. "Architecture is a public art," he notes today, "and I really wanted to figure out how to build in a way to benefit a wider population than single-family homeowners."

The Souweines, like many homeowners, have made a few changes to the house, first hiring Rawn to design a garage, and later hiring a landscape architect to design a screened porch with connecting decks and walkways. "Of course, we know that any changes we make to the house must be approved by Bill," Judith Souweine admits. She reflects on how the house has also

> accommodated the unplanned changes that life inevitably brings to every family: "My husband recovered recently from leukemia and this was a wonderful place to recuperate."

As they have for 20 years, the Souweine family (now including three grown children, a son-in-law, and a twoyear-old grandson) have invited their architect to join them for Thanksgiving this year, at the house they made together in Amherst, Massachusetts. book is an exploration of the creative process and a meditation on the nature of architecture and the role of the architect. Rvbczvnski extends his personal experience with designing, building, and living in a house and makes it universal." Inhabiting does not only mean living within. It means occupyinginfusing a particular site with our presence, and not only with our activities and physical possessions, but also with our aspirations and dreams." Architects are highly trained, creative professionals with an understanding of design and construction details. But as Rybczynski points out, it takes a client (in this case, his wife, Shirley) more cognizant of the "minutiae of everyday life that constitute a home" to build a house successfully.

Tracy Kidder must be given credit for creating the nonfiction build-lit genre following the interest in *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* in 1946. He did it first and he did it best with the publication of *House* in 1985. Kidder's story of an upper-middle-class Amherst couple who hire an architect (Bill Rawn, then an unknown) to design a house for them and their children is well-known by both the public and the profession (many young architects report that House was required reading in their introductory architecture courses). Thoroughly researched, with more than a few pages devoted to construction history, Kidder's story weaves the drama that unfolds between the architect, clients, and builder together with details such as the history of the modern nail. This uniquely American tale also traces this country's movement away from Thomas Jefferson's dream of "a nation of virtuous farmers living in simple but dignified houses of their own" to the reality that residential architecture in America expresses social differences. This is certainly true of the house that Rawn designed for the Souweines (they often fret that the house is too big), although Rawn did appeal to his clients' shared social conscience in arguing for a Greek Revival house --- "something American and populist, and something so simple. A box with some ornament." By recreating the process of building a house, Kidder captures some

of the beliefs, desires, anxiety, and joy that Americans feel about the buildings in which they live.

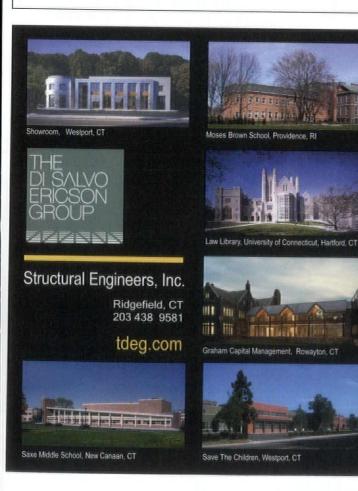
Frances Mayes describes the house as a metaphor for the self in Under the Tuscan Sun, but our connections to house and home extend beyond ourselves. Most people have a strong association with one house or another in their lifetime. Some dream of escaping a family home to build a life in a faraway city. Some are lifelong renters. Some do not have access to basic shelter. Still, for many, Thoreau's declaration in Walden that "at a certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider every spot as the possible site of a house" still resonates. Although there are fewer and fewer sites on which to build a house and more people for whom the goal of owning a home of their own remains elusive, the American dream of the singlefamily home endures.

Mark Ruckman is an associate editor for *ArchitectureBoston* and director of communications for the BSA.

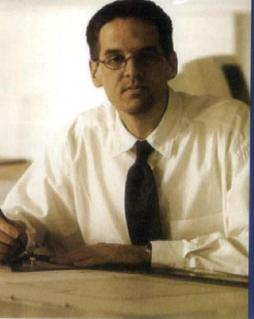




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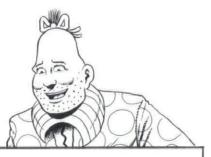




## SOMETHING ABOUT

HOW A GUY IN A MUUMUU BECAME ONE OF THE MOST DELY READ COMMENTATORS ON THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

#### BILL GRIFFITH TALKS WITH JEFF STEIN AIA



**BILL GRIFFITH** is the creator of *Zippy the Pinhead*, a daily cartoon strip that made its debut in 1970 and today is published in over 200 newspapers worldwide through the King Features Syndicate. Books of his collected work include, most recently, *Zippy: From Here to Absurdity* (2004). Griffith is also the originator of the phrase, "Are we having fun yet?" — first uttered by Zippy in 1979.

**JEFF STEIN AIA** is the architecture critic for *Banker & Tradesman* and the director of the architecture program at the Boston Architectural Center.

Jeff Stein: Zippy the Pinhead delivers pleasure in a really subtle way. Unlike a lot of other "funny ha-ha" comic strips, where the punch line is always in the last panel, Zippy is extremely complex. You mine the form by making us pay attention to art, line, character, words. Even within four short panels, there is generally a narrative, a little bit of story. And in the end, the pleasure comes from the complexity of the thing. Is that what you have in mind?

**Bill Griffith:** I've never quite put it in those words, but yes. When I'm doing a strip, I'm aware that I'm weaving elements together, almost improvising, as if I were all the instruments in a little jazz combo, then stepping back constantly to edit and fine-tune. This jazz analogy came to me years ago, in the sense of playing my various instruments, one of which is language. Playing with language is what Zippy gets the most delight from, even more than the content of what he is involved with or thinking about or confronted with.

