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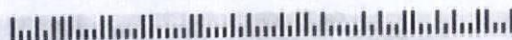
The Architecture of Winter

# winter

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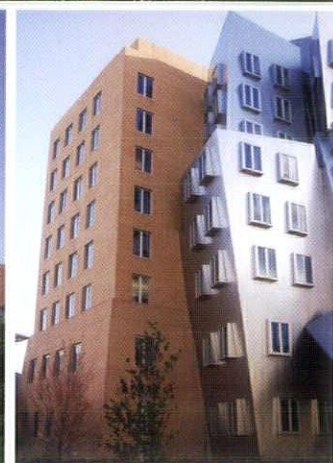
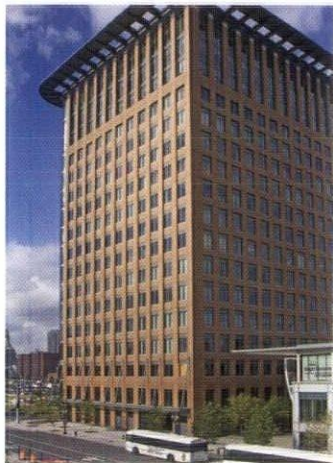
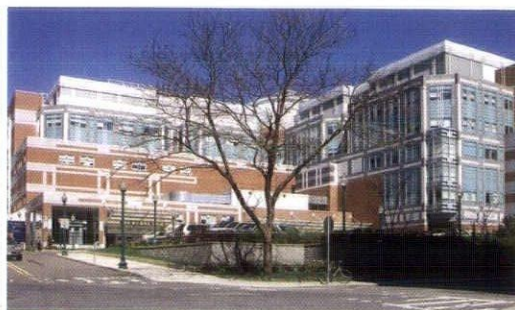
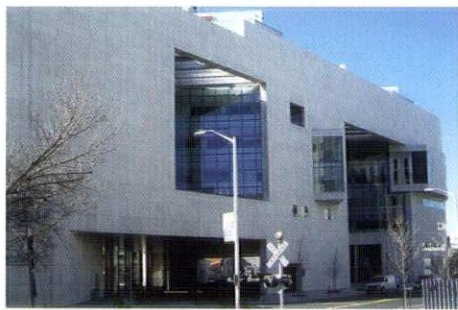
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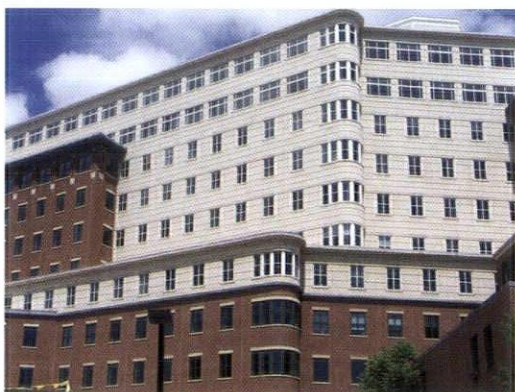




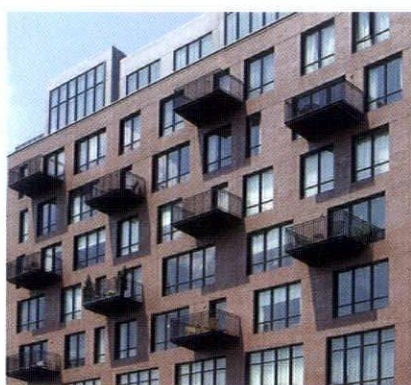
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St. Moritz, Switzerland, 1938

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# No Day at the Beach

**O**K, so it's winter. Quit your grumbling, whining, whinging, and kvetching. The biggest problem with winter is not the cold and the dark, but our own bad attitude.

Mark Twain observed, "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." He was wrong. In fact, lots of people do something about the weather: they move. Weather, specifically our winter, is one of the first explanations given for Boston's recent population drop. Gleeful émigrés send reports from North Carolina, Florida, Texas, and Arizona, describing low-cost housing, good jobs — and wonderful weather. (These reports are never sent in July.)

Maybe some of the folks who have moved on are the pessimists and malcontents no one wants around anyway; Anton Chekhov — who knew something about cold weather — wrote that happy people don't notice whether it's winter or summer. But we have reason to worry: a declining population has deep economic and political ramifications. We need to think about both sides of the population equation — attracting and retaining. In an era when there are few tethers tying people geographically, we need to be smart about attracting and retaining those who can make a real contribution. And if our winters are part of the problem, it's time to rethink our solutions.

One solution requires changing our attitude. Winter is a state of mind and, as contributor Norman Pressman notes, it's also a relative condition: the gorgeous gold-colored evening grosbeak on your backyard feeder has come south for the winter. For too long, the best we've been able to say about winter is that it's good for the character. Anne Bradstreet may have defined New England's relationship with its climate for generations when she wrote, "If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome." Unfortunately, character isn't playing too well in today's culture of self-esteem and immediate gratification. Today, Anne would be tasting 'tinis and blogging from South Beach.

But the New England way is not the only way. Many cultures — perhaps most notably in Scandinavia — have adapted to winter conditions far more extreme than ours and learned to embrace the season. Winter brings its own pleasures, and other societies celebrate those pleasures, establishing rituals and traditions and making accommodations that are part of their very identity. They have found reason to welcome winter.

Another solution explains why *ArchitectureBoston* has taken on the subject of winter: Let's think of winter as a design problem. We can do more than just dress for the weather — we can design for it. We can design a cityscape that responds to our climate; we can invent new traditions that celebrate it. Building technology today encourages us to ignore winter; we no longer need to huddle around the hearth in order to survive. Technology has liberated us, but it has also stripped us of the will to find innovative responses to the cold season. By looking for design inspiration in our climate, we can establish a culture that views the dark months with anticipation

In an era when there are few tethers tying people geographically, we need to be smart about attracting and retaining those who can make a real contribution. And if our winters are part of the problem, it's time to rethink our solutions.

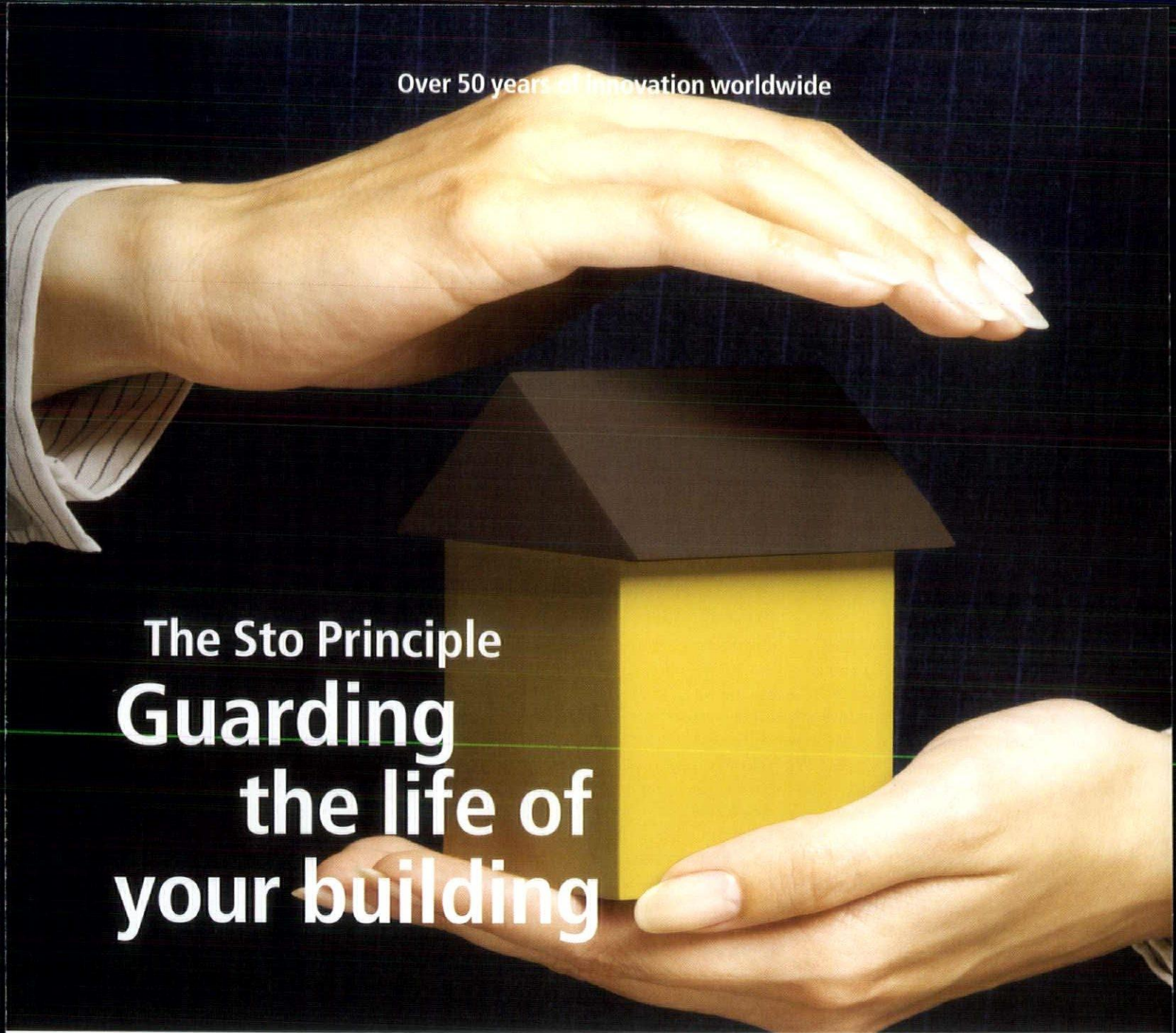
rather than dread. And by creating a city that better accommodates its climate, we can improve the lives of the homeless, the elderly, the disabled, and others for whom winter remains a threat to survival.

Boston's winters are marked by slush and mud as much as by snow and ice. Put another way, they are frequently mild and nearly always changeable; people in some parts of the world might envy us. As Henry David Thoreau, another archetypal New Englander, once recorded in his journal: "'Hear! Hear!' screamed the jay from a neighboring tree, where I had heard a tittering for some time, 'winter has a concentrated and nutty kernel, if you know where to look for it.'"

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA  
Editor



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A close-up photograph of a person's hand, wearing a light-colored striped shirt cuff, gently holding a small, yellow, three-dimensional model of a house. The house has a dark brown roof and a yellow body. The background is dark and textured.

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**Admiration and thanks** for a multidirectional look at that curiously voiceless (as Renée Loth noted) and often invisible island, East Boston [September/October 2006]. With some nostalgia for the mainland downtown, I called it “East of Eden” when I moved in six years ago and peered — from a four-decker built doubtless by Donald McKay’s shipwrights between launchings — over the harbor, the tanker traffic, and the tugboat wharf in my backyard, toward the other waterfront, the Old North Church spire, Charlestown, and the Mystic River Bridge. But it turns out that the town is a sort of Eden unto itself — an Eden of the dense, intense, modest, mannerly, family-spirited old urbanism, and a smart challenge to the new. Somewhere between neglect and renaissance, between the Italian landlords and Latino tenants, at the Café Italia with its Old Eastie clientele and its brilliant all-Brazilian kitchen, this may as well be remembered as an Edenic moment.

The only stroke I would add to your profile of East Boston is simply this: in an age of multipurpose dread, the town has a remarkable *fearlessness* about it. Cheerful East Bostonians of many stripes and generations seem to be fearless about the past, and the future, including the new apartments. They walk the streets — singles, pairs, and clusters — fearless of crime, and of each other. From the start, it struck me that East Boston is miraculously free of those venerable Boston hang-ups focused on race and on strangers. And that freedom from fear makes a radical difference in the life of the town. Concretely: if East Boston had been responsible for planning the new South Boston Waterfront, it would have put housing on that precious land and made a modern paradise of it, for people! If the architects do their job with some style, East Boston will surely make the most of its new neighbors and its overdue attention.

Christopher Lydon  
Radio host, Open Source  
East Boston

**You know what I love** about Greg and Tacey Luongo’s article [“Who Is East Boston?” September/October 2006]? They understand what makes East Boston great. It’s not the miles of waterfront, the spectacular views of downtown, the incredible parks and public spaces, nor Eastie’s gritty, storied past of immigrants and shipbuilders. The Luongos understand that East Boston is about individual people — each with a different story but a common love of the neighborhood.

I grew up in the suburbs and hardly knew my neighbors. I moved to the North End and, though I loved the neighborhood and the cafés, I still felt like a guest. But in Eastie, I’m home. Neighbors knock on my door if they see my car getting a ticket. When I walked out of my house this morning, I said hello to four neighbors before reaching my car — only 100 yards away. There are some great dives, but there aren’t really any pubs; so what do people do? They have neighborhood house parties; imagine that. Three generations of the same Italian family live next door to us. On the other side live three generations of a Salvadoran family. Across the street? A triple-decker converted into condos, occupied by an African-American woman, a white professional male, and a gay couple.

Parks and architecture are great, but the greatest thing about Eastie is the variety of the people who live and love it here. It’s about people from different countries, ethnicities, races, economic and social classes, sexual orientations, and political beliefs who all love the same neighborhood. This urban barrio of Italians, Latinos, artists, and professionals is, in many ways, the ultimate American neighborhood.

Rob Pyles  
Audissey Guides  
East Boston

**Your East Boston issue** brought back many memories. I came to East Boston in 1969 to work for two years as a community organizer, with plans to return to New York

and finish architecture school. The Neighborhood Council, with support from the Boston Archdiocesan Planning Office, was seeking federal funds to create the East Boston Community Development Corporation. My job was to find out from residents and activists what was needed and incorporate their ideas into development plans. Our original office is now Café Italia on Meridian Street.

The *East Boston Community News* began as a newsletter of the project in response to repeated requests for a real newspaper instead of the advertising rag that was the only paper in Eastie. The *Community News* became an independent newspaper after the first controversial story related to the airport and the governor’s race.

After my two years were up, I was rooted in East Boston and chose to stay. When I joined Urban Edge at the end of 1977, my wife Joan and I considered moving to Jamaica Plain to be closer to work, but chose to stay in East Boston. Over the course of 30 years, Joan fell in love with everything Italian. Now our neighbors next door and across the yard are from El Salvador and much of the music we hear has a Latin beat. Our block, like all of East Boston, celebrates many cultures and races.

We did not own a car until four years ago. Joan took the T to work and I got there via the ferry followed by a 20-minute bike ride. But most mornings I was the only rider, so the ferry service ended. With the anticipated waterfront development, I look forward to the return of the ferry so I can bike to work again.

Mossik Hacobian  
East Boston

**Your recent issue on Eastie** performs a valuable service. You reveal the new community and its connection to the past. Eastie epitomizes the Gateway City, holding on to the broadest possible range of housing options and fostering community through civic engagement.



The world has come and continues to come to Eastie and call it home; now all Boston is coming, too. The number of windows overlooking Boston Harbor is now greater than the number overlooking Boston Common. The harbor is our shared front yard and new Common. The Piers Park sailing program and Zumix reflect the real Boston at play. An unstated challenge, however, is the need for cultural space and meeting places for old and new residents, both the "lifers" and the young, mobile types. Shared space is vital, and visitors need a welcome mat. What gets built to serve these needs remains a challenge.

Westy Egmont  
Boston

**Architecture embodies the values** of the cultural milieu in which it is created. How unfortunate, then, that "on time" and "on budget" constitute the cultural milieu of most architects today. And those granted the resources to transcend those hazards seem to regard novelty and glamour as the muses most worth wooing.

What of the opportunity to serve humankind and the exquisite ecology that sustains life on this tiny planet? What of the comfort, dignity, and well-being of building inhabitants and likewise the well-being of generations hence? How might architects eschew ever-expanding consumption and embrace instead a steadfast moderation? And how will they ever persuade their clients to do so?

Happily, *ArchitectureBoston* attends to the loftier aspects of the practice of architecture with greater success than other segments of the architectural press. In a time when architects are said to design buildings with photo opportunities foremost in their minds, *ArchitectureBoston* acknowledges that architecture is about more than pretty pictures. The roundtable regularly includes wide-ranging perspectives on provocative topics. The photo essays explore the built environment from well outside the boundaries of conventional architectural photography. "Other Voices" closes each issue from the point of view of non-architects. In the most recent issue, "Who Is East Boston?" bore witness to the power of the built world to shape people's lives and sustain their spirit.

That being said, I invite you to throw even wider the doors that confine the architectural press to the world of commercial allure. Are we called upon to do more than engage in the commerce of construction? What else is there?

Jay Weber  
Arlington, Massachusetts

**I loved "Where the Girls Are"** by Joan Wickersham [September/October 2006]. The engineering and architecture professions have much in common, including problems like a protracted uphill battle to increase the percentage of women and minority practitioners. Hopefully outreach by role models like Judith Nitsch will make inroads on the engineering side, and the lessons learned can inform the architecture community. Closing that gap would likely make practice better for everyone and possibly improve the built environment, too.

Jeremy Edmunds PE, LEED AP, Assoc. AIA  
New York City

**The interview** between Mildred Schmertz and Jane Thompson in your July/August 2006 issue was informative and profoundly stimulating. Mildred Schmertz has always possessed a keen mind in the advocacy and promulgation of the profession of architecture. While I have never had the privilege or pleasure to meet Jane Thompson, I have followed the Thompson course of exemplary practice of architecture and design. Inherent in this interview were the thought process and action necessary if architecture, design, and joyful living are to thrive. Congratulations to two great visionary women.

Der Scutt FAIA  
New York City

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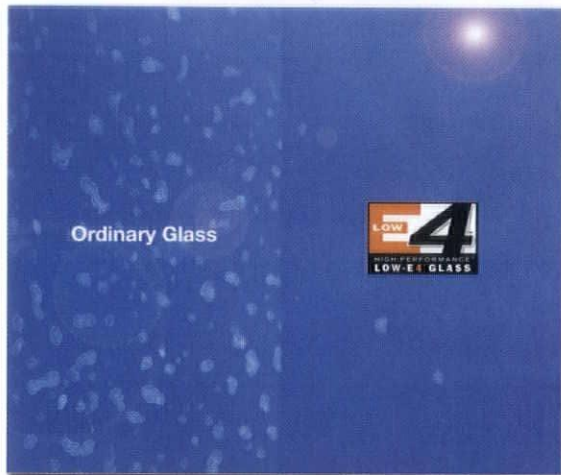
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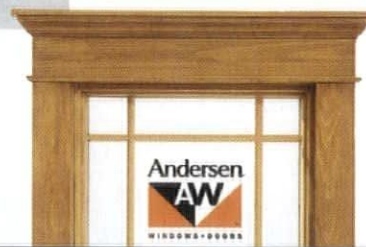


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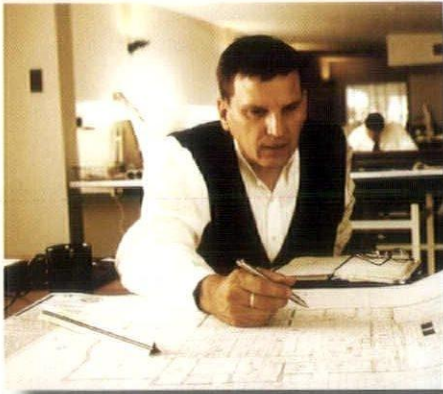
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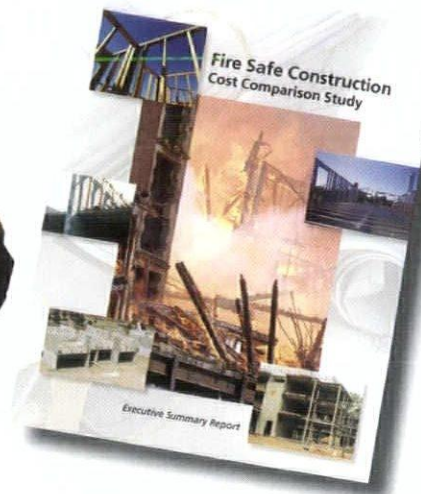
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Phaeno Science Center, Wolfsburg, Germany, 1999–2005. Zaha Hadid Architects.