**Jeff Stein:** It's not just the meaning of the language, it's the sound of it, too.

**Bill Griffith:** It's the way the stimulus presents itself as a way for him to enjoy his verbal reaction to it. What some people think of as non-sequiturs, I think of as carefully crafted juxtapositions.

WHEN HEARST CALLED ME, I THOUGHT THE PAPER WAS LOOKING FOR A WEEKLY STRIP. I DID THE **CLASSIC** DOUBLE-TAKE JAW-DROPPING

THING WHEN I FOUND OUT THEY WANTED A DAILY. THEY HAD CASUALLY ASKED ME TO COMPLETELY CHANGE MY LIFE.

Jeff Stein: The phrase "non-sequitur" comes up a lot in references to your work.

**Bill Griffith:** Yes, always. That and surrealism, neither of which are accurate, though I do accept the surrealism characterization.

**Jeff Stein:** And yet Zippy seems to be a perfect character for these times.

Bill Griffith: I may be the only mainstream daily newspaper cartoonist with a character like Zippy, but my origins are in underground comics back in the late '60s up through the late '70s. If you look at the work of the people who survived that time and are still working, you won't find another Zippy, but you'll find characters, especially in the work of Robert Crumb, who are off the rails in a similar way. Why those artists never aspired to daily newspaper comic strip-hood, I don't know. Why I'm the only one who made the leap is literally a matter of serendipity. It was never a conscious effort; I got a phone call from Will Hearst III in 1985, when he took over *The San Francisco Examiner*, and from then on, my path changed from working for magazines and cor books to working for daily newspapers.

Jeff Stein: Hearst apparently also called Hunter Thon and hired him at the same time.

Bill Griffith: Yes, and Crumb. I said yes sort of tentativ Thompson said yes happily, then never met his dead Crumb said no, but his wife convinced him to give it He produced 20 strips, which were clearly meant to sabotage the whole thing, because they could never b printed in that newspaper. There was no overt sex, bu was enough to break all the taboos that needed to be br Thompson delivered the first few columns on dead and that was it. His column was supposed to be weekly; became monthly; then it became whenever he felt like i think Will Hearst's idea was to make The Examiner more exciting. Thompson lasted about a year until he was flo San Francisco by Hearst to talk about not meeting his deadlines and to see what could be worked out. Of cour arrived loaded - in two ways, with alcohol and with fin When Hearst approached the door of the hotel room, t story - which I heard directly from Thompson - is th fired through the door at Hearst. That was the dramatic their relationship.

Jeff Stein: Creating a daily strip takes enormous discipl Some cartoonists have assistants.

**Bill Griffith:** I have no assistants. When Hearst called me, I thought the paper was looking for a weekly strip, becau that's what I had been doing. I did the classic double-take dropping thing when I found out they wanted a daily. The just casually asked me to completely change my life.

Jeff Stein: How did it change your life?

**Bill Griffith:** The first year was very difficult. I don't have a p with working. I'm really happiest when I'm working. But I have a problem with being creative on demand, literally ev I do seven strips a week. I take Sunday off, so I have to do tw





one day. They're generally done five to six weeks in advance nine weeks for the Sunday strips. If I know I'm going to take a vacation or give a lecture, I have to work extra hard.

Jeff Stein: Where do you get the discipline?

Bill Griffith: I just listen to that little voice inside my head. In my case, it's my father's voice. I can hear him telling me to get down to the studio and go to work. Not that he wanted me to be a cartoonist. He'd rather I got into my car and drove to some engineering plant. But he drilled a work ethic into me, which, in some ways, I rebelled against for many years, but I'm now grateful for.

Jeff Stein: You spent some of your childhood in Levittown?

**Bill Griffith:** I grew up in Levittown. A friend of mine still has family there, and I've been back as recently as last year. It's very strange. It's prospering.

Jeff Stein: People are getting little additions to their houses -

**Bill Griffith:** Major additions, actually. There are only a dozen that have not been significantly altered. When we moved there in '52, it was barren. Since there were no trees or shrubbery, you felt as though all the other houses were right on top of you. And they almost were, because they were only separated by 20 feet or so. But seeing one house 20 feet away is different from seeing all of the houses, each 20 feet apart, in perspective going in every direction. I got lost constantly, as did all my friends. If it wasn't for the names of the streets, you wouldn't know where you were. It was a very surreal environment.

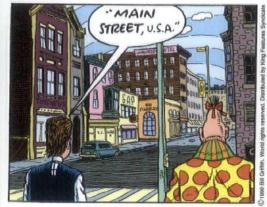
Jeff Stein: Among the things that are fascinating about the Zippy comic is the background — the sense of a real place in the strip. It's not a doghouse in an imaginary back yard; Zippy goes to real places. And we can go, too — your website lists the places referenced in each strip. How did you come to imagine that would be a way to ground ideas? **Bill Griffith:** After a couple of years of *Zippy* in the early '70s, a good cartoonist friend of mine said he still liked the strip, but it was beginning to feel a bit like being trapped in an elevator with a crazy person who wouldn't stop talking. He wasn't going to tell me what to do about it, but just let that thought sink in. He was right. After a while, I thought Zippy is like Costello without Abbott; he needs someone or some reality to bounce off. Something that's grounded, that's solid and real. So I started adding the real world into the strip.

Jeff Stein: You're well known for going places and taking photos and then going back and using them.

**Bill Griffith:** I keep more than one camera handy all the time. I also depend on the kindness of people who send me photographs. After I started including real places, I began to get photographs from people who said, "Maybe this is someplace Zippy would like to visit." So now I get several envelopes a day, full of photographs, many of which have a wonderful, personal, snapshot quality. I use them for reference.