## Zaha Hadid

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June 3–October 25, 2006

**In a lecture**, architect Peter Zumthor once declared that he would talk about his buildings only if they were still in design; anything built should be visited. Like music or food, architecture must be experienced directly. A recent exhibition at the Guggenheim illustrates why.

Zaha Hadid is a 30-year retrospective of the work of today's leading female architect. Spread along the Guggenheim's great spiral ramp, this collection of abstract paintings, drawings, photos, and three-dimensional objects catalogues Hadid's famous formal and spatial gymnastics. A group of exquisitely folded white paper models are a highlight. Hadid's stunning attention to craft in buildings and their representation is clear. I walked away struck by the beauty of what she makes.

And yet, for all the bluster of Hadid's public persona, the exhibition is remarkably

timid, and never gets much beyond a marketing pitch. It seems that Hadid (or the architectural establishment around her) is still trying to establish her presence rather than using this opportunity to delve deeper. There's none of the creative processor vitality evident in the Frank Gehry exhibition on view in the same spot a few years ago, nor do the curators offer additional context, critical analysis, or the experience of being in a Hadid space. Instead, we're faced with collages of flat photos.

Hadid's Cincinnati Art Center is a remarkable building—spatially dynamic, well-crafted, beautiful in its own right while also enhancing the art on display inside. But I say this based on a recent Ohio road trip, not on this exhibition. If you miss *Zaha Hadid*, don't worry. Buy the catalogue, and then visit her buildings.

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, is a designer at Rogers Marvel Architects in New York City.

## The Venetian Dilemma

**Directed by Carole and Richard Rifkind**

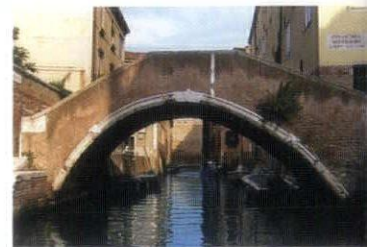
DVD, 56 minutes

(available from Filmmakers Library;  
www.filmmakers.com)

**"After 1,500 years**, Venice is running out of time. To survive, some say Venice must modernize. Or must she?" With this question, Carole and Richard Rifkind frame the bitter debate that has stirred the emotions of Venetians for 30 years. Their compelling and beautifully photographed documentary focuses sharply on the opposing views of the dilemma.

Residents, who believe that their city is "cracking under the weight" of tourists (a projected 20 million next year), seek to preserve their place and way of life. City planners recognize the impact of tourism on the city's delicate fabric and argue that "to preserve is to die." They propose an ambitious program of public-works projects to modernize the city's economic base, including a subway system connecting the island to the mainland and the airport.

Because of its unique heritage, Venice belongs to the world, not only to its residents. Venetians must stop bickering, develop creative ways to deal with tourism, and accept that change is inevitable. Venice is indeed running out of time.



Antonio Di Mambro FAIA is the principal of Antonio Di Mambro + Associates in Boston.



## Sketches of Frank Gehry

**Directed by Sidney Pollack**

DVD, 83 minutes

**Riding the documentary wave**, Hollywood director Sidney Pollack (*Out of Africa*, *Tootsie*) agreed after much prodding to do a film on his longtime friend Frank Gehry. The result, *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, features sweeping money shots of popular Gehry stock: Bilbao, Disney Hall, and the Stata Center at MIT, among others, choreographed to an original, benign score. Woven among these arty montages are conversations between Pollack and Gehry at his house, in his car, and in his office. We also see Pollack and Philip Johnson, Pollack and Gehry's therapist, Pollack and the LA artists who make up Gehry's coterie.

If you're an architect and want to show your friends what you do, you might recommend this film. In Gehry's case,

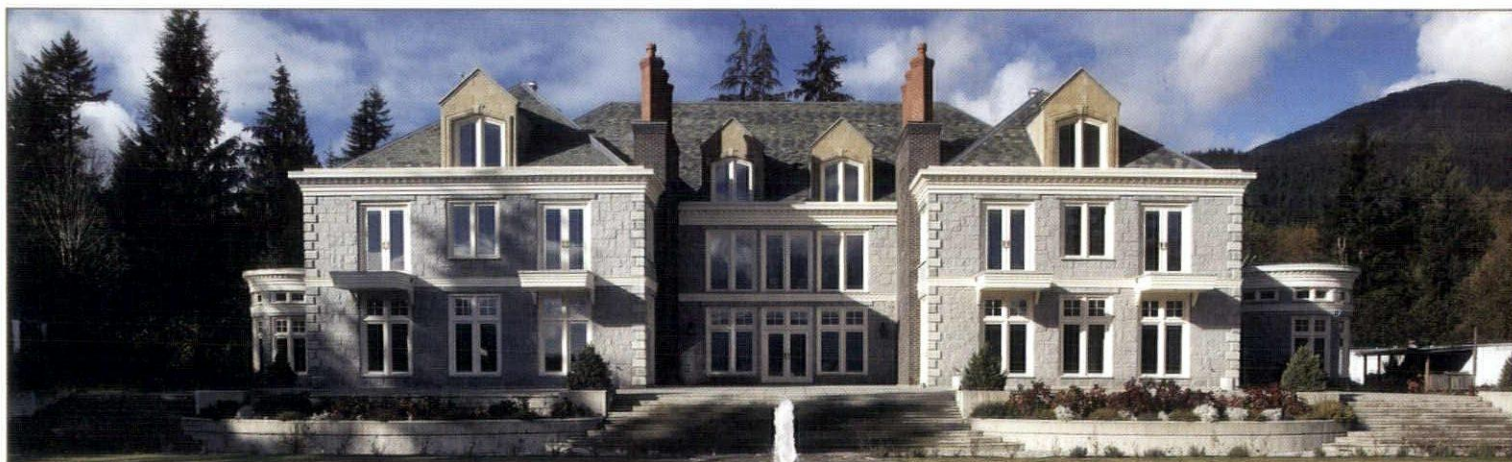
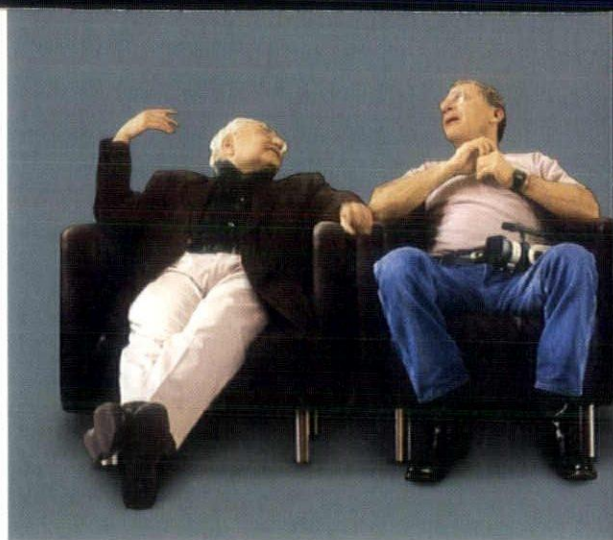
there's lots of folding, cutting, and taping of silver paper, heavy sighs, big hand gestures, and more cutting and taping. Such architectural drama seems to hold the audience's attention.

The film's underlying premise is that Gehry is the only architect with any guts. Perhaps you agree. (One of the most absurd or perfect scenes — depending on how you feel — is when he walks onto the stage of Disney Hall after a concert to a standing ovation, feigning humility.) A parade of celebs — the architectural kind (Herbert Muschamp) and the real kind (Dennis Hopper) — tells us why Gehry is the best. The only naysayer is Princeton professor Hal Foster, who is shot in some dark cave-like place, clearly unenlightened; he looks like Lurch from *The Addams Family*.

But what's shown also tells a darker story: Gehry works with only two people in his office of hundreds, and he's never seen wandering around the firm or

interacting with any underlings. He's the lone genius; his believers do his bidding and give him wide berth. The film adulates the genius who dumped everything to express himself, including his entire staff and his first wife. (According to the film, dumping her was the critical step toward becoming Gehry the legend.) Creepily, this seems like a prequel to *My Architect* (the film about architect Louis Kahn): You can't help but think about the hapless victims of Gehry's ambition.

Rachel Levitt is a designer and writer.



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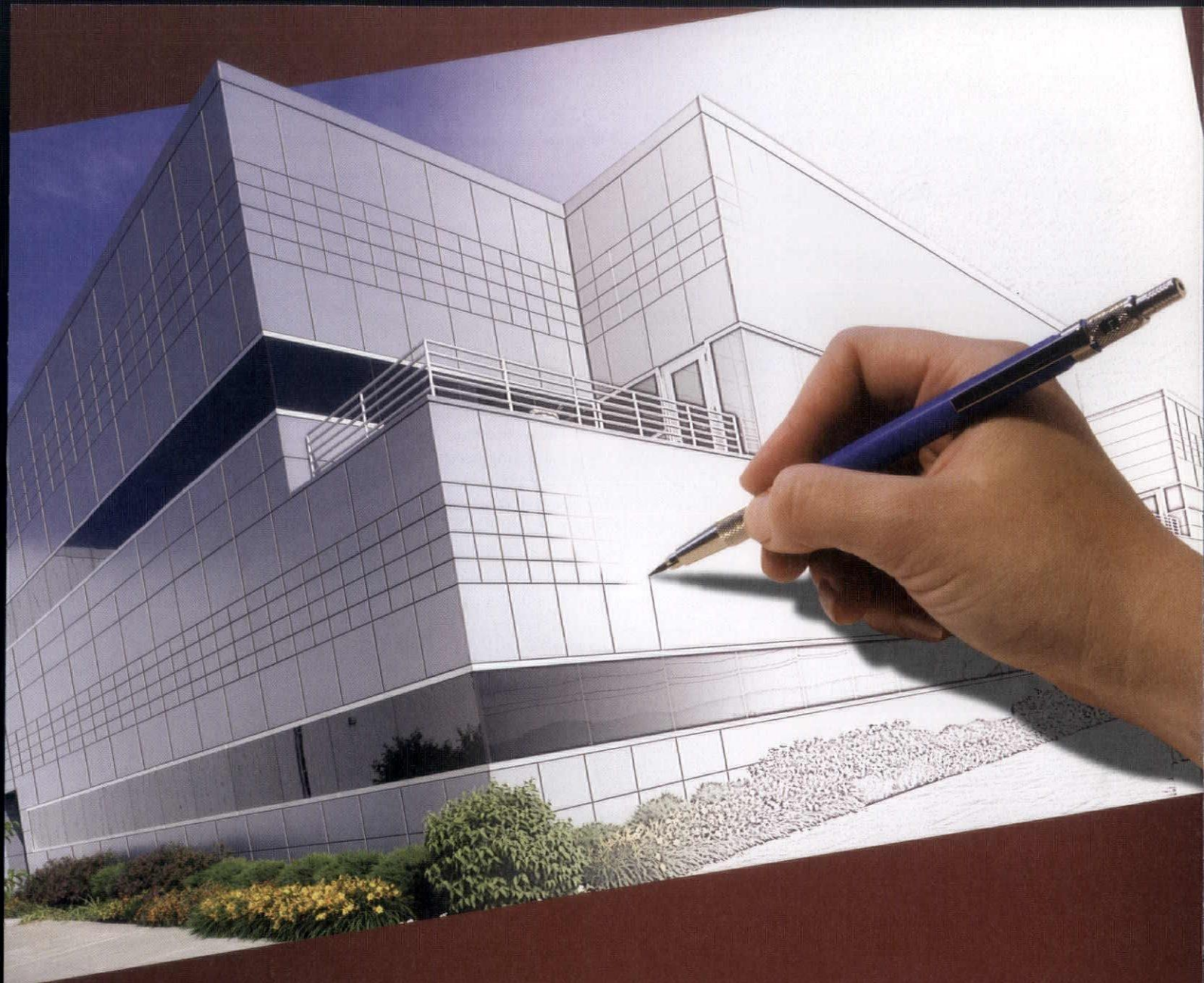
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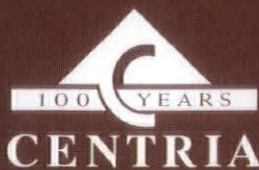




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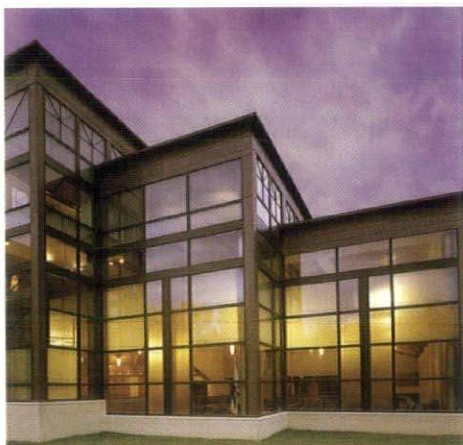
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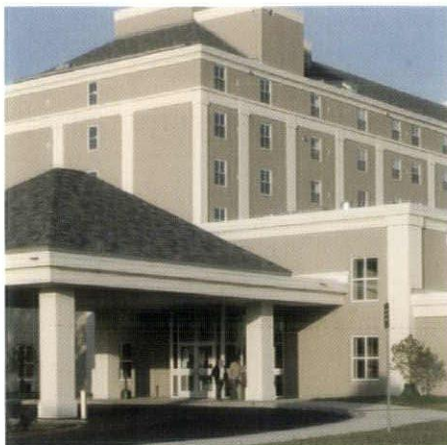
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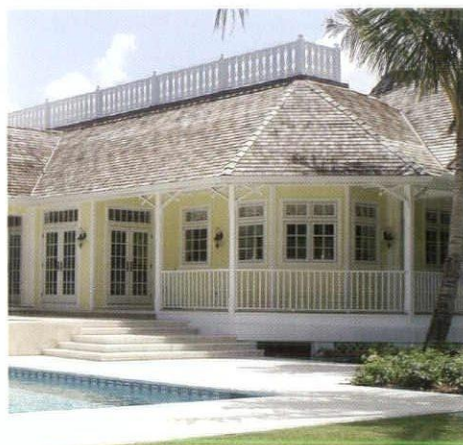
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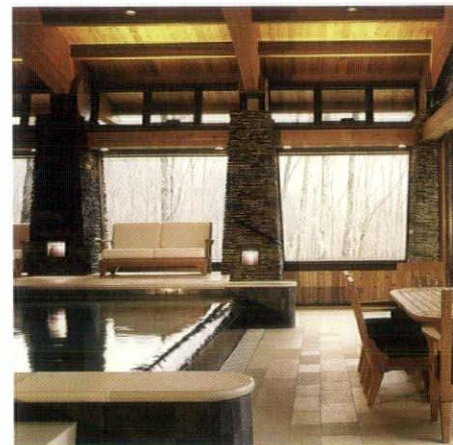
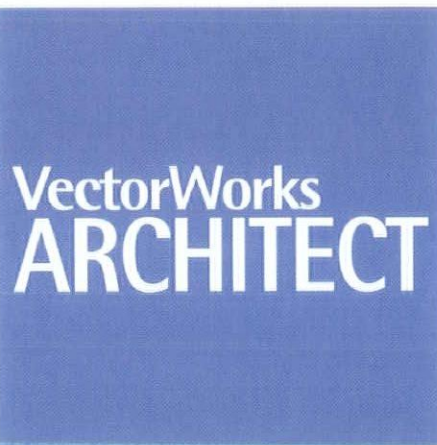
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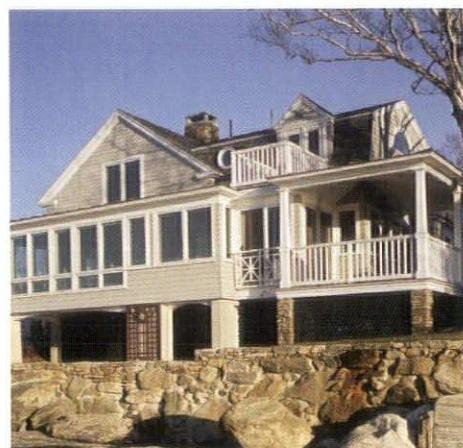
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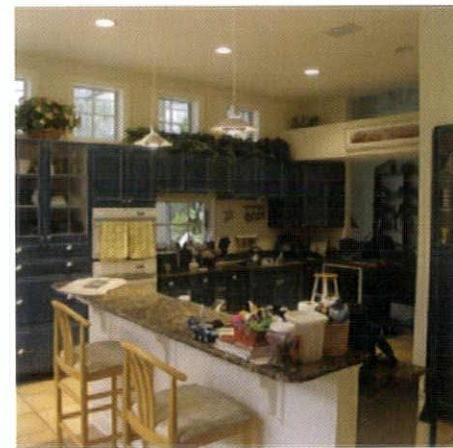
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# Life, Death, and Real Estate

**The place:** Mount Auburn Cemetery, on the border between Cambridge and Watertown, Massachusetts. Founded in 1831, Mount Auburn is the oldest of America's "garden cemeteries" and an icon of historic landscape design. Horticultural connoisseurs wander the 175 acres of trees, shrubs, and perennials. Birdwatchers come for thrushes and warblers. Architects gaze at the Egyptian Revival gate and the tombs of Charles Bulfinch and Mary Baker Eddy. Couples move slowly, holding hands or pushing strollers, using the place as the beautiful park it is. But then: a hearse, followed by car after car, crawls up a hill and down again, winding along the green avenues before finally disappearing from sight.

**The president:** Bill Clendaniel, who has directed Mount Auburn for 18 years. Among his many responsibilities — finances, curatorship, public education — is the challenge of keeping Mount Auburn going as an active burial place. Space is running out. Recent years have seen innovations: walls with inscriptions, a "condominiumized" obelisk carved with the names of the people whose remains surround it. Classic single or family gravesites are quite rare — and stunningly expensive — nowadays. As Bill says, "We only sell this land once."

**10:05** Driving a jaunty little electric vehicle, Bill stops beside a shady bank where exploratory digging is going on, supervised by one of the cemetery's two salespeople. Several gravesites are available in this little glade — but there are pipes running beneath the bank. Once the digging has pinpointed the pipes' location, slim gray mock-up headstones will be nestled into the greenery to mark the available gravesites and give a prospective client an idea of the final effect.

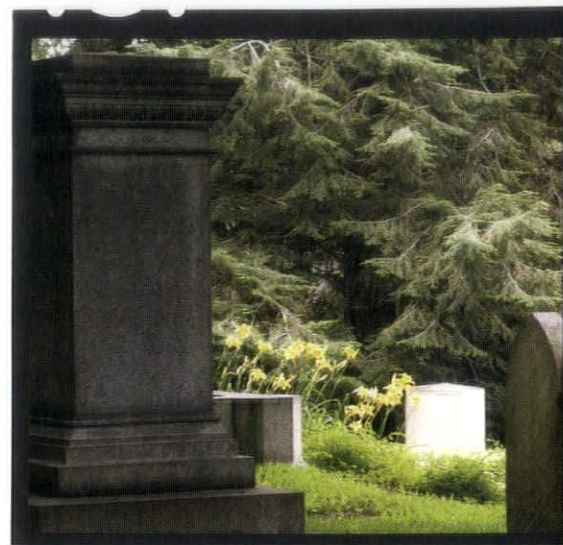
**10:17** Bill stops his vehicle near a small forklift that's nosing the ground, peeling up a neat rectangle of turf. A grave-liner, which resembles a gigantic lidded cement shoebox, waits by the roadside. "This for tomorrow?" Bill asks.