Jeff Stein: One of the kinds of places that appears quite a bit is the diner.

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Bill Griffith: That started when I first moved from San Francisco to Connecticut in 1998. I had used diner interiors a few times in strips. I always liked the opportunity that a counter and stools gave for a little storytelling. When I moved to New England, I was drawn in by diners again. I started going to them, from state to state, just to soak them up and sample the rice pudding. Then they started appearing in my strips. I even invented two new characters, Bert'n'Bob, who are literally stuck on their stools - you never see them from anywhere but behind. And I started eavesdropping, writing down snatches of overheard conversation, which diners offer in spades. They're a great place to soak up not only a kind of quintessentially American architecture, but also quintessentially American archetypal people. Very different from fast-food places - they're too noisy, and the spaces are too big. And for the most part, the people in fast-food places aren't talking much. People in diners are much more interesting. And diners are just fun to draw. I think half of why I put in all the detail is that I enjoy doing it.

**Jeff Stein:** That level of detail is another fascinating thing about your work. If there are books on a shelf in the background, there are often real titles on the books.

Bill Griffith: I try to pack as many cultural references into one strip as is humanly possible, which is why, if you notice in the back of all the *Zippy* book collections, there is something called the Pindex. And all the strips are footnoted, so you can find out where that diner was, or where that muffler man was, or who Annette Funicello was.

Jeff Stein: In addition to "non-sequitur," the term "absurd" comes up from time to time in reference to the strips. I think that's a more powerful and positive way of characterizing what goes on in *Zippy*. The "theatre of the absurd" movement that followed World War I did exactly what *Zippy* does now — it pointed out inconsistencies in what goes on in our everyday world.

**Bill Griffith:** Yes. Zippy is consistently inconsistent. To me, absurdity — the absurd reaction, or the recognition that something is absurd — is the essence of mental health.

**Jeff Stein**: Zippy is often characterized as being a wise fool, which is a really good description.

**Bill Griffith:** The model of the court jester is also there. He is licensed by his outsider status to run off at the mouth, to make fun of everything in his own slightly skewed, surreal way. He's also deemed harmless, which is a mistake on the part of a person who deems him so.

Jeff Stein: Who or what was the inspiration for Zippy?

Bill Griffith: There are two. One was a sideshow performer in the Barnum and Bailey Circus, who was known as Zip-the-What-Is-It? Strangely, his actual name was almost the same as mine. My birth certificate reads William Henry Jackson Griffith, after my great-grandfather, William H. Jackson, who was an early photographer of the American West [editor's note: The first photographer of Yellowstone, Jackson was later recognized as the foremost landscape photographer of his time]. William Henry Jackson was the birth name of Zip-the-What-Is-It? Also, Zip was born in 1843, the year after my great-grandfather. It gets kind of cosmic. The other



inspiration for Zippy, and the source of his muumuu, was Schlitzie the Pinhead, whose real name was Simon Metz. He was featured in the 1932 Todd Browning film *Freaks*, which I saw in college. Pinheads — microcephalics — tend to speak in a characteristic speech pattern — complete sentences that seem disconnected or random, but that actually flow together in a strange way. That gave me Zippy's voice, although it's since evolved. It was not a vehicle for political satire in the early days; now it can be.

**Jeff Stein:** You typically have a couple of characters in a strip — one of them is often your alter-ego, Griffy.

**Bill Griffith:** Griffy can be bitter and angry sometimes. He can express my reaction to a situation or a phenomenon, whether it's cultural or political.

**Jeff Stein:** But there's always the enveloping lightness of Zippy to counteract that.

**Bill Griffith:** Right. And Griffy knows that Zippy's reaction is healthier than his, so he's sometimes envious of Zippy. But most of the time he's off on a rant.

Jeff Stein: Does he learn?

Bill Griffith: No.

Jeff Stein: As you work, do you make an outline as a kind of structure upon which your intuition can be hung?

**Bill Griffith:** Sometimes I have the entire strip in my head, start to finish; it comes to me instantly. That's pretty rare. But what usually does happen is that the first panel comes to me out of nowhere.

**Jeff Stein:** And you've become comfortable with the notion that it will in fact show up.

**Bill Griffith:** Right. Then I have to listen to what wants to happen next. It's probably similar to composing music.

Jeff Stein: Zippy seems to have a huge online presence [www.zippythepinhead.com] — he's turned into a real industry.

**Bill Griffith:** Websites sometimes give an exaggerated impression. *Zippy* online is literally a cottage industry it's me and a couple of people who help me, taking and filling orders and sending stuff out. But the website has been a great thing for me, both in connecting me to my readers and in generating income without which I might not be able to continue doing the strip, because newspaper income has remained exactly the same for every cartoonist for the past 40 or 50 years. No prices have ever gone up. If *The Boston Globe* paid \$100 a week for *Zippy* in 1985, it's paying \$100 today.

Jeff Stein: Do you have a social agenda with *Zippy*? From your position, you can comment on world events in a way that news organizations can't.

**Bill Griffith:** Right. I have no requirement to be fair and balanced. On those few occasions when I feel compelled to comment about something political or social that I know is not going to be in people's full awareness when the strip runs five or six weeks later, I have to think: do I want to try to get the papers to bump the previous strips and replace them with this? I consciously steer away from doing that a lot, for two reasons: one, it's not what I want to do; and two, those kinds of strips really don't have a very long shelf life. So I try to address the issue in such a way that it will still work five or six weeks later. When you read a compilation of strips that are politically very tuned in to the *zeitgeist*, they're just documents. They're no longer vital, no longer entertaining.