The gravedigger nods. "We got two full burials, and three cremated."

Grave-digging, pruning, mowing, and other noisy landscaping activities are carefully scheduled at times when there are no burial services taking place.

**10:40** Back at his office, Bill checks messages. He notes down details about a concert that will figure in the cemetery's year-long 175th-anniversary celebration and leaves a message for a developer working on a housing project adjacent to the cemetery, who wants to discuss the purchase of a sliver of land.

**11:05** Bill shakes hands with an assured, beautifully dressed woman who has come with her daughter to look at seven of Mount Auburn's most idyllic — and costliest — available gravesites. They chat for a few moments, and then climb into



one of the little electric vehicles and drive off for a private tour.

**12:55** Carrying his lunch salad, Bill joins an in-progress horticulture meeting. The staff is planning the construction and planting of an area to be called Birch Gardens, along a section of the cemetery's perimeter. The design, by Halvorson Design Partnership, calls for both casket plots and smaller plots for cremated remains, with all the inscriptions appearing on communal granite walls — a model which, in real-estate terms, increases density, building an apartment complex rather than a neighborhood of single-family houses. (And, as one might expect when comparing apartments to fancy houses, the purchase price here will be significantly lower.)

The right mix of trees and shrubs will be crucial, both to create a particular garden "identity" for the area and as a visual and acoustic screen from the nearby public roadway.

The staff briefs Bill on the discussion: "We're debating fall versus spring planting."

Fall would suit the conifers called for in the design, but some of the specified trees — beeches and elms — are spring-dug.

"If planting is delayed till spring, you're going to have a big bare wall for another six



months. And it's not going to be easy to sell a big bare wall."

Bill: "We can't make plants do what they don't want to do. And we're not going to sell much in the late fall or winter anyway."

**1:14** The group critiques planting plans submitted by the landscape architect, beginning with trees. The conversation is technical, cryptic, passionate, and very fast. "I'd like to replace this group of three Doug fir with white fir."

"OK, this umbrella pine — let's specify 'Wintergreen' as the cultivar, if we can find one of any size. It's something we don't already have."

"Hmm, this heptacodium. It's going to require a lot of maintenance and pruning to get it to be tree-like. We need something upright. Let's put in a magnolia as an alternative. Or throw a prunus in there."

**1:35** "Are we done with trees?"

"No, wait. I'm concerned about size. I don't think we need five or six calipers of anything. We could go down to three-and-

a-half or four."

"We'll specify a mix of sizes, to look more natural."

"And it'll be cheaper, too."

"Listen, the cost of landscaping here is nothing, compared to the granite."

"Peanuts."

"Budget-dust."

**1:42** Shrubs. More rapid, rabid discussion.

"Sixty rhododendron 'Gumpo'? No. I question the hardiness. Give us 20 of them, and 20 each of two other things, and I'd feel better."

"And these deutzias are going to grow slowly. They're spaced too far apart."

**1:50** Bulbs and perennials.

"*Anemone sylvestris*. They've specified 88 — but they're invasive."

"So really we only need 22."

"*Anemone blanda*. 4,000 bulbs. Anyone have a problem?"

"I do. They die out."

"But they buy you time while other plantings fill in."

**2:37** Another meeting begins, the goal of which is to figure out how to divide up and sell the burial plots and inscription space of Birch Gardens. Drawings are unrolled on the table: plans of the graves and elevations of the granite walls. A patchwork grid of variously sized squares and rectangles. Silence. "I don't quite get how the wall relates to the ground," someone finally says.

The project manager explains: urns and caskets will be placed in the ground, with corresponding inscriptions on the wall.

"But where? If my dad is in the ground over here, where will his place on the wall be?"

**2:44** Everyone is still peering at the drawings. The conversation is frank: not disrespectful, but not overly sentimental either. This is a business meeting, a gloves-off airing of issues that need to be resolved.

"I'm just trying to understand — see, the way you have this divided up into rectangles and squares, it looks like space for a family of four."

"That's right."



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"But two would have to be buried, and two cremated?"

"That happens," one of the sales reps puts in. "People within the same family can want different things."

"Yeah, but isn't that awfully specific? You could wait a long time before that particular family walks in."

**2:50** "You seem to be assuming that the big burial spaces correspond to the big inscriptions on the wall. But what if a cremation person wants to buy space for a big inscription?"

"Then we have to find a casket person who wants a small inscription."

**3:10** One of the sales reps clutches his pocket, which has started to buzz, and grimaces. "Who's calling me now?" He goes out of the room to take the call. In a minute he's back. "Sorry, I have to leave. Someone's here wanting to buy a bench or a tree."

**3:12** The other sales rep peers at the plans. "One-and-a-half feet by one, for two sets

of cremated remains? You can't do that."

"We might be able to go even smaller, if we just dig deeper."

The sales rep shakes his head. "Not good."

"But is it possible? Could they fit?"

The sales rep shakes his head. "You need to leave room to dig around. Some margin for error. You don't want to accidentally hit —"

"What if we install cement liners?"

"This is Cambridge. People here want earth to *earth*."

**3:20** "What if we do one foot square, and require an urn?"

"We've never required an urn. Some people just want a cardboard box."

"The real issue is retrieval. People move and want to take the ashes with them. If you use cardboard, we can't guarantee we'll get 'em all."

**4:05** The meeting has adjourned; the discussion will be continued.

Driving back through the cemetery

to the office, Bill stops at a corner where two men in safety glasses are attending to an ancient, enormous beech. The tree was damaged several years ago during a heavy April snowstorm and developed a debilitating canker. It's looking ravaged. "Time for it to go?" Bill asks the arborists.

"Probably."

Bill glances across the road, where a similarly beautiful, but healthy, beech shades an empty gravesite. A couple is interested in buying it, but only if Bill can promise that the beech will remain. Of course he can't: natural catastrophes happen, living things age and die. The landscape, carefully and sensitively preserved as it is, changes.

The couple, Bill suspects, will be anxious when they see that the other beech is gone. "But we'll figure out something beautiful to plant in its place. And they might well be reassured, watching how we respond to the loss." ■

Joan Wickersham is a writer in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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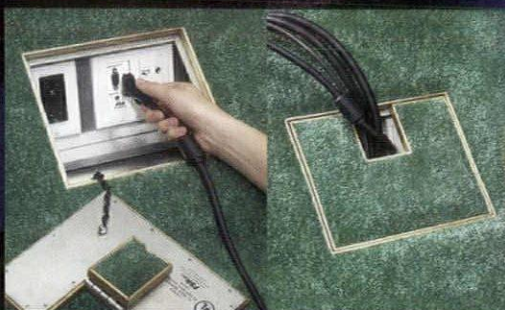
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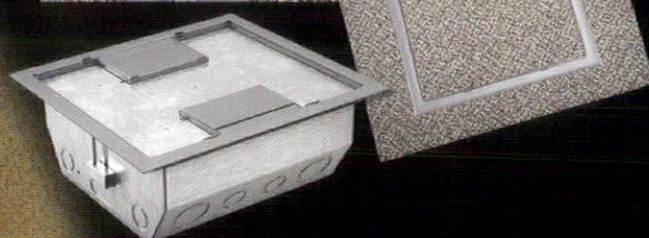
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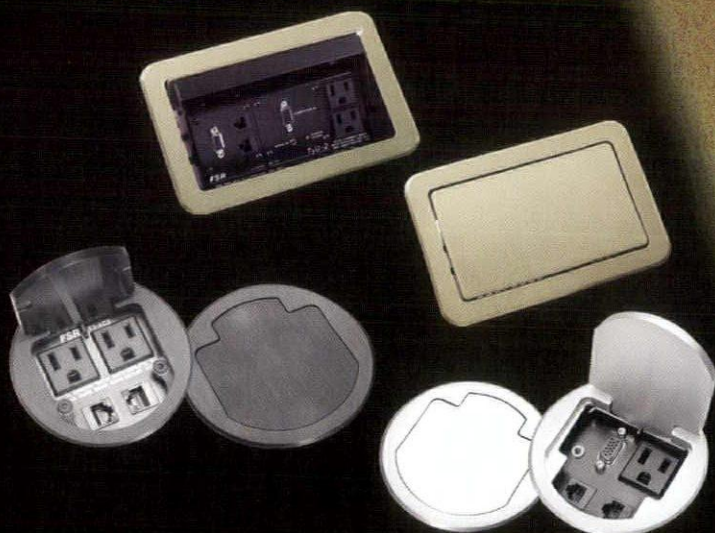
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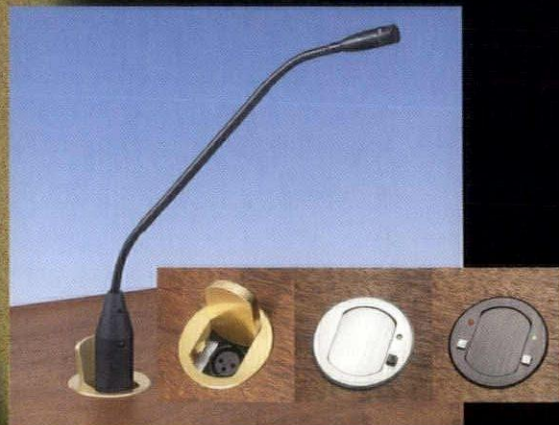
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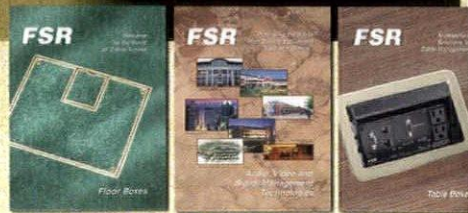
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**Norman Pressman MCIP, OPPI, RPP** is a planner and an internationally recognized authority on cold-climate urban planning and design. Professor emeritus of urban planning at the University of Waterloo, he was also the founding president of the Winter Cities Association. His books include *Northern Cityscape* (the recipient of a Canadian Institute of Planners Award of Excellence in 1996) and *Shaping Cities for Winter* (2004).



**Jeff Stein AIA** is the director of the architecture program at the Boston Architectural College and is the architecture critic for *Banker & Tradesman*.





Your mother always told you to dress for the weather. Did she mention *design* for the weather?

**Jeff Stein:** You are considered something of a visionary in the world of city planning, especially for the billion or so people who live north of the 45th parallel. Through all your work, you argue for sense of place. The Hopi people of the American Southwest have a phrase for it: "Grow where you're planted." Meaning, understand where you are, and try to live there in some beauty. It doesn't sound so difficult, really, and yet in significant ways many of us in the North, and in the very far South of the planet, aren't really doing it, are we?

**Norman Pressman:** I don't think we are. In urban design, we have forgotten the lessons of the past. We have forgotten about vernacular architecture. The vernacular always considered the local climate, the resources, the lifestyles, the traditions. With modern technology and the dominance of the car, we've forgotten completely about climate. Planning and designing and managing a good "winter city" simply factors in the climate with a little more attention and emphasis, especially where the winter is hostile and lasts for many months. But climate, especially winter, has been ignored for at least the last 40 years, since urban design made a big comeback in North America.

**Jeff Stein:** We have an entire educational industry that has made a habit of ignoring winter, in what might be a nostalgic longing for the benign climate of the classical cultures of Greece and Rome.

**Norman Pressman:** Therein lies one of the basic flaws of urban planning. I was introduced to the problem with the help of a Canadian journalist named Jack Royle, who asked me to do a little talk back in 1983 about livable cities through a climatic lens. He had lived and worked all across Canada, and observed that urban design and urban development were almost identical regardless of latitude, climate, temperature, windiness. And it really puzzled him. He said, "Isn't there something we can do about it?"

Rideau Canal Skateway, Ottawa.

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## Climate Matters

Norman Pressman talks with Jeff Stein AIA



**Jeff Stein:** Is there a scientific definition of what winter is exactly?

**Norman Pressman:** Winter is a relative phenomenon. Nobody completely agrees on what it is. One of the essential elements of winter is its variability. There is no such thing as a consistent winter, any more than there is a consistent summer, spring, or fall. You can have a mean precipitation level from less than half an inch to more than 15 inches in January. You can have between zero and 150 hours of sunshine in January. And temperatures can range from 30 below Fahrenheit to 40 above Fahrenheit. The only scientifically accepted definition of winter is the astronomical definition: it occurs between December 22 and March 21.

But there are five basic elements that are understood to constitute winter: temperatures normally below freezing; precipitation, usually in the form of snow;

city and New York, with a latitude of 40 degrees, does not?

**Norman Pressman:** Bostonians might be surprised to know that Boston doesn't technically qualify either. Boston has the same average January temperature as Berlin, Cleveland, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Reykjavik, and Zurich. They are really not considered winter cities, even though many winter cities do have similar freeze-and-thaw cycles over a period of several months. I don't think that you have at least one or two months of continuous snow cover. Most of the 100 or so places that constitute the major winter settlements of the world tend to agree with this definition. But there are characteristics that differentiate one city's winter from another. For example, Bodø, in the north of Norway, and Winnipeg are characterized by extreme wind chill. Sapporo and Aomori in Japan

agreed upon. And once you have the design principles, you can adapt them to suit local conditions, and to satisfy what local inhabitants feel are high priorities.

**Jeff Stein:** There seem to be two opposite approaches to dealing with humans and nature. One of those is, don't over-protect us from nature; the other is, provide protection from whatever in nature is undesirable.

**Norman Pressman:** Those are the two extremes. In North America, there is a propensity toward over-protection: to build a lot of glazed-over projects; to build monstrously sized enclosed shopping malls; to build skywalks and pedestrian bridges and enclose the whole city center; or, alternatively, to build huge underground pedestrian networks connected to subway and metro systems. However, my Scandinavian colleagues feel differently: they believe it's OK to be exposed to nature and to nature's hardships. In fact, it's maybe even a good thing, as long as you don't have to be exposed for very lengthy periods of time. And if you dress properly, that's a big help as well. North Americans dress in fashionable summer garb all year round, then complain that it's cold in the winter. There's a wonderful Swedish folk expression: "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing."

**Jeff Stein:** So the solution you've written about lies in living with the climate, not in spite of it.

**Norman Pressman:** I think that if you tremendously over-protect yourself, what you're really doing is eliminating the climate completely. There's a lot of discussion about whether or not that is desirable.

**Jeff Stein:** A few years ago, when oil was \$20 a barrel, we thought that we could do this fairly easily. There were technical fixes in architecture and urban design that would allow us to protect ourselves, which all of a sudden don't seem quite so realistic anymore.

**Norman Pressman:** That's true. If you completely eliminate climate, you just end up with a kind of steady-state, thermally neutral environment, in which there is no

## There's a wonderful Swedish folk expression: "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing."

— *Norman Pressman*

restricted hours of sunshine and daylight; prolonged periods of those three elements; and significant seasonal variation. That having been said, the generally accepted definition of a "winter city" — this is something I concocted — is a place where the mean maximum daytime temperature is usually below freezing for at least two months in the year. In other words, there's some snow cover, and people would say they can go skating or skiing. At high altitudes and in mid-latitude regions, roughly between the 40th and 60th parallels, winter can constitute anywhere between 75 and 250 days a year. But for some people, winter has very little to do with snow and freezing temperatures: up in the sub-Arctic, for example, it's darkness that really defines winter, in addition to wind and cold.

**Jeff Stein:** Presumably then, Boston, with a latitude of 42 degrees, qualifies as a winter

and Ottawa and Quebec City are characterized by heavy snowfalls. Fairbanks, Alaska, is characterized by ice fog; Copenhagen by cloud cover and a lot of it; Boston and Reykjavik by a lot of slush, because of the freeze-thaw cycles; Tromsø and Kiruna in northern Norway and Sweden, respectively, by darkness; Irkutsk, in Siberia, and Edmonton and Montreal by lengthy periods of cold temperatures. Many cities have a combination of all of these things.

**Jeff Stein:** Given that level of complexity and variation, there can't possibly be a single recipe for urban design for winter.

**Norman Pressman:** I don't think there's a single recipe, any more than there's a single recipe for cooking a good meal, or for designing a good building in various localities with different building materials, different traditions, different lifestyles. But there are a lot of principles that are generally





Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen (Svalbard Archipelago, Arctic Ocean).

variation at all. But that's an extreme. To not have any protection, of course, is the other extreme. We need to find a middle ground, depending on the relative severity of winter, and on what is considered acceptable from a cultural perspective.

**Jeff Stein:** In one of your books, a quote from planner and historian Frederick Gutheim says, "We've built broad piazzas and boulevards which have no place in Northern climes, and the design of Northern cities should be rooted in the forms of the North, not the Mediterranean. For cities have been well-designed for the cold, and they're often surpassingly lovely." Is density one of the issues for cities in cold climates?

**Norman Pressman:** Gutheim wrote that about 30 years ago and it's just as valid today. The most vulnerable inhabitant of a winter city is the pedestrian or public-transit user. If we can reduce the need to walk under very severe winter conditions, or if we can reduce the distances that must be walked, we will be less exposed to the hostilities of climate. And that, of course,

implies mixed-use densification. Yet we have persisted in building low-density, segregated land-use communities. That is not only undesirable in terms of thermal comfort, but it's also not a very wise thing in terms of the number of roadways that have to be cleared by snowplows, the costs involved for emergency vehicles and for policing, and the tremendous distances that have to be traversed. So the good old relatively compact city, with a lot of mixed activity and land uses, is always a better winter city than the kinds of places we've been building in the US and Canada over the last 40 years.

**Jeff Stein:** Yet somehow commercial culture promotes that other model.

**Norman Pressman:** The developer's response is that it's not necessarily what's best for people, but it's what people want. Of course, no one has scientifically proven that everybody, even if they could afford it, would want to live in a single-family detached house with a two-car garage. But in any case,

that's not a solution you can cover the globe with. What we're talking about is having a balance between contact with nature and the climate, a healthy social fabric, some degree of protection, and transit-supportive density in case gas prices really go through the roof or we experience shortages.

**Jeff Stein:** Climate includes a number of conditions in addition to temperature. Wind is certainly one of them. How do cities reconcile wind effects on climate with the demand to build towers? For instance, Bostonians have learned that towers seem to create huge wind turbulence for pedestrians. The Hancock tower is one well-known culprit.

**Norman Pressman:** Most of the major Scandinavian capitals, particularly Stockholm and Oslo, have been discouraging the building of high-rise towers for the last 10 to 15 years. They're recommending, in effect, taking that 20- or 30-story high-rise and laying it on its side. Whether a municipality is technically a winter city or not, the cities or local authorities can





Arcades (Marktgasse), Bern, Switzerland.

either request or demand, by bark or by bite, that the developers present project impact studies covering four areas in particular: snowdrift, shadow, wind, and solar access to public space and private space, such as residential backyards.

**Jeff Stein:** Could you say a few words about snowdrift impact studies?

**Norman Pressman:** They were first developed by microclimate engineers in Scandinavia and are now increasingly common in Canada, too — they're especially useful in areas where there's heavy snowfall and a lot of wind. They identify conditions where drifting will prevent access to places that are intensively used, such as main entrances to buildings, public plazas, roads, airport runways, driveways, and so on.

**Jeff Stein:** In Boston, we require some studies, but in times of economic trouble, we tend to forego them. The Hancock tower, to use it again as an example, casts a mighty shadow in the middle of winter over the Public Garden, one of the city's

great outdoor amenities. Had it been built in ordinary economic times, that might not have been allowed to happen. But when the politics are such that we want to attract construction jobs to the city, we tend to take the short view of things.