**Jeff Stein:** And there's a real vitality to *Zippy*. It's in the mold of Walt Kelly and his *Pogo* strips.

Bill Griffith: Kelly was a huge favorite of mine.

Jeff Stein: *Pogo* had political commentary that was nonspecific, or timely but universal.





**Bill Griffith:** I make a conscious effort to do that — to use a less direct approach, make the same point, and as a result let the strip have a longer life and more universal relevance.

Jeff Stein: That's the way architecture works, too, as a storytelling art. The architect can't tell his or her story too specifically in the building, because if you're walking past it and look up but don't get it, then you don't get it. The building has to communicate in such a way that you can put your own overlay of meaning on it and still come away with an experience that is satisfying. And the same thing happens with *Zippy*— it requires an active observer. The reader can't be passive and expect to understand it. You as the cartoonist are only meeting your audience halfway.

**Bill Griffith:** I try to make that point with people who don't understand what I'm doing but would like to. If your expectation of the comic strip is to be entertained by the traditional model of three panels followed by a punch line in the fourth, you'll be disappointed, because I'm not necessarily going to do that. I may, but I may not. Sometimes I structure a strip in such a way — and this is intuitive on my part — that there's a surface gag as well as several other under-the-surface meanings at work.

Jeff Stein: There's a postmodern thing that you do occasionally, too, which is to quote from other cartoons, including cartoons from the past. The cover drawing of Zippy

on the recent book, *From Here to Absurdity*, makes him look a little bit like Sluggo.

Bill Griffith: I love comics. I especially love comic books, although I think the best comic creation of all time is Nancy and Sluggo. I enjoy letting Zippy walk into another comic reality. It seems perfectly reasonable — if he's going to go to Las Vegas one day and talk to a muffler man somewhere in Wisconsin the next day, why can't he walk into Nancy and Sluggo's world? Why can't he suddenly be drawn as if he were in Little Nemo? Or why can't Zippy and his occasional wife Zerbina be transformed into romance comic figures for a day or two? It's fun. And I only play with those genres of comics that I love to look at and love to read. It gives me a lot of pleasure to dip into the style of some other cartoonist.

Jeff Stein: Your work often reminds me of Gertrude Stein's description of Oakland, California, in which she said, "There's no there, there." In *Zippy*, there is always a there, there.

**Bill Griffith:** When I first started doing the strips where Zippy appears in real places, a reader wrote that he was delighted to see that Zippy had escaped into the real world, which I thought was a great phrase. That's just what it felt like — he had run screaming from surrealism into the real world because the real world is even more fun.

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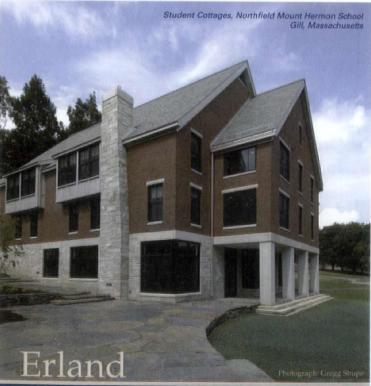


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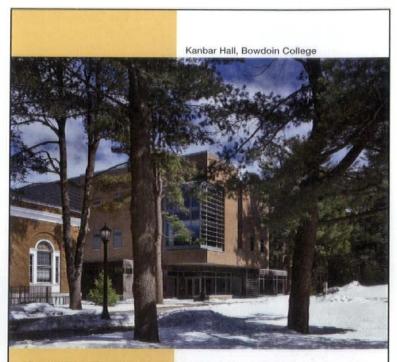
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### BY GRETCHEN SCHNEIDER, ASSOC. AIA | Periodical Roundup

## Covering the Issues

**Pick me...** Do you need to market yourself? (Of course, the dark secret to survival is that we all do....) *How* offers its "Self-Promotion Design Annual" (October 2005), promising "real world marketing strategies for students, newbies, and veterans." Does it deliver on strategies? Maybe not. But this issue certainly provides 140 examples of award-winning brochures, letterheads, logos, postcards, and one extraordinary wedding invitation. Consider it a flipbook of clever and beautiful graphic-design examples, including marketing materials that a practicing designer of any sort might actually use.

Back to school ... CMYK (Summer 2005) offers a glimpse of another approach to design education: graphic design education. In "Choosing the Right Design School," Keith O'Brien interviews educators, administrators, and students. Their advice? Who's in charge, who's teaching, who the alumni are (and the sort of work all these folks are doing) matter. Expensive private design schools are worth it, generally, for the depth of their infrastructure, faculty, students, and alumni network. The usefulness of a master's degree depends on the situation. Sound familiar? O'Brien cites Ric Grefe, executive director of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, who notes that design education" is not about the tools, but about acquiring the judgment to use those tools effectively." Wise words for architects, too.

#### The new, new thing ... Business Week

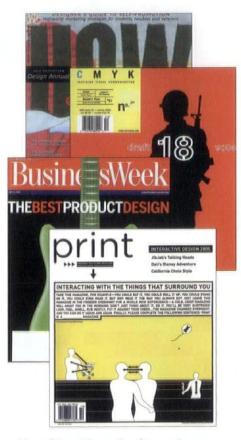
presents nifty new things in its "Best Product Design of 2005" special issue (July 4, 2005). Some — like Rubbermaid's "Paint Buddy" or the no-tank "Hatbox" toilet — are of the practical why-didn't-we-think-of-thisbefore variety. Others, like the "tryke to bike," just look cool. *Business Week* editors note that in the '90s, innovation meant technology; today, innovation means design. Whatever that means. They argue that "design" helps companies focus on the future and provides that important "wow!" factor, while also solving (or at least simplifying) complex problems. However, a look at these awardwinners, selected from 1,380 entries from around the globe, suggest that the "wow!" factor might not be enough. While these lovely things might meet a specific function, the question remains — to what end?