**Norman Pressman:** If you subject development proposals to these kinds of impact studies, and if you bear in mind that they exist to make a better city — to make better, more thermally comfortable public spaces and parks — you need to bear in mind that there is a price to pay for ignoring them. But of course, the whole development industry involves a juggling of various interests and priorities and making a lot of compromises.

Still, in any city that experiences a less-than-ideal climate, it's imperative to extend the period of comfortable outdoor space. For example, the cities of Toronto, Montreal, Oslo, Stockholm, and Sapporo have similar climates in that people can be in outdoor space with relative comfort for roughly 18 weeks or four-and-a-half months of the year. By using microclimatic design techniques, which

essentially capture as much sun as possible and eliminate as much wind and shadow as possible, you can extend that to a six-month comfortable outdoor season, an increase of 30 percent. For cities in the northern hemisphere that have really lengthy, harsh winters, like Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Ottawa, Moscow, Winnipeg, and Harbin, a 30-percent increase in outdoor usage is very significant. Some of these techniques, such as microclimatic landscape planning, are nothing new. They've always been part of good vernacular design, which we have been ignoring.

One thing that greatly improves the urban fabric of a city with a less-than-ideal climate is a system of arcades. We rarely build the kinds of arcades, gallerias, or passages that were commonplace in 19th-century Europe.

**Jeff Stein:** Boston has only a few arcades, but there is an informal system of passages downtown, mostly a series of through-block lobbies in office buildings. Unfortunately, it's like a secret handshake — you have to have lived and worked here for a while to discover and navigate them.



**Norman Pressman:** And they are interior, essentially private, spaces. Arcades, of course, can also contribute to street life. The entire city of Bern, the capital of Switzerland, is arcaded on both sides of every single street — almost six miles. It creates marvelous pedestrian-friendly environments for meeting, shopping,

Europe to expand the outdoor season for socializing and café-sitting, where outdoor cafés are installing lots of overhead or freestanding heaters. Many are even offering blankets, cushions, and sheepskins on armchairs. Little details like that can cumulatively have a very significant positive impact.

**In any city that experiences a less-than-ideal climate, it's imperative to extend the period of comfortable outdoor space. — Norman Pressman**

working. Arcades are another example of a traditional technique that can do a lot for the quality of life, as well as for the quality of design, in the modern winter city. Other fine examples can be found in Innsbruck, in Bolzano and Turin in Italy, as well as in several newly planned Scandinavian communities.

But other strategies really are new. For example, there's a new trend in northern

**Jeff Stein:** What are some microclimatic techniques that we have forgotten or ignored that capture sunlight or offer wind protection?

**Norman Pressman:** Avoiding very high buildings, which create a lot of wind-tunneling at the base on open plazas. Making sure that proposed designs create

heat pockets and sun pockets, whether at a very small level or fairly large scale — regrettably, there are not many good examples of such techniques; there are far more bad examples. Using a lot of coniferous vegetation on the windward sides of buildings. The best example I know of at the regional scale is in Reykjavik. All the trees had been chopped down by the original settlers. But in the last half-dozen years, the regional masterplan for greater Reykjavik has called for planting thousands upon thousands of coniferous trees on the windward edge of the city, to act as a break for its very harsh winds, so people in downtown Reykjavik will have almost no experience of wind at all. This strategy also halts erosion and provides needed recreational parkland. They poetically call this landscape plan “the Green Scarf.” A lot of other cities could learn from their example.

**Jeff Stein:** While we're on the subject of green — color can also play a role in making cities more livable in wintertime.

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**Norman Pressman:** That's another thing that we don't have many good examples of. Most of the best examples involving the use of color are in small sub-Arctic communities in Scandinavia. But there are interesting exceptions. Longyearbyen, a town on the island of Spitsbergen, is the only community, to my knowledge, that has implemented a color masterplan. Everybody has to select from the official palette before repainting a house or building a new building.

**Jeff Stein:** Is it a broad palette, or is it bright?

**Norman Pressman:** It was actually developed by an interior designer who is also a color expert. The colors work in harmony with all the colors you see in nature in each of the seasons. It's primarily a pastel palette, but includes some of the intense, brilliant hues that you see in nature. The city of Nuuk — the capital of Greenland — is now working with color palettes as well.

**Jeff Stein:** Color might help alleviate a

health-related issue: seasonal affective disorder resulting from the loss of sunlight.

**Norman Pressman:** With light deprivation, people require more stimuli or they will get depressed, particularly in the northern latitudes where it's really very dark. They can get some of that from color, but they also need to get it from social interaction. That may sometimes mean going out when you otherwise might not want to go out. So public transit is critical.

A lot of Scandinavian cities have introduced heated bus shelters in the last five to 10 years, so that it's much easier to move about without a car. The city of Luleå, Sweden, way up in the North where the sun barely rises above the horizon in winter, has introduced wood-burning fireplaces on its main pedestrian shopping street in the city center, in addition to a lot of very beautiful ice and snow sculptures. And they're using more and more color on building façades. Many Northern cities are taking advantage of


geothermal energy to heat streets and sidewalks: Luleå has dry, non-slip surfaces where people can walk adjacent to the building façades. And you can use cross-country skis in the center section of their pedestrian mall, if you like. The city of Oslo has more than 2,000 kilometers of cross-country ski trails throughout the entire metropolitan region, more than 200 of them illuminated for nighttime skiing.

**Jeff Stein:** These are cultures that introduce children to cross-country skis at a very early age.

**Norman Pressman:** Yes, that's particularly true in Norway. It's ingrained in the culture, but it's also ensured by the educational system. The Japanese in Hokkaido, particularly in greater Sapporo, are learning from them; they now have learn-to-ski programs for children.

**Jeff Stein:** We think that skiing is fun — it's a sport. Yet if the ground is covered with snow, it's the best way to get around.

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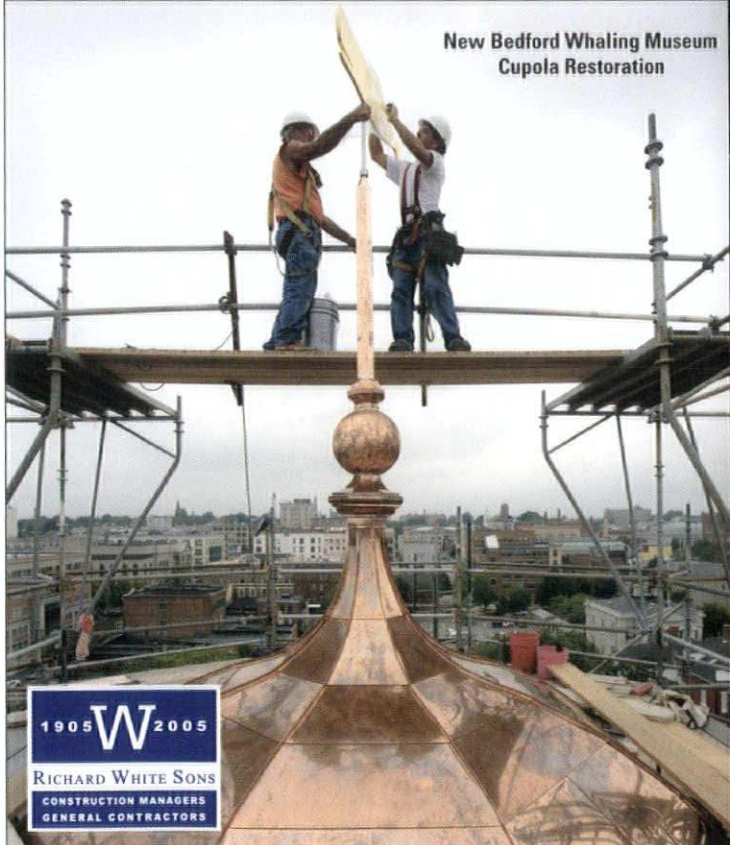
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**Norman Pressman:** It's also a way to enjoy winter. Because if you don't participate in winter sports, such as skiing or hockey or skating or ice fishing, you end up hibernating for much of the time. But it's worth remembering that winter is also a season that is often filled with a frenzy of formalized indoor activity, like dinner parties, symphony, ballet, theater, opera. That is actually a valuable tradition in terms of encouraging social interaction. And of course, both approaches are blended in winter carnivals, which are becoming more and more popular, as best exemplified in Sapporo and Quebec City.

is so bad. They're going somewhere where the weather is milder. I suspect that the problem isn't really the climate, but that we fail to design our cities and build our buildings to help us deal with that climate.

that Boston doesn't have much of a winter to begin with. It really is relative. If people are running away because they want palm trees, there's not much you can do. But if they simply want to live in an environment

**If our Northern cities were more climate-responsive, it is very possible that we could begin to stem the outflux of people into the Sun Belt.**

— *Norman Pressman*

**Jeff Stein:** Boston's First Night is a winter carnival of sorts, albeit a very short one. But it does show that you can draw hundreds of thousands of people into the city on a really chilly winter evening. And that's an interesting phenomenon because Boston, and New England generally, is losing population to other regions. The common complaint of people who are leaving is that the climate

**Norman Pressman:** If our Northern cities were more climate-responsive — if they were safer, more beautiful, more dynamic than they currently are — it is very possible that we could begin to stem that outflux of people into the Sun Belt. But this brings us back to the first thing we talked about — the fact that winter is a relative notion. From my perspective, living in Waterloo, Ontario, I would say

that makes life easier and more pleasant, there's a lot that we can learn from older European cities in regions that get some winter. I suspect that the winters in Fribourg or Bern or Turin are quite similar to winter in Boston. But the urban fabric there is really very welcoming. Our cities in winter really aren't all that welcoming, especially if you don't have a car. Even in Canada, we don't have any

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Outdoor café with heaters and cushioned seats, Prague.

## A good winter city has to protect its inhabitants from negative aspects of winter and expose them to winter's positive realm. — *Norman Pressman*

examples anywhere of heated bus shelters. And even well-designed bus shelters are the exception.

**Jeff Stein:** And then the waiting time between buses, even in a heated bus shelter, is a problem.

**Norman Pressman:** There are some communities in northern Finland that actually put on more buses in the winter, so that the waiting time is reduced. You get a higher frequency of service in the winter and a lower frequency of service in the summer. That's a very interesting response to managing public transit. It's not a design issue but a management issue.

The North American response to winter, when there is one, seems to turn first to skywalks. St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Calgary are almost completely covered. They give a very good level of protection but, of course, they're competing with the streets themselves.

**Jeff Stein:** Boston has just a couple of skywalks, but they are discouraged for that very reason — they take people off the street.

**Norman Pressman:** Even the city of Montreal, in its latest revised masterplan, decided not to extend its underground pedestrian city, because it was sucking too much life away from the streets. It's very

interesting to remember that these above-ground pedestrian skywalks, which generally started in the 1970s, were never built solely for climatic protection. At that time, it was an urban-planning doctrine to separate pedestrians and vehicles. Traffic engineers believed that pedestrians were an impediment to the free flow of car traffic. Then there was the great fear that the downtown sidewalks could never handle the volume of pedestrian traffic generated by the development of high-rise office buildings. They had to put the pedestrians somewhere else. If you want to get pedestrians out of the way, then you either have to put them above ground or below ground. Today it's fashionable to justify skywalks in terms of climate protection.

**Jeff Stein:** Is the talk about climate today part of a second generation of urban design? Urban design as a discipline had its beginnings a generation or more ago, and seemed to focus on a certain kind of classicism. Now, in the fullness of time, is it becoming a more nuanced, more complex discipline?

**Norman Pressman:** Yes, I think so. It has to be very inclusive. We've learned we need to factor in much more than we once did. Maybe, as Ralph Erskine — the British architect who practiced in Sweden — taught, we need to create an "architectural grammar" for the North. The classical urban-design grammar isn't quite sufficient. We want to provide prototypes for good Northern urban design that can be emulated.

The ideal winter city has never been built, but fragments of the ideal exist in many different cities. A good winter city has to protect its inhabitants from negative aspects of winter and expose them to winter's positive realm. There is a lot we can do. We can change our attitudes and we can change our behavior. And I think design has a very important role to play. Everyone at some point becomes a pedestrian — you get out of your car, or you get off the bus, or you get off the subway. What happens if that is a challenge? You are vulnerable. The winter city has to accommodate the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society: the children, elderly, physically challenged, economically disadvantaged, cyclists, transit users, homeless people. If they're accommodated, everybody else will be doing just fine. ■



# Dressing for the Weather: Climate Matters in the Orkneys

By Duncan Pendlebury AIA

It is a land where Vikings left their tales of love and heroism in rune-chiseled stories while they over-wintered in Neolithic tombs. It is a land where every day is spent dealing with a climate driven by constant wind blowing from the west, pushing the North Atlantic into the North Sea through the Scapa Flow. The Orkneys lie two honest hours of wild ferry rides north of the Scottish mainland, a collection of sheep-dotted islands, large and small, inhabited and barren.

My friends in the Orkneys (they call themselves “Orcadians”) remark that the never-ending wind—standing on the west coast facing the North Atlantic requires a constant 30-degree lean—and the driving rain that is always pelting your face or threatening to do so, creates a very visible horizontal social structure. Everyone is dressed against the weather. I hadn’t thought much about the effects of the climate on outward social appearance, but then I remembered the arrival at Stromness, the port on the main island. I was probably too glad to have feet on solid ground and too sleepy from the overdose of sea-sick pills to notice that just about every Orcadian greeter on the quay stood in loose rubber boots, tweed hat pulled tight against the building breeze and hands thrust into the pockets of a blue, brown, green, or black all-weather jacket. Our climate in New England allows for so much more variety and expression—except for those nor’easters when we all don the dark overcoat and put head to the wind.

At John O’Groats, located at the most northeastern corner of the Scottish mainland, palm trees grow wild. But if you want to grow apples only two hours to the north, where the islands’ fields slope slowly to the North Atlantic, you have to build a wind-deflector wall first. If you simply want to

grow some flowers and sit on your patio, you still build a deflector wall.

The original Orcadians were hunters and fishermen who built round and oval stone houses below ground, connected by stone-roofed alleyways, each with an internal latrine alcove connected to a central underground sewage trench—5,000 years ago! They didn’t want to go out in the weather, either. The ruins of their houses, tombs, and “stone circles” are everywhere in the Orkneys and incredibly accessible. You can crawl, without a guide, a docent, or a guard, as much as your bulky rain gear allows, into Maes Howe, a large community tomb, which 3,800 years later served as a winter shelter for Vikings as they started raiding the British Isles from their base in Norway—a 24-hour sail away.

Because of the Gulf Stream, winters in the Orkneys are surprisingly mild, although

they are long, dark, windy, and wet. The unusual climate has recently generated countless alternative energy start-ups, mostly focused on wind generators and tidal generators. Energy codes are strict, although a few Orcadians still live in traditional stone-walled and stone-roofed farmhouses and heat with peat. Insulating materials and even window sizes are regulated; asphalt roof shingles are prohibited because winter winds sometimes blow at 135 mph. Rooms are small whether the house is old or new, built for coziness and heat preservation. (My Orcadian friends covet our open-plan houses.)

Dress for the weather? Orcadians can show you how an entire society is shaped by the weather. ■

Duncan Pendlebury AIA is president of TRO JunglBrannen in Boston.



View of Hoy, Orkney, from the P&O ferry.



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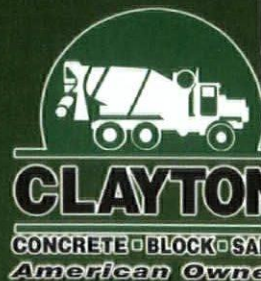
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# Cool Thinking

We can't change the climate, but we can change our attitude — and, with a few good ideas, we can make winter in Boston less difficult, maybe even pleasurable. *ArchitectureBoston* asked readers how they would improve winter in the city.





## Urban Hookah >

Moskow Architects

We recently considered the plight of folks who smoke in the winter. Smokers are really the current pariahs of society — you have undoubtedly seen them huddled in doorways shivering and puffing. Our Urban Hookah addresses their needs (and the needs of those who do not like to enter a building through a cloud of smoke), providing warmth and shelter.

## Bridges to Warmth

David Roberts PE

Even the hardiest of Bostonians cringes at the thought of crossing one of our many bridges (Northern Avenue, Congress, Summer Street, or any of the bridges crossing the Charles River) in the months of December through March, when the bitter winds can penetrate all that L.L. Bean has to offer.

The solution? Install 10-to-15-foot-high Plexiglas (we still want to keep the view) wind barriers on each side of the bridge with overhead gas-fired radiant heaters. These provide both a brief respite from the cold (radiant heat warms the objects, not air) as well as sidewalk snowmelting. The cost of the project would be small enough to be easily buried deep within a Big Dig change-order (who'd know?!).

## < Light Rooms

designLAB architects

We propose the distribution of "light rooms" throughout Boston to provide communal respite from the darkness of winter. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a condition that affects over 10 million Americans, with the highest incidence in northern latitudes. Researchers believe that therapy using bright light can lift depression or reset a sleep cycle.

The light rooms would be constructed of translucent polycarbonate panels enclosing simple benches for up to 12 people. A full-spectrum 10,000-lux light source will bounce light off one opaque wall, simultaneously flooding the interior with light and creating a glowing neighborhood beacon. Funding for the construction of the light rooms would be provided by corporate sponsors and credited on the luminous surface of each light room.



## Hygge

Adam Jacobi

A word that exists in Denmark (and most likely all of Scandinavia) is *hygge*. *Hygge* is loosely defined as comfort/coziness/warmth. It is a way to live and cope with long dark nights and never-ending snow. It's not an object or event — it's an attitude. The website [Linkdenmark.com](http://Linkdenmark.com) offers a definition: "It doesn't translate directly into any other language but we can illustrate it in action: Gather the family and invite over your closest friends. Push the sofas and chairs up close to the coffee table. Turn off the lights and light some candles. Better still, light a fire in the hearth, serve plenty of good food and drink, raise your glass and make a toast or two, or three, and feel the warmth flow around the table. Smile at each other until you see the candlelight shimmering in each other's eyes. You've got *hygge*!"

Whatever it is, Boston could use some.

## Hot Arcs

Pamela de Oliveira-Smith

Imagine arching heating elements installed along the downtown sidewalks — including the Public Garden and the Common. Think of them as open tunnels that glow white (or, a nod to Christo, saffron) but are not a solid structure. Viewed together, they would look more like a Slinky. The effect would be warming and glowing. The rods would be about 7.5 feet tall and just wide enough to line the walks.



On one special day, let any child dance in *The Nutcracker*.

—Diane Georgopulos FAIA

## A Winter Cornucopia

Diane Georgopulos FAIA

- I'd suggest some kind of competition for the holiday tree-lighting on the Common instead of the limp strings of bulbs that get hung every year. The shops on Newbury Street (Armani, DKNY, Brooks Brothers) could each sponsor a tree to be designed by one of their store or window-display designers. On First Night, Bostonians could vote for their favorite tree.
- Taking a page out of Providence's WaterFire evenings, imagine a Fire-and-Ice walk along the Rose Kennedy Greenway, where large-scale ice sculptures interspersed with braziers would illuminate a romantic walk. Have stops along the way where small choirs could sing — Boston has an unbelievably large number of choruses. Hot chocolate, hot cider, and fleece earmuffs could be sold by vendors under heaters.
- On one special day, let any child dance in *The Nutcracker*.
- Like the Asian festivals where lanterns are floated to commemorate the dead, establish a date when Bostonians can buy little biodegradable lanterns or candles to set in the water at Long Wharf and watch as they float out to sea taking our troubles away.

## Pedestrian Corridors

Mark Lewis, Assoc. AIA

When I worked downtown, I used to always try to find a way to get from one place to another by spending as little time outdoors as possible on those bitter cold days. That meant traversing building lobbies, atriums, arcades, overhangs, and subway connection corridors (Downtown Crossing from Park Street, for example).

I always thought it would be great to have a route that people could travel in the winter that could keep them sheltered. Let's have a series of sheltered outdoor pedestrian corridors that could move people through the city. A great opportunity now exists to do such a thing on the Greenway.

## True Grit

Tim Love AIA

Winter in Boston would be just fine if the amount of sand built up as a result of salting and sanding the streets could be addressed. As a South Boston resident, I can report that Southie is "serviced" disproportionately by the salting trucks (thanks to all of the politicians and city workers who live in the neighborhood). The crux of the problem is that there is so much sand in the mix that the grit has climbed seven feet up the side of my rowhouse by March. In addition, there is constant dust in the air and grit on the floors. This condition has a much bigger impact on my mood than snow, wind, or cold weather. Northern European cities such as Berlin, Copenhagen, and Munich have no sand-grit in the winter months (presumably due to the application of environmentally friendly chemicals). The City of Boston recently hired a new director of public works from Denver. Is this our chance for snow-removal reform? I am hopeful, since, while I have never been to Denver, I imagine that it (as a shining new Western city) has impeccable Munich-quality snow-removal techniques. If sand can be eliminated, the entire culture of this city will change: a Copenhagen/Munich-like blossoming of winter culture. (Unfortunately, Berlin, where the sun is hidden behind a wool blanket of clouds for the entire winter, is just too depressing — even with its clean streets.)

## Snow Shine

R. Vickie Alani

I would love to see flush in-sidewalk uplighting — especially in the no-shovel zones. In the fall, summer, and spring, we would get lots of glow, but in the winter, the piles of snow would shine! The bigger the pile, the more awesome the sight. We would dread the shovelers digging out the bright landscape. A certain turn of emotions.

## Boston's Diamond Necklace

Raymond Gonzalez

The best way to experience a winter day is from a warm interior. Boston's Diamond Necklace would be a series of steel-and-glass winter gardens connected by existing concourses, new public thoroughfares, and the T system. Each structure could serve as a gathering place and work as part of a system of interior spaces to make getting around the city in winter easier. (And when the weather permits, the structures would be open to the elements.)



## Hearths >

Jim Sandell AIA

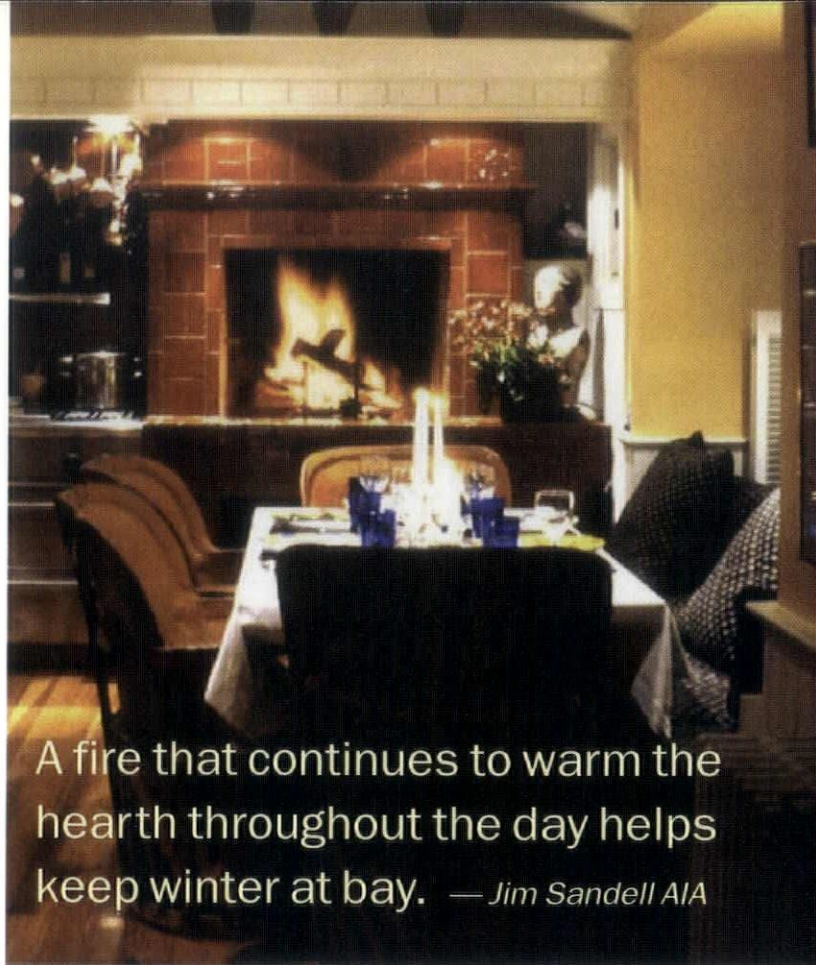
My family's antidote to cold New England winters is a warm fire. When we recently renovated our home, we included a cooking fireplace built at counter height next to the stove at the heart of the kitchen. Banquette seating for dining and gathering, an island for food prep, and an Umbrian hood impart an Italian style that recalls our many years of living in Italy.

The pungent smell of wood smoke, hot embers cooking sausages, or a roast slowly cooking on a built-in rotisserie makes meals a special time for the family. Starting each day with a fire that continues to warm the hearth throughout the day helps keep winter at bay.

## Sing!

Kathy Gips

Let's have regular winter sing-alongs on City Hall Plaza the first Thursday of every month — rain, snow, or shine.



A fire that continues to warm the hearth throughout the day helps keep winter at bay. — Jim Sandell AIA

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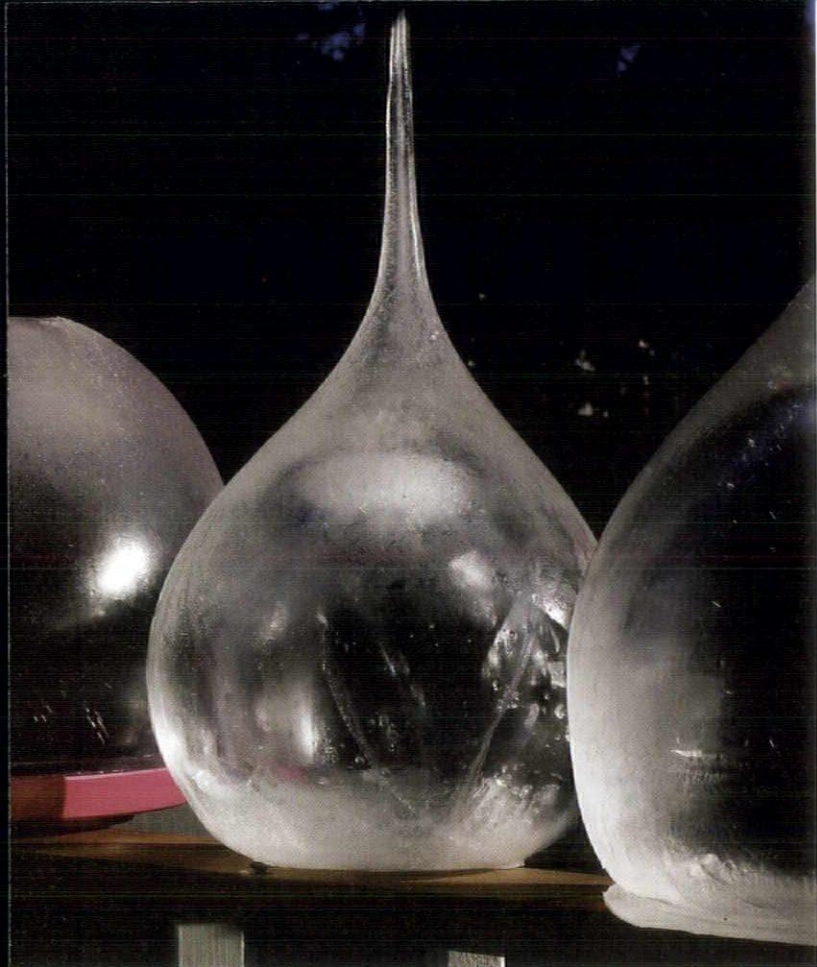
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## < Ice Lanterns

Peter Vanderwarker

### Ice lantern specs:

1. Fill balloons with water (16" diameter, round, party balloons, available at iParty).
2. Place each balloon on a plastic plate, for support. (I recommend Heller, designed by Massimo Vignelli.)
3. Keep the plate dry, so the lantern does not freeze to it.
4. Freeze at 25 degrees or lower for about 18 hours. Keep away from sun.
5. If you hang the balloon from above, you will get a taller lantern.

### Next day:

6. Cut balloon and remove with some hot water.
7. Punch bottom of lantern with a knife to let water out.
8. Place a lit votive candle inside.
9. If you need to make a chimney, use drops of boiling water.
10. Call your friends over. Serve them chilled beer.
11. Fill balloons with water (16" diameter, round, party balloons, available at iParty).
12. Repeat.



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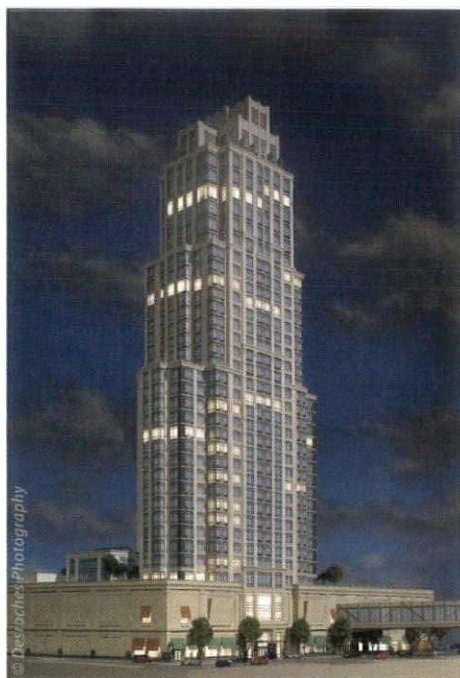
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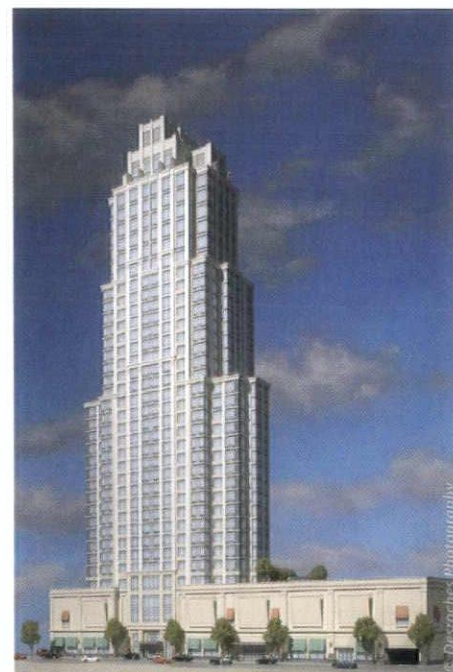


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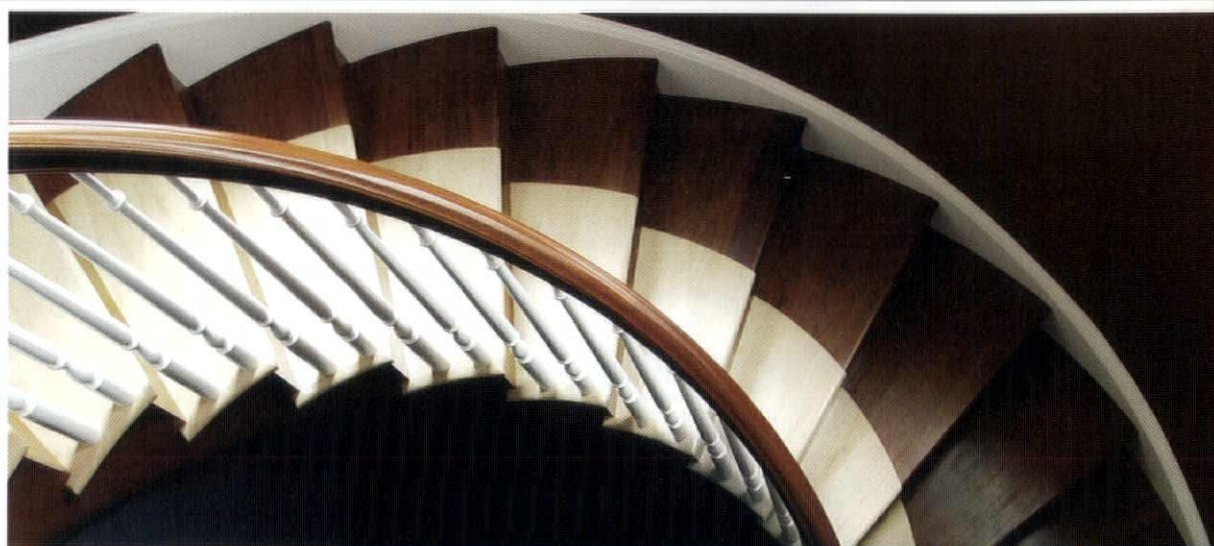


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# The Architecture of WINTER

## Building Against the Season

By Matthew Bronski, Assoc. AIA

"...it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..." So wrote Charles Dickens in 1859, in what has become one of the best-known opening sentences in all of English literature. The connection of winter to darkness and despair persists throughout centuries of literature and the arts.

Over the last half century, and most acutely in the last two decades, architecture has endured its own season of darkness: the loss of a collective understanding of what it means to design in response to our climate, rather than in spite of it. Mesmerized by the promise of technology, architects have abandoned centuries-old principles. In doing so, they have turned their backs on a robust design sensibility that has evolved across cultures and regions in order to address not only the physical challenges of the winter season, but also its spiritual and emotional challenges.

### Antidotes for the Spirit

Across many cultures and periods, light and color are used as an emotional antidote to the season of darkness. The onion shape of the domes of Russian Orthodox churches, for example, though derived from Byzantine architecture, addresses both pragmatic needs and emotional challenges of the harsh winter climate. The onion-shaped domes shed snow clear of

the underlying walls, while the lower curve of the domes, often brightly painted or gilded, reflects and makes manifest the low sun during the short winter days.

Color has played an important role in responses to winter across Northern Europe. Many traditional timber buildings in Scandinavia and Bohemia include exuberantly painted and decorated interiors to brighten the long winter months spent largely inside. Similar approaches have been used on Scandinavian exteriors. As the historian Riitta Nikula relates, Finnish wooden buildings were generally either left unpainted or painted red (to imitate brick) through the 18th century. In 1803, however, King Gustavus IV Adolphus sent a letter to some towns urging the inhabitants to paint their houses yellow rather than red, as yellow was the most appropriate and happiest color.

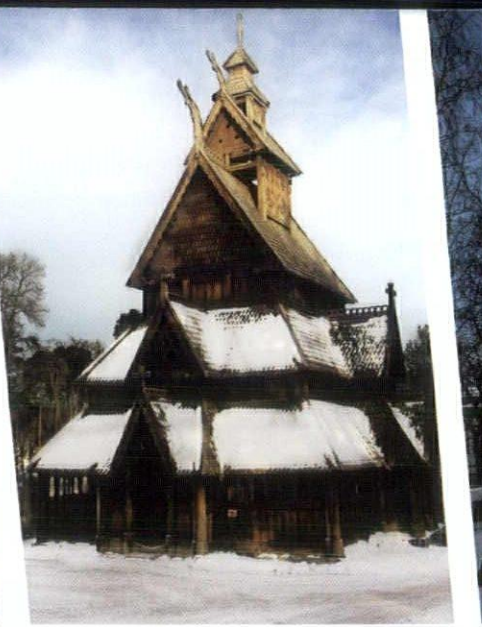
Taking the opposite tack is the work of modern master Alvar Aalto and his first wife, Aino, on their own house in Helsinki (1935–1936). Aalto's composition of white-and-brown vertical boards and white-painted brick reminds us of the stark beauty of the winter landscape — as others have noted, the house embodies the silence and austerity of a Finnish birch forest in the snow. In 1936, the identity and spirit of the young nation (Finland gained independence in 1917) were deeply rooted in its landscape. The Aalto House, like the orchestral works of composer Jean Sibelius, embodies this landscape and resonates in a profound way with the Finnish spirit.

Howard House, Nova Scotia, 1995–1999. MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects.





Chalets, Switzerland.



Stave church, Norway.

### The Pragmatic Lessons

Northern European vernacular buildings offer simple but enduring technical and pragmatic lessons for winter design. Scandinavian log construction — whether oriented vertically, as in Norwegian stave churches, or stacked horizontally, as in Norwegian and Finnish farm

In early- to mid-18th-century America, Southern houses typically had fireplaces located on end walls to throw the heat to the exterior during hot summers, while New England houses had a massive central chimney to retain as much heat as possible. The hearth was not only the physical, but also the symbolic and social

## Northern European vernacular buildings offer simple but enduring technical and pragmatic lessons for winter design.

storehouse buildings and lofts — takes advantage of a locally abundant material that provides good insulation. Deep overhangs at roofs (and overhanging upper stories on lofts) shelter walls from snow and leakage. Entrances located on gable ends avoid the hazards of ice and snow sliding off roofs. In Scandinavian examples, as well as in Russian wood churches, raised, covered entrances protect doors from being blocked by snowdrifts. Some early Scandinavian farm buildings in areas of relatively less severe snowfall have low-slope roofs that add insulation by accumulating snow in the winter. More commonly, in areas of heavier snowfall, steeply sloped roofs shed snow and prevent structural collapse.

American vernacular buildings include some similar responses but use the materials and technology of their own place and time. In the latter 19th century, manufactured metal roofing became widely available and affordable. It became the roofing of choice on vernacular buildings in the Adirondacks and other northern snow-bound regions, as the slickness of the metal encourages snow slide-off to prevent structural failure. The most successful vernacular designs in the Adirondacks include steeply sloped metal roofs, without valleys or dormers, to most effectively shed snow.

### The Symbolic Fire

In some cases, pragmatic and symbolic responses to winter are intertwined in the American vernacular.

center of the 18th-century New England house. Architectural observation of the social importance of the fire was far from new, even in the 18th century. Over 1,500 years earlier, Vitruvius had written that it was fire that originally brought man together for social interaction.

### Integrating the Lessons

Although the fireplace was no longer the source of heat by the early 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright understood the role of the hearth in social interaction. Referring to his Usonian houses (his attempt to create affordable, well-designed, truly American dwellings), Wright wrote that we could “never make the living room big enough, the fireplace important enough.” In many Usonians, his interior color palette of warm red, orange, or golden tones further emphasized the symbolic warmth of the hearth.

Part of a subset of late 19th- and early 20th-century architects who were influenced and inspired by the vernacular, Wright is a pre-eminent example of an architect who clearly understood the importance of designing for winter. He learned the vernacular lessons, took advantage of traditional materials where they made sense but embraced new technology where appropriate, and integrated these lessons to execute highly original works in his own vocabulary.

Wright’s responses to winter ranged from the symbolic and emotional to the technical and pragmatic. He wrote that snow





Aalto House, Helsinki, 1935–1936. Alvar and Aino Aalto.