Off the beaten path... In its"Interacting with the Things that Surround You" issue (September/October 2005), Print presents a fascinating range of unusual image-based material that offers all sorts of inspiration. Steven Heller spends a week in the New York Public Library's new digital gallery that now makes 500,000 images freely available on the Internet. It's a tremendous resource for those who rely on image-based presentations. Steven Brower presents the drawings and sketchbooks of Woody Guthrie, revealing a well-developed hand and cultural and political subjects as diverse as his music. Mark Dery discusses the influence of our fastest growing ethnic group — Hispanics — on fashion, music, and design, including a brief guide to leading designers and their work.

And the Digital Design Annual Awards includes sneak peeks into winning website pages: MoMA's "Tall Buildings" exhibition; Stephen Yablon's architectural practice; European "shadow and light" architectural photography; and, yes, the Subservient Chicken. A must-see for anyone considering a website upgrade.

#### A Salute...

Hats off to the folks at *Arch Voices*, who have become friends over the years. Their weekly electronic newsletter ended this fall after 265 issues. Over the years, *Arch Voices* has become both watchdog and conscience,

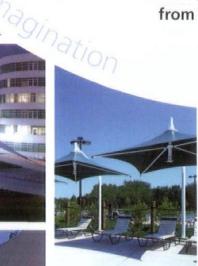


critic and inspiring voice, frustrationventilation and organizing vehicle. The people behind Arch Voices reminded the architectural community that we have a responsibility to a larger world, as they unearthed that idealism that got us into this pursuit in the first place. While highly critical of the profession today, they worked tirelessly to make it better. They argued that a positive role in architecture does not start and stop with licensure, just as having a voice in the profession is not only for those with gray hair. They provided a long-needed catalyst for action, convincing young people to get involved — and getting the grown-ups to notice. John and Cassius and all those who worked with you: Thank you. The voices we know will be missed; we look forward to their next generations.

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, teaches the architecture studios at Smith College and works with Rogers Marvel Architects.

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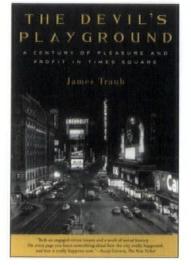


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MORE THOUGHTS ON PLEASURE



THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND: A CENTURY OF PLEASURE AND PROFIT IN TIMES SQUARE by James Traub Random House, 2004 Reviewed by Kimberly Jones

What do historic places owe to any of us, and us to them? In *The Devil's Playground: A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square*, New York journalist James Traub strains to broker a peace between the plasticized redevelopment of this storied local crossroads and the legions of dismayed onlookers he represents.

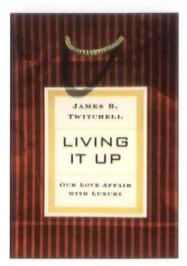
Traub begins by presenting detailed research into early 20th-century history, when New York's channelized social classes found a rare confluence in this burgeoning entertainment district. Through booms and bankruptcies, Times Square stuck to a diet of "frothy escapism" and homegrown "raffishness"; it mesmerized the nation with its dramas, both onstage and off. By mid-century, however, the merely titillating had given way to the outright criminal, and Hollywood had drawn the public gaze to the opposite coast.

Organized intervention seemed unavoidable, and Traub recounts the debates among architects and others regarding how — and whether — to redevelop Times Square; he later loitered there for the better part of two years to examine the recently completed project firsthand. Here the book comes alive, as Traub renders the square's new proprietors with the tools of a good fiction writer, warming to his most endearing subjects, despite their complicity in the "engineered" and "globalized" trends he finds unsettling.

Traub notes that corporate signage - however gaudy and outsized loaded upon carefully refurbished theaters is only a thin continuance of the exuberant, ad hoc underpinnings of this place. But the old Times Square met demands that no longer exist. It was a gathering place, and as a society today, we're not much for gathering. The generation that shook off its Victorian constraints by hoofing the night away in Times Square cabarets was a stark contrast to today's youth, who find no shortage of evening venues in which to shake any number of things. And if American tastes in entertainment seem to have slipped a degree or two in their refinement, then perhaps what entertains the masses in today's Time Square is simply less agreeable to the modern highbrow than the popular fare from 1930. Places, like people, sometimes resist being tied so firmly to their inception; Times Square may just be testing new directions in which to take us. Unpredictability, after all, is one of its hallmarks.

A century ago, a corpulent businessman dispatched a young chef from his favorite Times Square eatery to Paris to commandeer a secret recipe and, when the lad returned, serenaded him at the dock with a small orchestra. I know of no urban strategy that could guarantee Times Square's return to that mythic charm. It seems that Traub doesn't either, but can't let go of the fantasy.