Zimmerman House (before recent renovation), Manchester, New Hampshire, 1950. Frank Lloyd Wright.

was the best insulation, and designed low-slope roofs that retain the snow, with immense roof overhangs that shelter the walls. Incorporating appropriate technology, his radiant floor heating schemes provided better heat distribution and human comfort than more commonly used radiators or air ducts. And consideration of the

architecture seems to be suffering from a collective amnesia for even some of the simplest lessons.

At an international building-durability conference last year in Europe, a Finnish researcher described an epidemic of wood-wall leakage and deterioration problems in Finland as recent

## Today's improved materials and construction technology should be used to support and enhance a fundamentally sound design.

winter climate often helped shape the overall form of Wright's houses. Many of Wright's Northern houses, like the Zimmerman House in Manchester, New Hampshire, rebuffed the north wind with a mostly solid wall, and opened to the south with large expanses of glass and a deep roof overhang to shade the glazing in summer, while allowing the low winter sun to warm the interior masonry.

Wright's second house for the Jacobs family in Wisconsin, a "solar hemicycle" (so called because of its C-shaped plan), mounds an earthen berm against a solid masonry wall to the north, with a curved glass wall to the south to capture the low winter sun. Wright's use of the berm to stabilize seasonal temperatures had much precedent. For centuries, burrowing into the earth has been a way to mitigate extreme temperatures at many latitudes, as Thoreau reminded us in *Walden* when he described digging his root cellar into the south slope of a hill. (The many forms of earth-sheltered dwellings in China support Thoreau's contention.) While Wright's buildings clearly have their share of technical problems (roof overhangs that sag and leak, radiant floor heating pipes that rust and destroy their concrete floors), these problems are easily solved in new design, and Wright's broader lessons of designing for winter are still relevant today.

### The Winter of Despair

Sadly, the accumulated lessons of Wright and the vernacular in designing for winter are frequently forgotten. The profession of

residential designs have forgotten the simple vernacular wisdom that sloped roofs should overhang walls. Too often today, architects conceive buildings with little regard for their winter climate, instead expecting that better materials and technology (such as membranes, air barriers, sealants, insulation, and insulating glass) make any design and building form viable. In cold climates, immense skylights in a high-humidity environment (like a museum or natatorium) are a potentially problematic proposition, but they seem to be the rule rather than the exception in recent new designs. Too many designers assume that an expensive skylight and insulating glass are all that are needed to prevent condensation and related problems — and too often they are wrong. Today's improved materials and construction technology should be used to support and enhance a fundamentally sound design, rather than to attempt to compensate for a fundamentally problematic one.

The overall forms of many prominent new buildings seem conceived in spite of winter, rather than in concert with it. The glass box continues to appear frequently in Northern climates, often justified on the grounds of being "aesthetically contemporary" (although it is difficult to believe that claim more than a half century after the Farnsworth House and the Lever House). As a building form, the colossal bridge at Harvard's One Western Avenue is the antithesis of Wright's hemicycle: Rather than using the building's form to naturally mitigate winter cold,





Agnew House, Nova Scotia, 1996–1998.  
MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects.

the bridge form dictates that no surface will be tempered by the warmer ground; moreover, the underside of the bridge will lose heat to the colder winter air. Technology (air barriers, insulation, and heating systems) will need to compensate. Sert's Peabody Terrace, directly across the river, offered a beautiful lesson and a far more logical response for a large dormitory on the Charles River. While a few buildings are turned to create well-proportioned and humanly scaled outdoor spaces, most of Sert's buildings present a concrete wall to the north, with large areas of glazing to the east and west. The mostly glazed walls to the west offer river views, and are warmed by the winter sun, yet shielded from excessive summer heat gain by balconies and louvers.

### The Spring of Hope

Hope is not lost. Some contemporary architects are designing for winter in thoughtful ways that do not ignore centuries of accumulated wisdom and experience, but integrate and express these lessons in buildings that are of their own place and time, and that have their own authenticity.

E-House, Michael McDonough's much-publicized, environmentally progressive house project in the Hudson River Valley, is a recent example. Although the house relies very heavily on computer technology — perhaps too heavily — it also recognizes and incorporates time-proven, low-tech responses to winter. The overall form


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and orientation of the house are partly shaped by the climate and the sun. The fireplace design is based on a traditional Rumford radiant firebox, and anchors the great room as a social gathering place. A bread oven adds emotional comfort, and a bit of heat, in winter. The house includes radiant floor heating, a classic Wright solution in cold climates. While the appearance of the house isn't the least bit Wrightian, McDonough was so influenced by his responses to winter that he declared Wright the patron saint of e-House.

MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects, based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has designed a series of contemporary houses and cottages along the Nova Scotia coast that are richer because they are informed and shaped by their harsh climate. The Agnew House — on a cove on the Atlantic coast — has a steeply sloped roof with massive overhangs. The house employs the time-tested vernacular precedent, but reinterprets it, using the massive roof overhang and perpendicular supporting walls to define outdoor space. The Danielson Cottage, designed for a meteorologist and a landscape architect, sits isolated on the edge of a cliff on the tip of Cape Breton Island. On precious, warm, clear days, the cottage walls open to the outside, affording views to Newfoundland. A gleaming metal roof wraps over the top of the house and down two walls, like a fisherman's rain hat with the ear flaps turned down — a reminder that storms can roll in quickly and unexpectedly even on the sunniest days. During inclement weather, the house closes in upon itself, battens down the hatches, and waits

for the storms to pass. The architects' consideration of climate and place has enriched, rather than hindered, the overall form, originality, and authenticity of their buildings.

For many others who fail to adequately consider winter climate in their design, it is all too easy to fall into the construction technology trap. The more we conceive buildings with little regard for their climate, and the more heavily we rely on construction technology to overcome inherent incompatibilities between the building's design and its climate, the more finicky and prone to failure our building envelopes become. The frequent lack of adequate consideration of climate marks the "winter of despair" in current design. This disconnect from place-based, climate-based design merits widespread rethinking, particularly as we now face the "period of consequences" of the global climate crisis. But, as Percy Shelley asked, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Hope is on the horizon; the interest of a few in learning the lessons of the vernacular, and the laudable interest of many in green buildings and sustainability, may renew more widespread emphasis across the architectural profession on buildings that better suit their respective climates. As that happens, a new architecture of winter will emerge, and the built and natural environments and the architectural profession will all be the better for it. ■

Matthew Bronski, Assoc. AIA, is an engineer/designer at Simpson Gumpertz & Heger in Waltham, Massachusetts. He co-chairs the BSA Historic Resources Committee.



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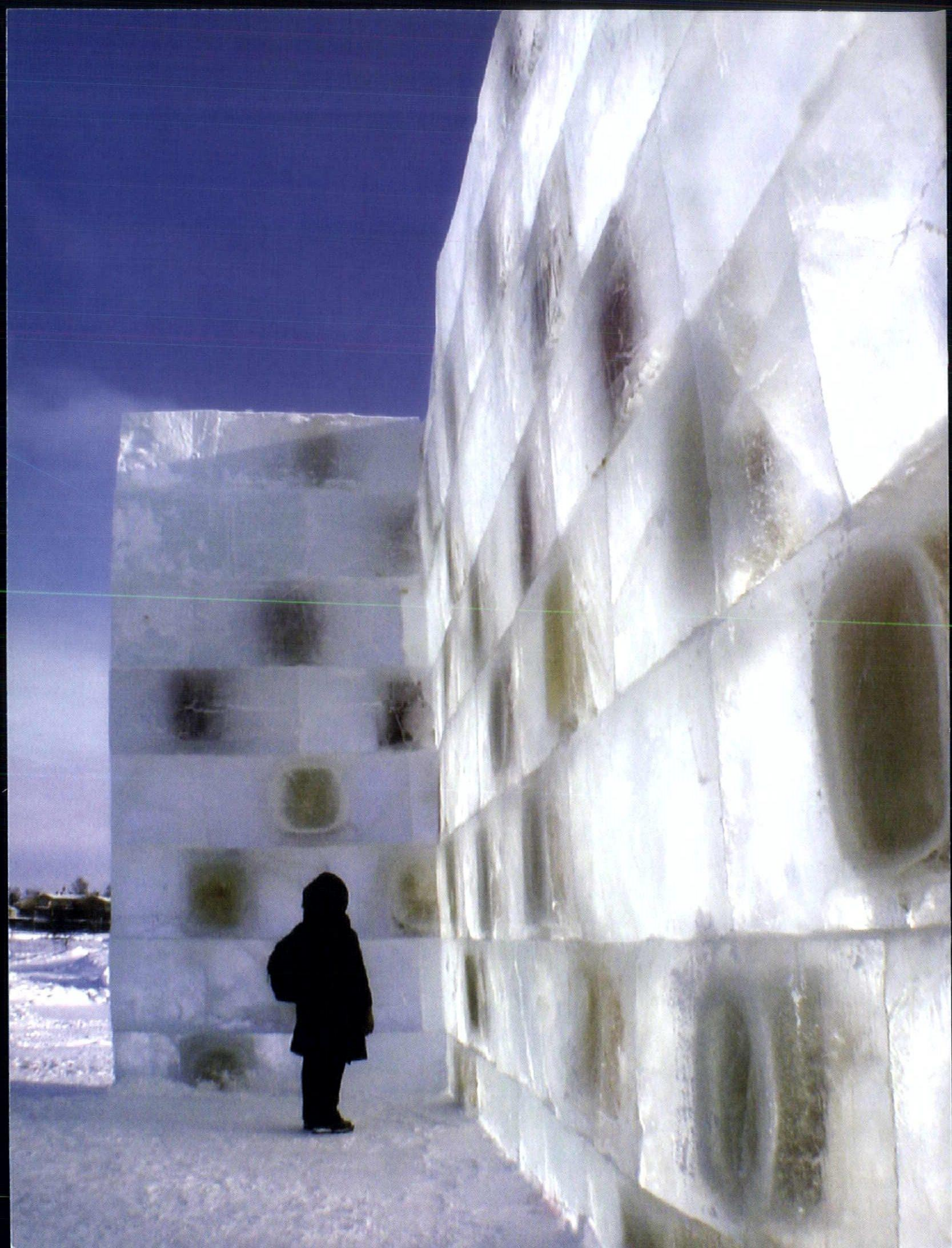
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# The Snow Show

The art and architecture of very, very cold water

**Chances are,** you built snowmen when you were a kid. (Maybe you still do.) If so, you probably have an intuitive sense of the materiality of snow: Wet snow compacts better than the dry, fluffy stuff. Snow is surprisingly variable in color and texture. It's also surprisingly variable in its hardness. Structurally, snow works pretty well in compression and is lousy in tension. Pouring water over snow will either melt it or glaze it, depending on temperature and quantity. Snow is ephemeral.

Lance Fung, a New York-based independent curator, is intrigued by the material qualities of snow, just as he has long been intrigued by the nature of creative collaboration. In 2003 and 2004, he brought both interests together in the first Snow Show, held in Lapland, Finland; the most recent exhibition was held last February and March in Sestriere, Italy, in conjunction with the Winter Olympics. Pairing artists and architects, Fung deliberately explores the juxtaposition of architectural theory and fine art through a medium that encourages public participation. The Snow Show is at once intellectual exercise and sheer spectacle: It's hard to imagine anything more technically impressive and yet wonderfully goofy than an installation called *Caress Zaha with Vodka/Icefire*—in which the artist Cai Gio-Quang poured vodka over a cantilevered ice structure constructed by collaborator Zaha Hadid and set it alight, fluid fire coursing over ice —“provoking joy,” in Hadid's words.

The photographs that follow document the Snow Show installations that otherwise have no further presence. Although these

installations are far more abstract than their more familiar snow-sculpture kin at winter festivals such as Sapporo, Harbin, and Boston's First Night, they represent ideas that are much more likely to influence the way we build. Fung notes that snow is a neutral material; neither the architects nor the artists participating in his project had previous experience with snow construction. Viewers likewise bring little experience of snow-and-ice buildings, and so these images become intriguing suggestions of new ways of making space.

Most striking are the effects of transparency, translucency, and opacity. Manipulating light and color, giving their work dual presence by night and day, the teams hint at an entire new realm of building materials that transcend the solids and voids of traditional materials such as masonry and glass. Neither solid nor void, these snow and ice constructions are something in between.

These are the qualities that make the Snow Show installations so much more provocative than similarly ephemeral seasonal structures, sandcastles. Neutral and abstract, they are also scaleless. Look at these structures and imagine walls, rooms, buildings, and cities.

—Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA

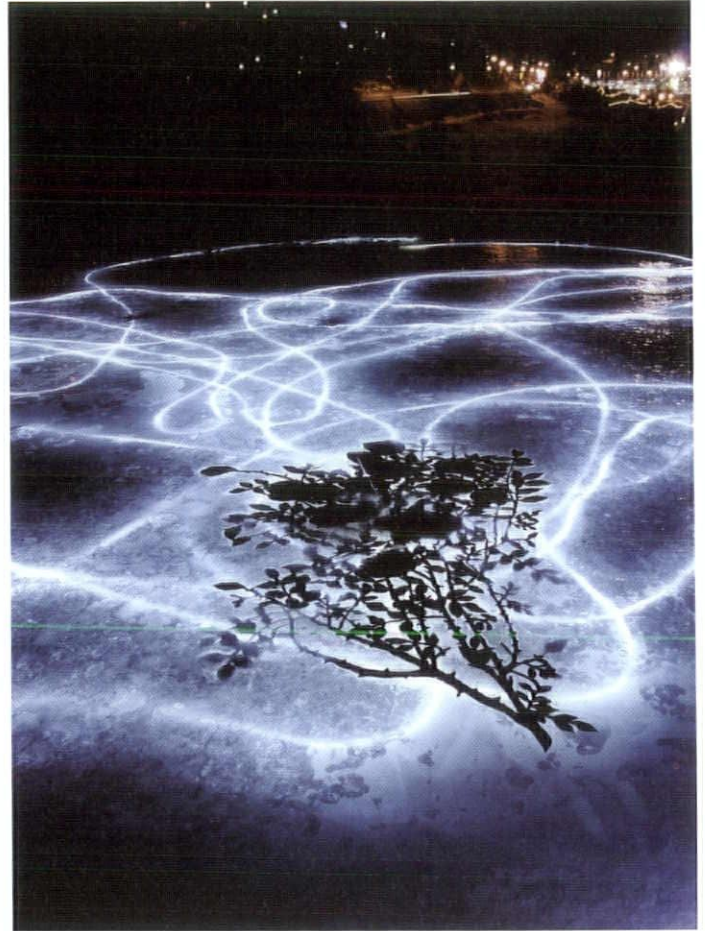
The Snow Show has been documented in the book *The Snow Show* (Thames & Hudson, 2005), edited by Lance Fung, with essays by the participants. Additional images can be seen at [www.thesnowshow.com](http://www.thesnowshow.com).

Left: *Fluid Fossils*, Do-ho Suh and Morphosis, 2004





*Where Are You?*, Jaume Plensa and Norman Foster, 2006



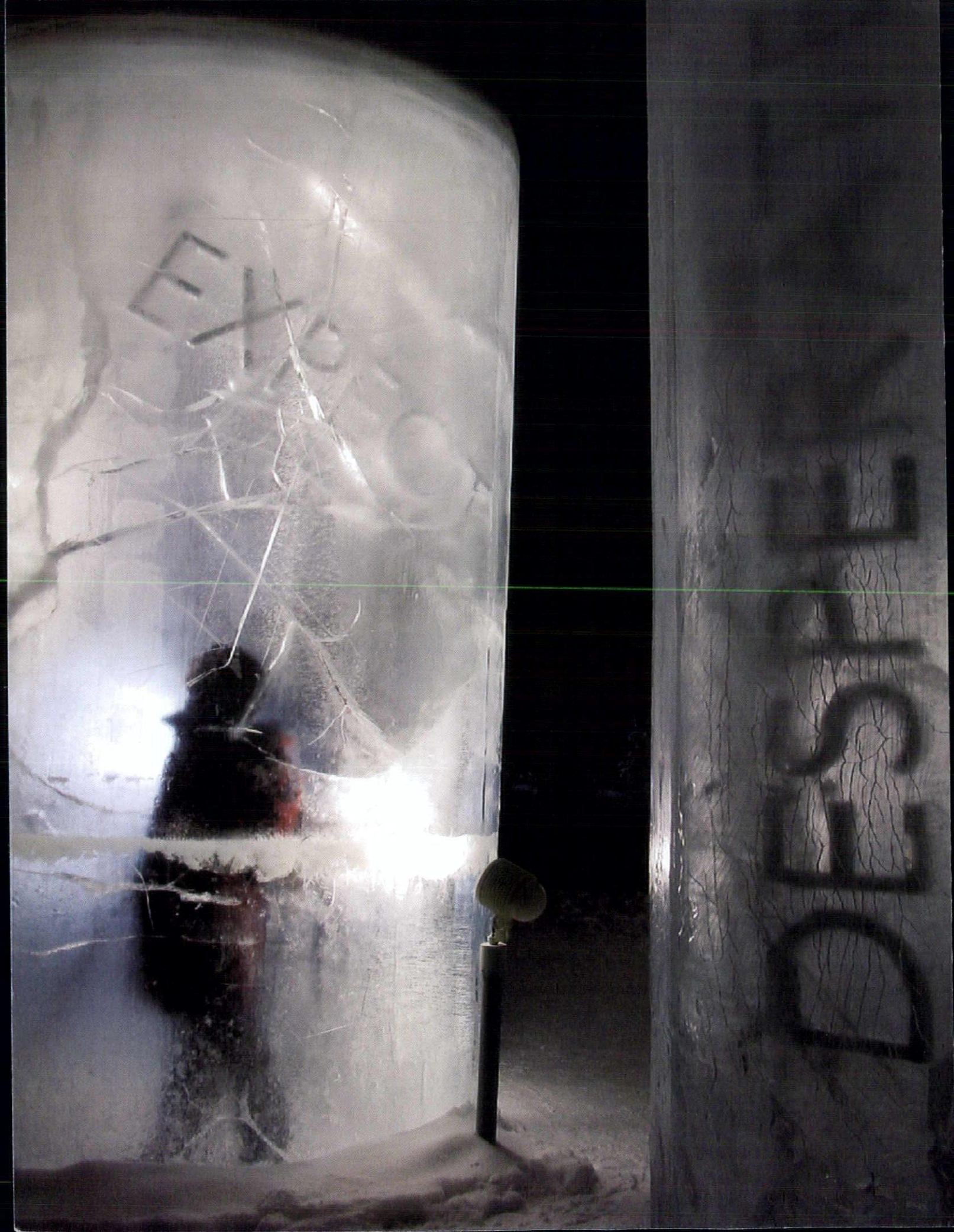
*Looking Glass*, Kiki Smith and Lebbeus Woods, 2006

Right: *Oblong Voidspace*, Jene Highstein and Steven Holl, 2003

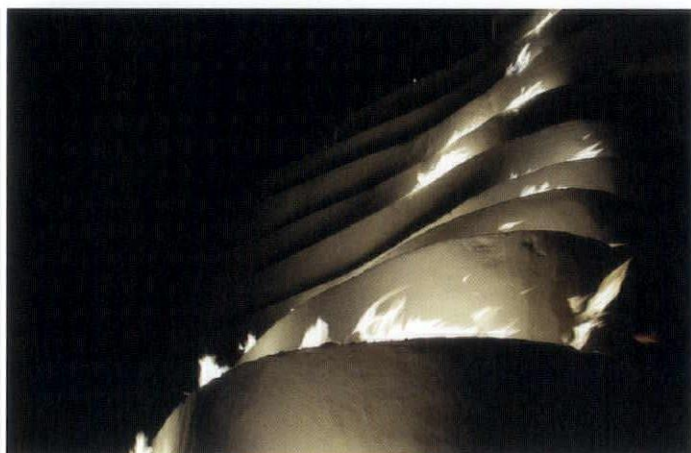
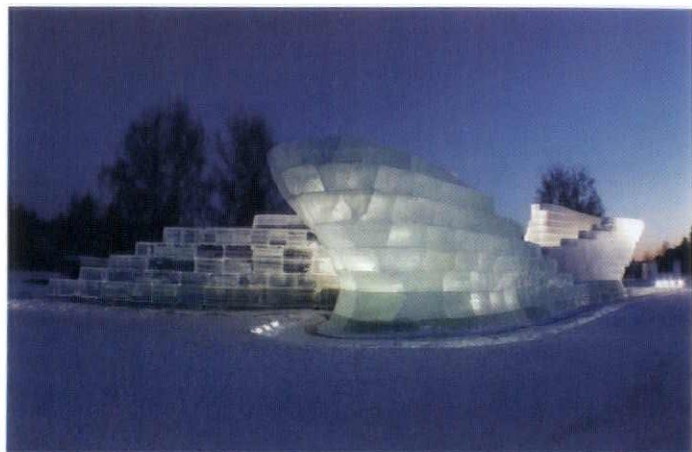




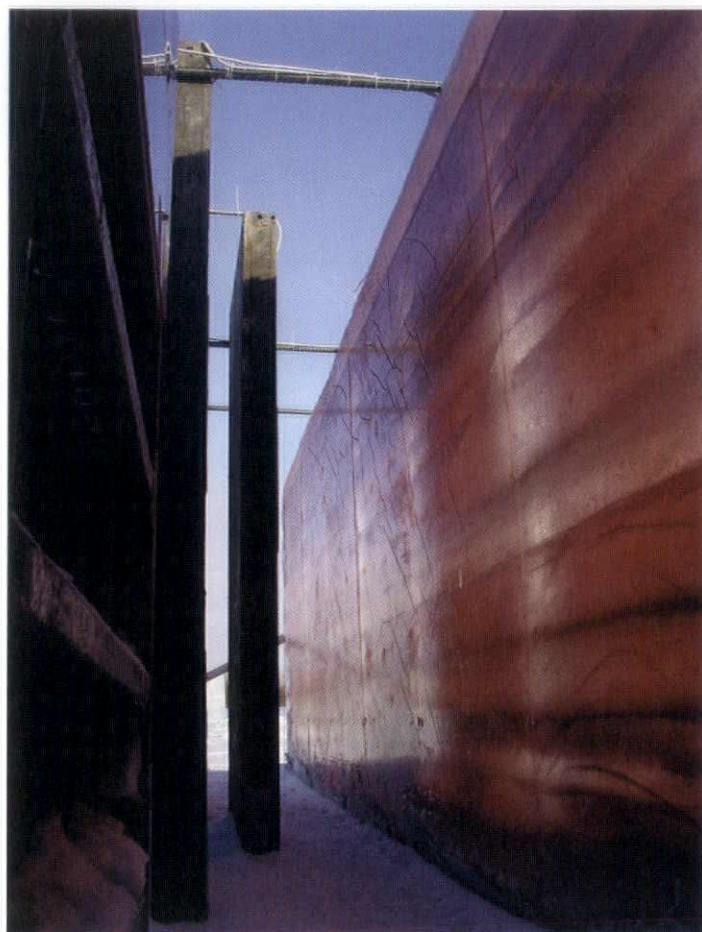








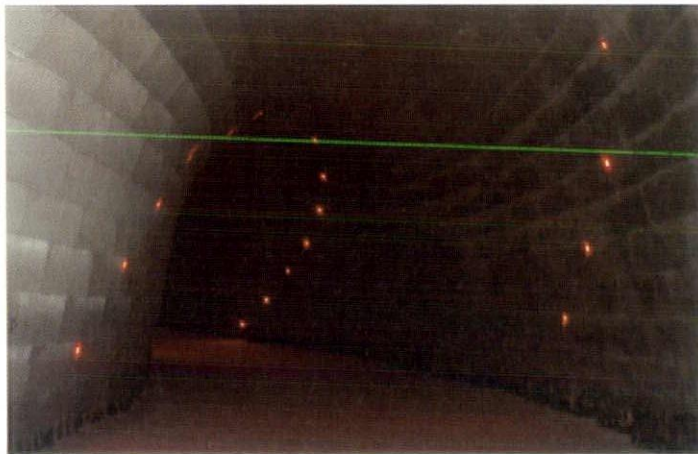
*Caress Zaha with Vodka/Icefire, Cai Gio-Quang and Zaha Hadid, 2004*



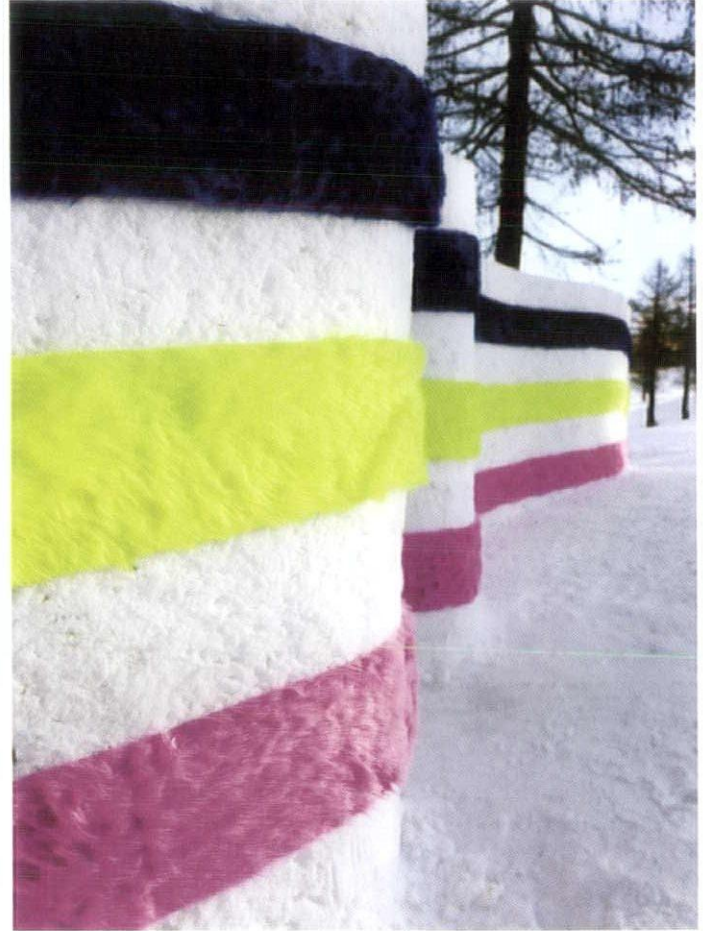
*Coloured Ice Walls, Top Changtrakul and LOT-EK, 2004*

Left: *Lanterns of Ursa Minor*, Robert Barry and Hollmén-Reuter-Sandman, 2004





*Iced Time Tunnel*, Tatsuo Miyajima and Tadao Ando, 2004



*Untitled*, Paola Pivi and Cliostraat, 2006



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# Winterscapes

Boston has, by tradition, refused to enjoy winter. From 1659 to 1681, its Puritan government outlawed the celebration of Christmas, and anyone showing holiday spirit was fined five shillings. Our distaste for celebrating the season continues today: a recent poll of Massachusetts residents found that their number-one problem with the Commonwealth was its weather. As designers, we should consider our own attitudes toward winter, as they affect the way we build our cities. Our collective understanding of urban winters comes not only from our neighbors and weather forecasters, but also from a shared visual culture of winterscapes, especially those by well-known artists. Renoir famously asked: "Even if you can stand the cold, why paint snow? It is a blight on the face of Nature." Other artists have been

## Shaping our views of Northern cities

By Justin Crane, Assoc. AIA

able to get beyond the physical discomfort, darkness, and monotone to depict extraordinary and enjoyable aspects of the season. By looking at a tradition of urban winter scenes produced in Western Europe and the United States, we can examine some of the roots of our own prejudices and find opportunities in a season that is much maligned.

Before the Renaissance, artists rarely portrayed winter landscapes. Snow, slush, and darkness played little part in biblical and Edenic representations from the Middle Ages. Christianity's most famous winter celebration took its December 25th date merely to incorporate the Roman festival of the Unconquered Sun (*Dies Natalis Invicti Solis*). Even if winter weather figured in Judeo-Christian myth beyond the lowest circle of Dante's inferno, its precipitation would only have obscured the iconic subject matter. This purity of representation remains in our architectural renderings: we avoid winter scenes, as trees without leaves seem forsaken, and snow only hides our creations.

The first extant winterscape, *February* from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (page 54, right), was painted by the Limbourg Brothers relatively recently, between 1412 and 1416. Winter didn't make regular appearances until the Dutch Renaissance, when painters used the season to symbolize the limits of mortality and morality in their 16th- and 17th-century landscapes. Dutch paintings of canals full of skaters appear benign; however, their

Right: *Harriet and Leon* (1941), Allan Rohan Crite









*Late Afternoon, New York: Winter (1900), Childe Hassam*

undercurrents are pernicious. An inscription on an engraving from Breughel's study of skaters before the Gate of St. George in Antwerp reads, "*lubricitas vitae humane*" — the "slipperiness of human life."

This association of winter with death became more literal in 19th-century prints of Parisian winters such as H. Meyer's *View of the boulevard Montmartre at one o'clock in the morning during the last snowstorm* (1881), in which carriages and horse carcasses are stuck in snowdrifts. Félix-Hilaire Buhot's *Winter in Paris* (1879–1880; facing page) exemplifies the horrors of an urban winter. The dead horses, homeless people huddling around a

In the short, blustery days of winter, all impressions of life become precious.

burning barrel, and skeletal dogs contrast with the manicured poodle and its warmly dressed owners. Winter was menacing and feared. A 19th-century New York journalist once described St. Paul, Minnesota, as a "Siberia, unfit for habitation." While snowplows,

heating, and the long-distance shipping of food have mitigated physical danger, we still go to great lengths to avoid the season — sometimes literally, as in Montreal's 20 miles of underground tunnels or the West Edmonton Mall, which covers 24 city blocks. We find similar responses in Boston's Prudential Center and its recently constructed "winter garden," an interior glazed atrium with tropical plants that defies rather than celebrates its namesake.

The Impressionists' winterscapes marked a shift in attitudes toward the season by presenting, even celebrating, its more sensuous qualities. This experiential aspect of Impressionism was initially obscured by the public's preconceptions of both painting technique and winter's atmospheric effects. Art critic Théodore Duret described how an Impressionist painter discovers winter light through observation: "He sees that, in the sunlight, the shadows on the snow are blue. Without hesitation, he paints blue shadows. So the public laughs, roars with laughter."

The Impressionists' keen observations also extended from capturing the physical essence of the scene to capturing the spirit of the place. Boston Impressionist Childe Hassam's last painting



*February from Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry (1412–1416), Limbourg Brothers*



before leaving the city, *A City Fairyland* (1886), depicts what is probably the South End. Well-dressed families, carriages, and trolleys track through fresh snow at that mercurial moment of winter dusk when spots of light from streetlamps become brighter than the diffuse winter sky. His *Late Afternoon, New York: Winter* (1900; facing page, left) also portrays a season infused with life and activity. Pedestrians move purposefully but unhurriedly through streets, falling snow reflects the soft pink blush of the setting sun, and the mass of the buildings recedes against the warm glow from the windows. Luminous highlights suggest a season of shared civic life, in which concertgoers walk together to performances, pubs beckon with warm drinks, and lights from nearby houses offer a reassuring sense of security and comfort. In the short, blustery days of winter, all impressions of life become precious. Helsinki has responded to the rareness of winter light by creating a city-wide lighting plan with 13 zoning types; the holiday lights on Boston's Commonwealth Mall now remain in place through the winter season, reinforcing the civic character of this great urban space. The value of human contact in severe weather is reflected in Boston's parallel cultural season of performances, exhibitions, and gala events, and in a strong civic life centered both on institutions such as the public library and symphony, and on myriad organizations charged with the responsibility to care for all living in our community.



Detail: *Winter in Paris* (1879–1880), Félix-Hilaire Buhot

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With Modernism came a very different presentation of winter. Rather than embracing its sensuousness, early-20th-century art took advantage of the season's striking formal qualities to neutralize its experiential qualities. Alfred Stieglitz created numerous prints of New York City during winter nights, combining a clean, severe contrast in tone with the pureness of Modernist art and design. Stieglitz's aim was to test the edge of technology, pushing photographic technique as well as capturing the spirit of the modern industrial world: "There was a tree — ice-covered, glistening — and the snow-covered sidewalk. Nothing comparable had been photographed before, under such conditions." The extreme conditions showcased technology's control over and defiance of climate, comparable to George Bellows' early-20th-century paintings of construction workers in snow-covered Manhattan.

Coatings of snow and ice gave themselves easily to minimalist abstractions, dematerializing everyday objects. Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy, well-known for his abstract photographs of household items, achieved a similar effect by taking a photo of a pathway through snow in Berlin (facing page). Sociologist Jeffrey Nash has observed in his study of parks in winter that people feel greater freedom in their use of the spaces — snow creates a blank field erasing the designer's intentions. This sense of a dematerialized winter world, and its resulting freedoms, has somewhat ironically been heightened by advances in technology that now allow us to assert unprecedented dominance over the weather: sophisticated climate-control systems, citrus flown from Florida,

and full-spectrum lighting that encourages people to forget the season as well as their locale. Winter becomes at worst an occasional inconvenience and at best an interesting graphic abstraction.

However, a few contemporary artists have returned to using the season to reveal how we think of our environment, our community, and ourselves. Allan Rohan Crite has spent the last 70 years creating portraits of everyday life in Boston's South End, with the majority

**Our climate is our identity.  
More significantly, our  
response to our climate  
is also our identity.**

of his work depicting the color and activity of summer. In contrast, his portrait of an African-American couple, *Harriet and Leon* (1941; page 53), puts them against a wintry backdrop. Kids still play on the street, but their play seems reserved as they respectfully watch Harriet and Leon. Neat coats of snow line the rowhouses, dressing them as finely as the couple. As he celebrates the formal qualities of winter, Crite doesn't forget the season's strong associations with

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people and place: he has stated that he painted *Harriet and Leon* to show a middle-class African-American couple defying contemporary associations with "Southern sharecroppers or jazz musicians."

As *Harriet and Leon* suggests, our climate is our identity. More significantly, our response to our climate is also our identity. Winter in northern cities is an immutable fact and will always be a season of darkness and uncomfortable chills. But we can shape our response to winter, by better understanding the sources of age-old attitudes and by creatively finding and designing ways to exploit the season's special qualities and experiences. Boston's First Night is one example, an event that continuously moves us between cozy interiors and frigid exteriors, that is ruined if temperatures are too moderate to sustain ice sculptures, that rediscovers the sensuous pleasures of winter while promoting a new civic spirit. In improving our own environment, we should remember our distinctive and dignified New England responses to the climate, from efficiently packed Boston townhouses to heat-retaining box pews in colonial churches. As we reconsider the city in the context of a season that is increasingly defied by environmental technology and threatened by global warming, we should consider one simple possibility: winter is an opportunity. ■

Justin Crane, Assoc. AIA, is a designer at Cambridge Seven Associates in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He co-chairs Common Boston, the BSA's AIA150 community-service initiative.

*From the Radio Tower, Berlin (1928), László Moholy-Nagy*



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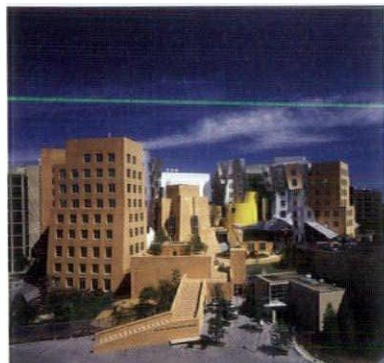
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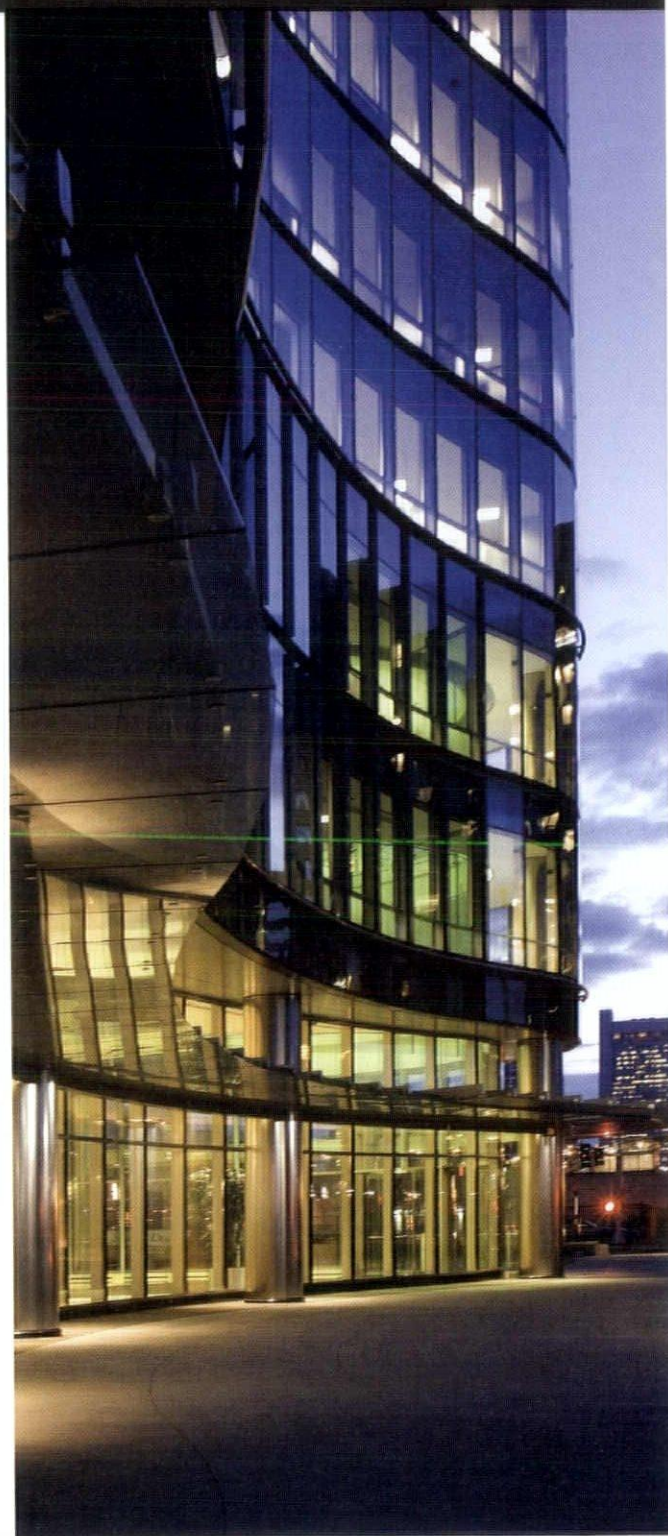
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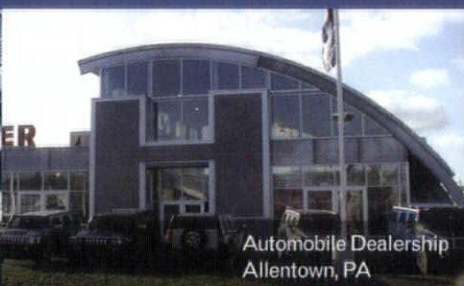
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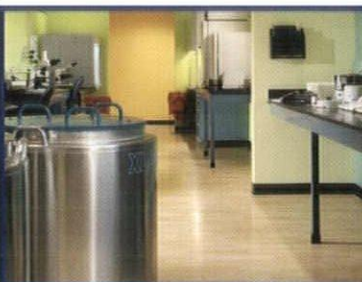
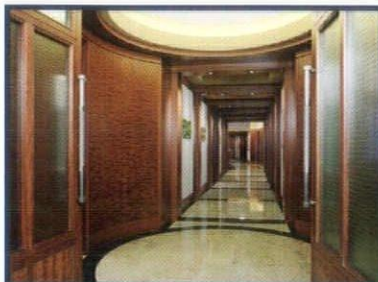
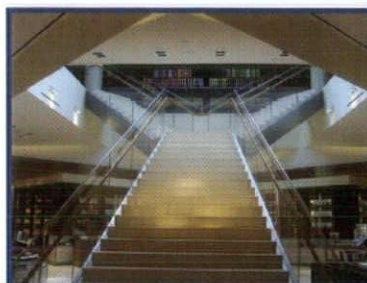