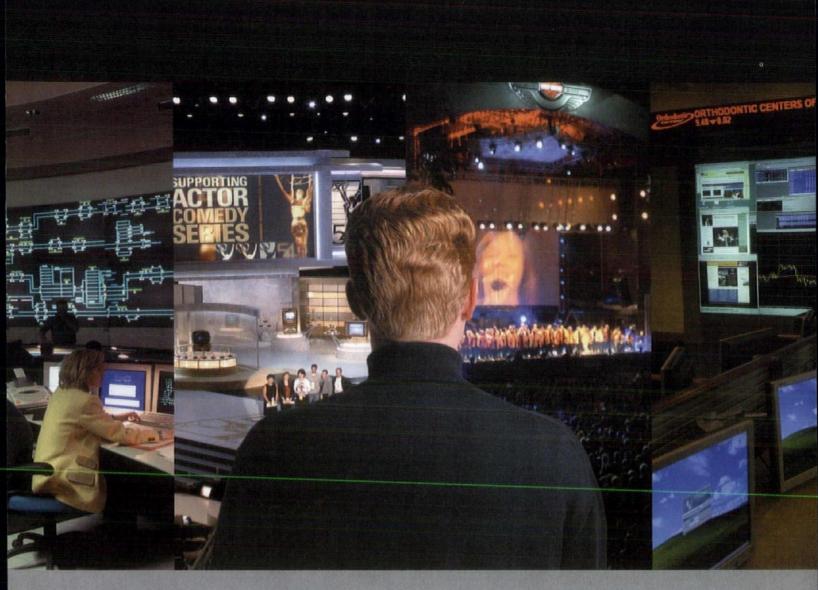
Kimberly Jones is a planner and writer in Boston.



LIVING IT UP: OUR LOVE AFFAIR WITH LUXURY by James B. Twitchell Columbia University Press, 2002 Reviewed by James McCown

"The world is too much with us," wrote Wordsworth. "Late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." The English poet was only one in a long line of Western thinkers who have lamented the urge to splurge.

In Living It Up, James Twitchell, a professor of English at the University of Florida, has offered up something of an apologia for our consumerist age, detailing the history of hyper-luxurious and splendidly useless items from Hermès ties to Prada leather bags and Bang & Olufsen CD players. The book is at its best when he puts forth compelling arguments about the wide social benefits effected by "luxury pioneers," those upper-income people who are willing to pay dearly for new gadgets that then fall in price and become available to the masses (remember \$1,000 VCRs). It's also lively when he gleefully pokes fun at his fellow tweedy, self-satisfied intellectuals and their dismissal of American consumerism as shallow and without purpose, even as they themselves lust for



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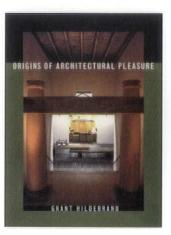
luxury of a putatively less vulgar kind: "Liberals...complain of 'faceless suburbs,' sport utility vehicles, and big-screen TVs. Yet they're strangely untroubled by apartments on the Upper West Side, country houses in Vermont, and Volvo station wagons. The message, apparently, is Le Corbusier is good, La-Z-Boy bad."

But the book has organizational problems. The first half is so overloaded with brand names and advertising clippings that the reader feels like a hapless shopper accidentally locked in Bloomingdale's for the night, doomed to roam the aisles bleary-eyed until help arrives. As a paid consultant to the advertising industry, Twitchell adopts, without irony, too many shop terms, dropping "consumption constellation" and "brandscape" and dozens of others without really defining them or questioning their meaning. And throughout the book, one senses that he is leading up to some great, final defense wherein he will put forth the transcendent global meaning and larger human purpose of "the finer things in life." But it never

comes. He ends with not one but two rambling chapters on Las Vegas, repeating all of the Robert Venturi musings that architects have been reading and discussing for 35 years, but never really reaching any compelling or memorable conclusion on his core subject.

This book could have been an antidote to *Affluenza*, the 2002 tome by John De Graaf *et al* that accompanied the earlier PBS series of the same title. That book, which annoyingly and persistently suggested that American object lust was at the root of everything from African hunger to terrorism, was nevertheless a stimulating read. By contrast, Twitchell's offers an admirable thesis about the larger good produced by getting and spending. But when it comes to delivering the goods, *Living It Up* is a disappointment.

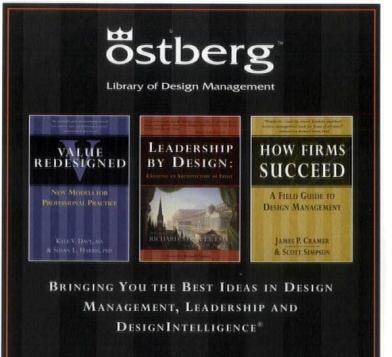
James McCown is director of communications and marketing for Schwartz/Silver Architects in Boston and writes regularly for the *Boston Globe*, *Boston* magazine and *Art New England*.



**ORIGINS OF ARCHITECTURAL PLEASURE** by Grant Hildebrand University of California Press, 1999 Reviewed by Kira L. Gould, Assoc. AIA

Why do we find pleasure in certain buildings? Grant Hildebrand, a professor of architecture and art history at the University of Washington, suggests that people prefer certain forms in architecture because of survival instincts, naturally selected over time, and because





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The human impulse toward survival behaviors, he suggests, is innately linked to a specific set of characteristics; designed environments that have these are likely to elicit human pleasure. He then uses three pairs of words — refuge and prospect, enticement and peril, order and complexity — as his framework. Survival requires ingestion, procreation, securing habitation, and exploration, he notes, and the latter two have architectural implications.

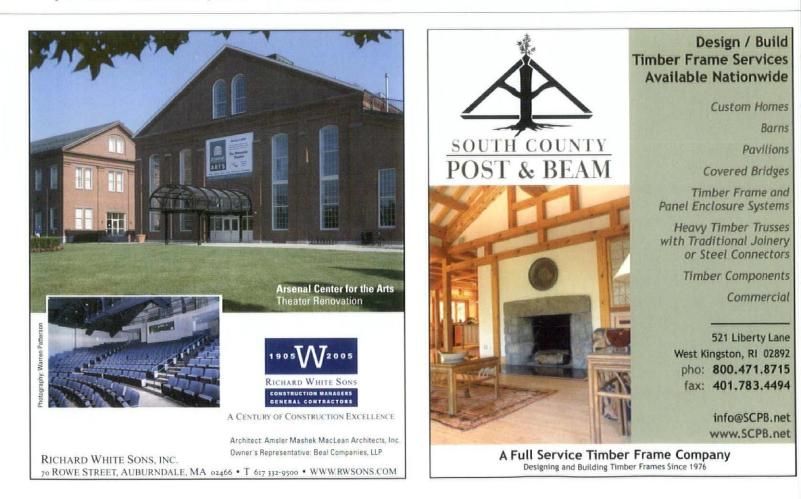
Humans are drawn to places of refuge (think nesting urges) but also desire places of prospect — well lit with long views, often including water. Hildebrand notes a positive "nested hierarchy" of prospect and refuge in Frank Lloyd Wright's refuge-dominant houses and describes a Mario Botta dwelling as "in balance," while Corbu's Villa Savoye is "prospect dominant." Enticement and peril relate to the human impulse of exploration. Humans are curious thrillseekers, which explains why perilous architecture, such as Fallingwater, and towers such as Mont-Saint-Michel, appeal. As an example of the third characteristic, order and complexity, Hildebrand cites Louis Kahn's Exeter library, where the crisp, central volume contrasts with intimate study nodes.

Hildebrand suggests that both order and complexity must be made known. This calls into question works such as Mies van der Rohe's Seagram building, whose salient features are hidden to the casual observer (or visible only in a drawing of a corner detail). Perhaps such hidden messages can be blamed for other architecture that Hildebrand might describe as out of balance (where complexity lacks order or order lacks complexity).

Hildebrand's prose is thoughtful and readable, although sometimes dry. He illustrates how the three pairings appear to have stemmed from evolutionary development and how they can be seen in various forms of architecture, but the leap to the notion of architectural pleasure is a bit long. One trouble is that pleasure is highly subjective (even if also in some part congenital).

He pines for architecture that can be appreciated by many people. The Laon cathedral towers "represent some quite sophisticated and abstract thinking of their time.... The towers also present characteristics of immediate and visible delight. They have it both ways: they add to one observer's collection at a sophisticated cognitive level, to another's at an immediately apparent affective level." This having-it-both-ways may be a key to long-term success. Architects have complex, nesting scales of responsibility, and one of these is a commitment to honesty, clarity, and accessibility.

Kira L. Gould, Assoc. AIA, writes about design from her home in Boston's South End.





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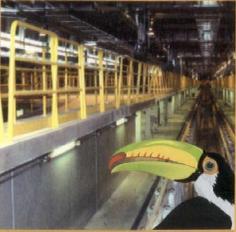
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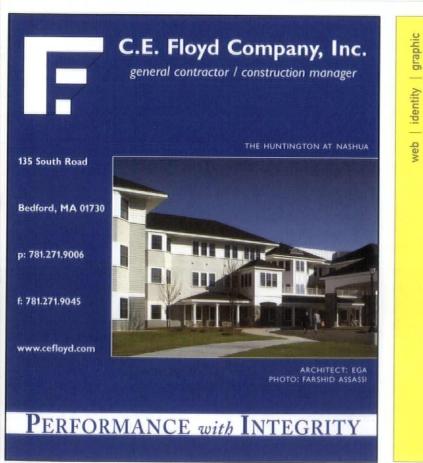
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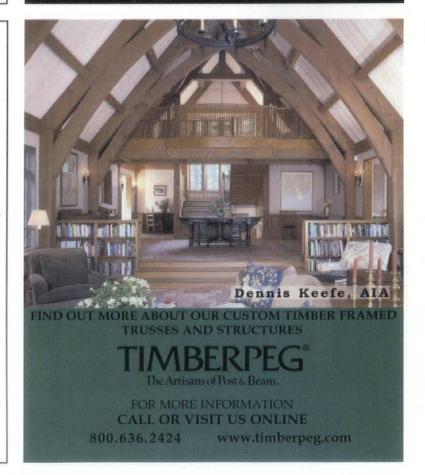
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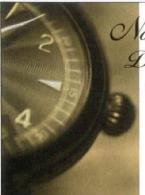
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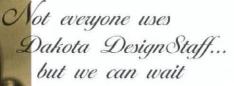


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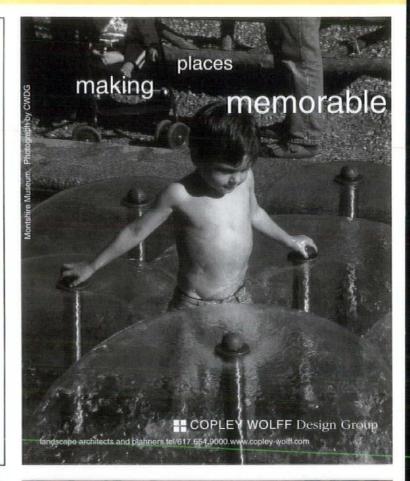
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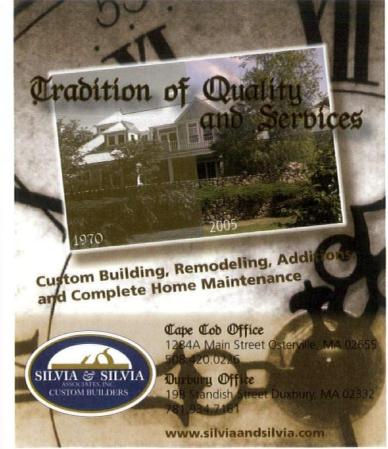
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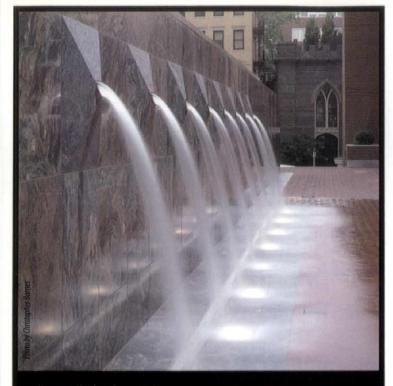
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### Other Voices | BY GREGORY LAUZON

# Six Flags New England

ost of the time, we build things so we can live our lives more conveniently and, sometimes, more beautifully. A well-designed bridge, for example, can get us across a river and it might even look breathtaking in the bargain.

But there's a place where someone has built stuff to confuse, amuse, and even scare the pants off us. It's Six Flags New England (formerly Riverside Park) in Agawam, Massachusetts. In 1840, it was a picnic grove. Now it's a mega-complex of neon and gasping hydraulics that attracts teenagers from all over New England.

Here, it seems, there are two main forces at work. The first is to separate "guests" from their money by creating an environment that steals a page from the shopping-mall playbook - directing all foot traffic past as many opportunities to spend money as possible. You can't simply wander the park. You have to dodge and weave your way through a pan-sensory assault - past kielbasa concessionaires, around (or just as often through) countless gift shops — with minimal signage to help you reach your intended target.

And that intended target is often the embodiment of Six Flags' other guiding principle: a meticulous exploration of the architecture of fear. There are few jobs that require one to think, Will this freak people out enough? Am I perhaps being too gentle?

Rollercoasters, of course, are the most obvious example of this. The first inkling of a rollercoaster, built at Coney Island in 1884, was meant to be nothing more than

a mildly amusing diversion, a novel way to take in some lovely ocean views. That was, apparently, fun for about five minutes - within a year, a successor was built in San Francisco that was all about speed, height, and stomach-churning dips.

In 2005, of course, rollercoasters are light-years beyond what early designers could have ever imagined. But despite 100 years of advances, every coaster on Earth is still bound by the laws of both gravity and government, and only one of those laws can be bent. (In recent years, Massachusetts' own Congressman Ed Markey has led the way in attempting to regulate coaster speeds and G forces. He means well, but to my mind, speed and



overhead. It's been said that architecture is frozen music. If that's the case, then a rollercoaster like Superman is frozen punk rock: breakneck and hellbent. But I think a more apt description is that coaster tracks are frozen mathematical equations: solve 'em for x and you get white-knuckled horror. They are prime examples of engineers pushing hard against the laws of physics, and the laws of physics pushing hard right back. "This coaster is going to be the craziest one ever built," they brag. "Oh yeah? Build it, and you will die," Mother Nature replies. We can stack skyscraper floors up to the very clouds,

There are few jobs that require one to think, Will this freak people out enough? Am I perhaps being too gentle?

G forces are kind of the whole point.) To the great delight of coaster fans worldwide, Six Flags New England is home to a steeltube monster that pushes at least the law of gravity right to the edge --- "Superman: Ride of Steel," which many aficionados rank among the top 10 anywhere. That New England hosts a world-class coaster is more than a little strange. Such a thing ought to reside in Ohio, say, or California - someplace a bit more accustomed to adrenaline and speed.

Next time you visit Six Flags, spend some time to quietly reflect on Superman as its payload of screaming teens roars by

anchor oil rigs in the deepest oceans, and send our friends and neighbors into outer space and back, but when it comes to building scream machines, a tyranny of the tracks takes precedence. Here, human frailty is the limiting factor, not material strength or cost of construction. "Scare the living hell out of us," we ask, "but let us survive the trip." Now that - pun very much intended — is one tall order.

Gregory Lauzon is a freelance writer in Western Massachusetts. He was terrified of coasters as a kid, but today he'll ride nearly anything. Nearly.

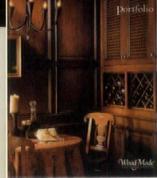
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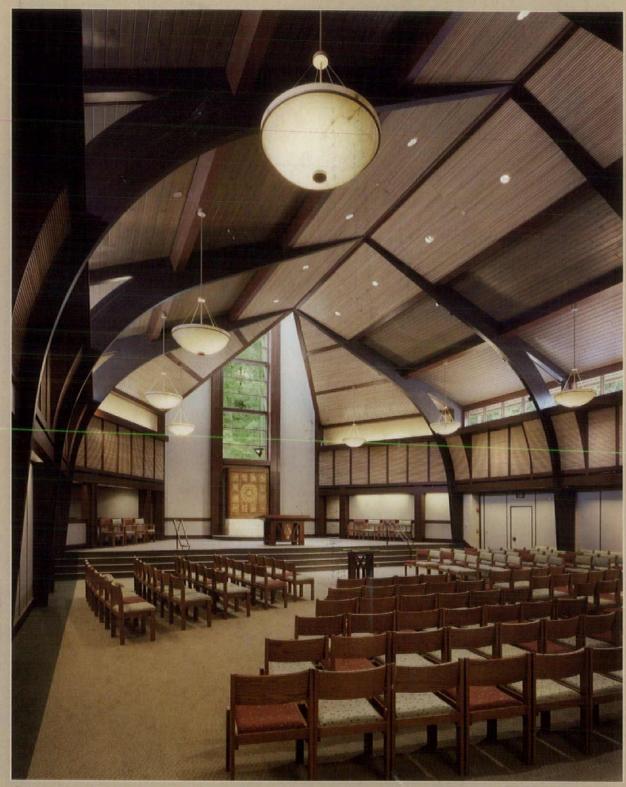


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