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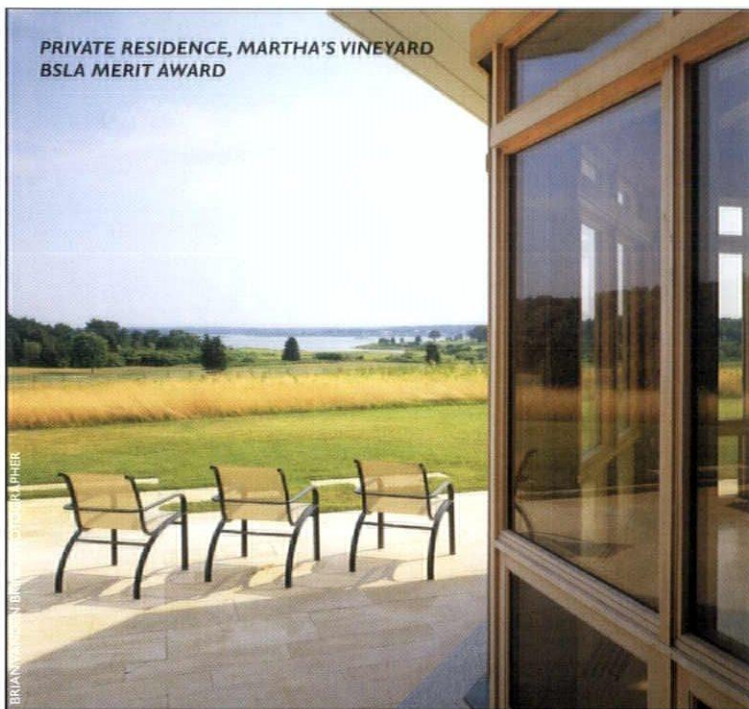
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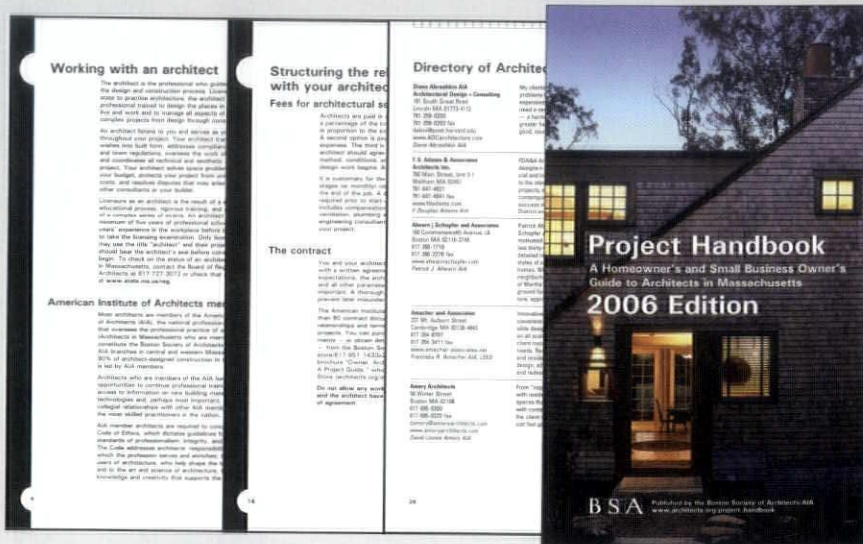
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# Covering the Issues

**Identity crisis...** “What kind of genius are you?” asks Daniel Pink as he explains economist David Galenson’s theory of creative minds (*Wired*, July 2006). Applying quantitative analysis, Galenson studies how and when innovators innovate. He argues that, no matter the discipline, creative minds fall into two categories: the “conceptual innovators”—those who take great creative leaps when they’re young—and the “experimental innovators”—those who plod along, slowly making progress, reaching their creative stride much later in life. Mozart, Picasso, Maya Lin? All are conceptualists who did their truly innovative work while young. Beethoven, Cezanne, and Alfred Hitchcock, on the other hand, were experimenters whose best work came later. Galenson is a late-blooming experimenter. And you?

**Dilbert, watch out...** The office cube is about to change—at least if Lisa Takeuchi Cullen can predict what’s to come (“Redrawing the Cube,” *Time*, July 17, 2006). The workstations of the future will be smaller and more personal, allowing increased control of noise, temperature, and view. Less individual space will be balanced by more group areas: cellphone booths, conversation pods, and in-house “common areas” that rival the local Starbucks. The goal is to accommodate flex time, overlapping schedules, and new team-based work habits. Cullen argues that the current standards were designed for the paper-pushing age; now, in the laptop era, it’s time for new shapes, materials, and configurations.

**Ever green...** All-things-sustainable continue to make headlines. *Newsweek* jumped into the pool with Jerry Adler’s “Going Green” cover story (July 17, 2006). Adler offers yet another series of sobering

statistics addressed by yet another set of inspiring examples. There’s the California architect who bikes to work, the Brooklyn hipster using recycled denim insulation in his townhouse renovation, the Detroit-based builder who refused to construct oversized vacation homes, the Massachusetts energy consultant designing residential solar arrays, and Manhattan’s race to build the most sustainable skyscraper. Adler saves the critical question for the end: “You cannot save the world with anecdotes. Is the relevant statistic that sales of hybrid cars doubled last year to 200,000, or that they were outsold by SUVs by a ratio of 23-1?”

**New history...** What to do with an old Modern? As the great mid-century houses face the end of their first life, how should they face the future? What to restore, what to preserve, what to change, and how to finance it are some of the key questions posed by editor Stephen Zacks (*Metropolis*, August 2006). A collection of articles outlines the unique challenges faced by the owners of houses by Landis Gores, Paul Rudolph, William Krisel, and Eliot Noyes. One has been restored by an enthusiastic developer and sold for profit. Another was bought by a community to be converted to public use. A third has acquired a new landscape true to the original spirit. The family who grew up in the fourth (which includes Boston architect Frederick Noyes FAIA) is grappling with what to do, trying to balance stewardship with financial realities. Maybe it’s time for *Dwell* readers to get serious.

**A year in their lives...** With the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, a number of publications have attempted to explain the aftermath. For an in-depth examination of how the political and physical are intertwined, check out “The Lost Year” by Dan



Baum (*The New Yorker*, August 21, 2006). Baum tells the comprehensive story chronologically, putting architecture and planning in historical and cultural perspective by including background such as 1950s urban-renewal practices and the role of the shotgun house in New Orleans life. In “The Long, Strange Resurrection of New Orleans,” Charles C. Mann takes an equally thorough, yet topical approach (*Fortune*, August 21, 2006). He discusses the political circus, the power plays, the mayoral election, and the problematic planning process, full of good intentions and completely lacking in political will. Critical of government actions at all levels, he finds hope for the city in the grassroots efforts of individuals. ■

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, is a designer at Rogers Marvel Architects in New York City.





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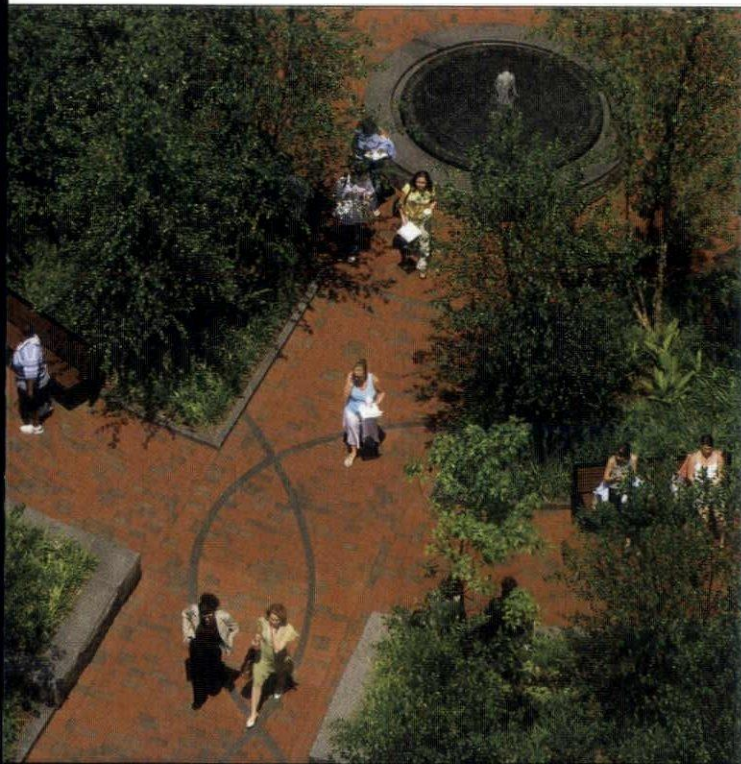
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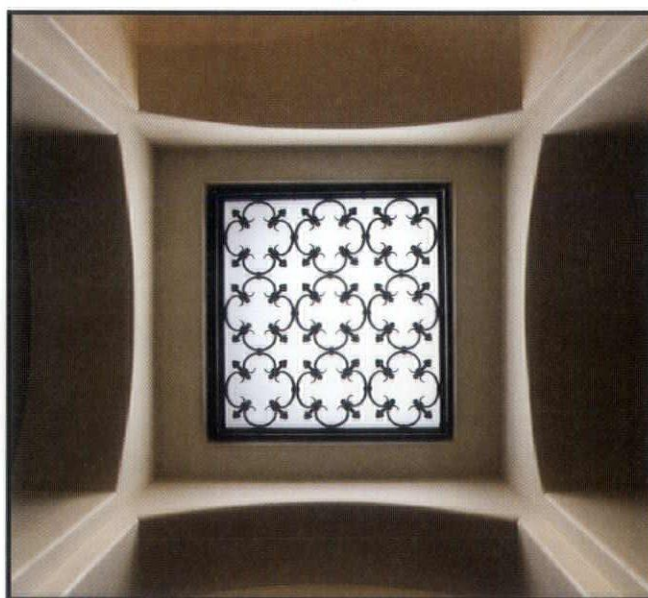
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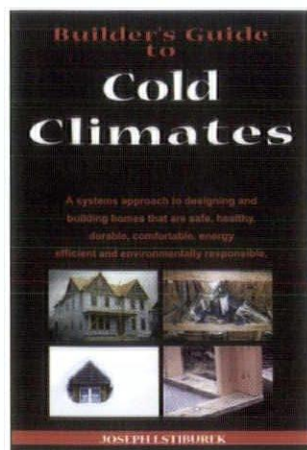
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## BUILDER'S GUIDE TO COLD CLIMATES

by Joseph Lstiburek PE  
Building Science Press, 2004 (revised)

**Joseph Lstiburek**, one of the leading building scientists today, admits that he is a builder who has gone over to the “dark side” of building science. But in this guide, he makes complicated concepts quite understandable, offering a designer’s guide as much as a “builder’s guide.”

How do you know if you’re in a “cold climate”? Lstiburek includes his well-known and much-used climate region map, somewhat different from the Department of Energy’s (DOE) eight-zone map because he overlays rain-loading and humidity in the definition of regions. Most of the Northeast falls into Lstiburek’s “cold” zone, although parts of Maine are “very cold” and much of New Jersey is “mixed-humid.” The distinctions are meaningful, and key to Lstiburek’s approach to building science. (Other books in the series include guides to hot-dry/mixed-dry climates; mixed-humid climates; and hot/humid climates.)

The guide is based on Lstiburek’s extensive experience as well as knowledge gained from building scientists in Canada, Norway, and Sweden, and DOE’s Building America program. Updated from the original 2000 edition to include the latest thinking on vapor barriers and revised sections on roof, wall, and foundation design, it is a guide to high-performance buildings that can only be achieved through an integrated-systems approach.

Following a section introducing this approach and outlining recent changes in construction technology and building science, the book is divided into two parts: Design and Construction. Design first reviews “big picture” choices, from site selection to building shape and orientation and basic systems.

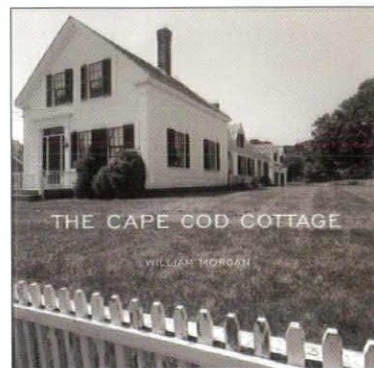
This section then presents building-science concepts, including material properties, and compares the performance of different wall, roof, and basement assemblies. It includes an excellent review of the benefits of rainscreen versus barrier design, and the discussion of air-barrier systems and details is quite rich. The discussion of air-leakage rates is at the cutting edge. The presentation of issues related to control of water-vapor diffusion and drying balance is clear and includes Lstiburek’s classification of materials into vapor retarder and permeance categories — the subject of proposed code changes today.

The second section, Construction, focuses on specific building elements. Each chapter begins with an introduction of general concerns, followed by specific recommendations, details, and solutions to common problems.

Lstiburek’s guides are known for their clarity and their accessible (even humorous) language. The graphics are one of their biggest strengths: clear drawings and abundant details help the reader to quickly understand the concepts.

Although the guide’s focus is residential design, the underlying building-science principles apply to every building and include the latest thinking on high-performance buildings. This book is a “must have” for every architect’s library.

Wagdy Anis AIA, LEED AP, is a principal with Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott in Boston, and chair of the Building Enclosure Technology and Environment Council of the National Institute of Building Sciences.



## THE CAPE COD COTTAGE

by William Morgan  
Princeton Architectural Press, 2006

**This survey** of Cape Cod cottages is a sweet book; much like its subject, its restraint makes it more profound than its more elaborate peers. The story it tells is New England’s story — the story of creating a sense of place and a sense of home.

The Cape Cod cottage fits its climate: tight eaves and minimal trim close the corners; overlapping shingles shed the rain and snow; and the great central chimney radiates heat all winter. But more than just appropriate engineering, the Cape is about shelter in a deeper sense. Indeed, what could be more “house” than a Cape house? As the author points out, what child hasn’t drawn the Cape with its face of two eye-windows, one door-mouth, and a chimney-hat with smoke curling out? And what image seems more New England, more rooted in its place? The Cape’s utility and compactness belie its power.

Morgan tracks the history of the Cape from its 17th-century roots to contemporary versions in a brief and informative essay. His artful black-and-white images follow the text, forming the bulk of the book and giving the reader a fine visual survey of this enduring form.

The form of the Cape has resisted modification. Additions typically honor the primary structure and grow from the back



with wings, sheds, and ells; the Fairbanks House in Dedham, Massachusetts, is one well-known example. In the early 19th century, housewrights slightly modified the Cape to fit the Greek lines then coming into fashion. Instead of aligning the long axis of the building parallel with the street with an entrance under the eave, the Greek Revival housewrights turned their buildings 90 degrees and faced the gable to the street. This simple shift turned the cottage into a temple.

The Cape is alive and well. The book reminds us of the power of the 20th-century versions by architect Royal Barry Wills, which, curiously, seem more authentic than the 17th-century forms he was emulating. Wills' architectural skill and deep understanding of the Cape merit review.

As architectural historian Vincent Scully has shown, Robert Venturi

presented a new approach with projects like the Trubeck and Wislocki houses on the sandy dunes of Nantucket. These two houses are among the best of Postmodern buildings, with their appealingly awkward self-consciousness and love of asymmetry. Venturi understood that the essence of the Cape is its compact tightness and showed that the old form still has plenty for architects to explore.

The introduction by New England architect Dan Scully extols the virtues of the simple life embodied in the Cape type. He sees the Cape as the original anti-McMansion. The enduring presence of the Cape, however, depends not so much on its reflection of the simple life, but on its ability to accommodate our increasingly complex lives.

John B. Tittmann AIA is a principal of Albert, Righter & Tittmann, Architects in Boston.

## AMERICANS AND THEIR WEATHER



William B. Meyer

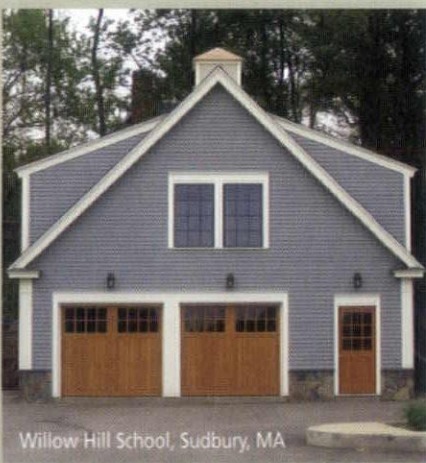
### AMERICANS AND THEIR WEATHER

by William B. Meyer

Oxford University Press, 2000

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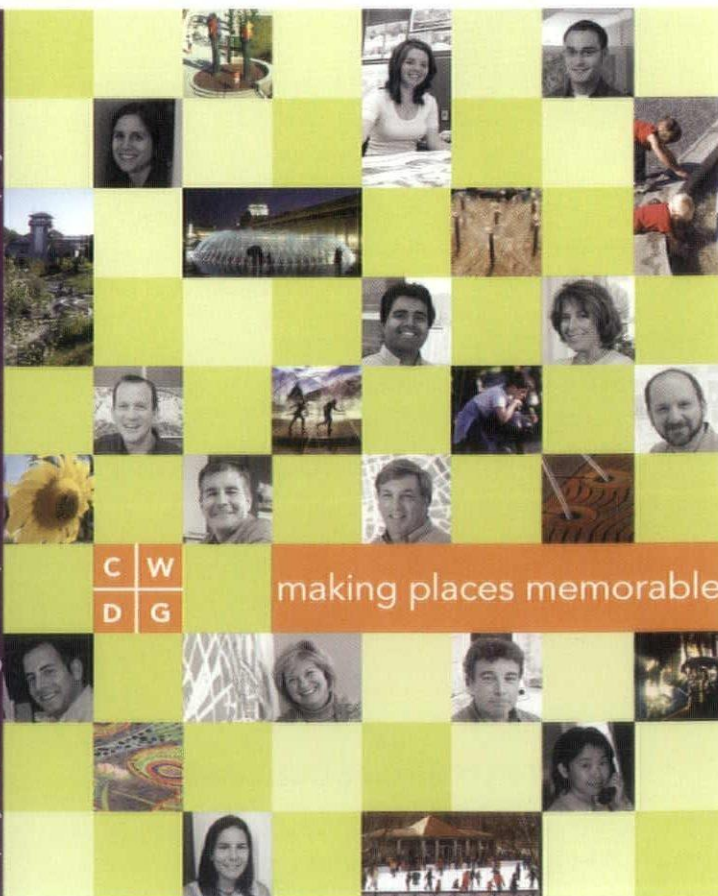
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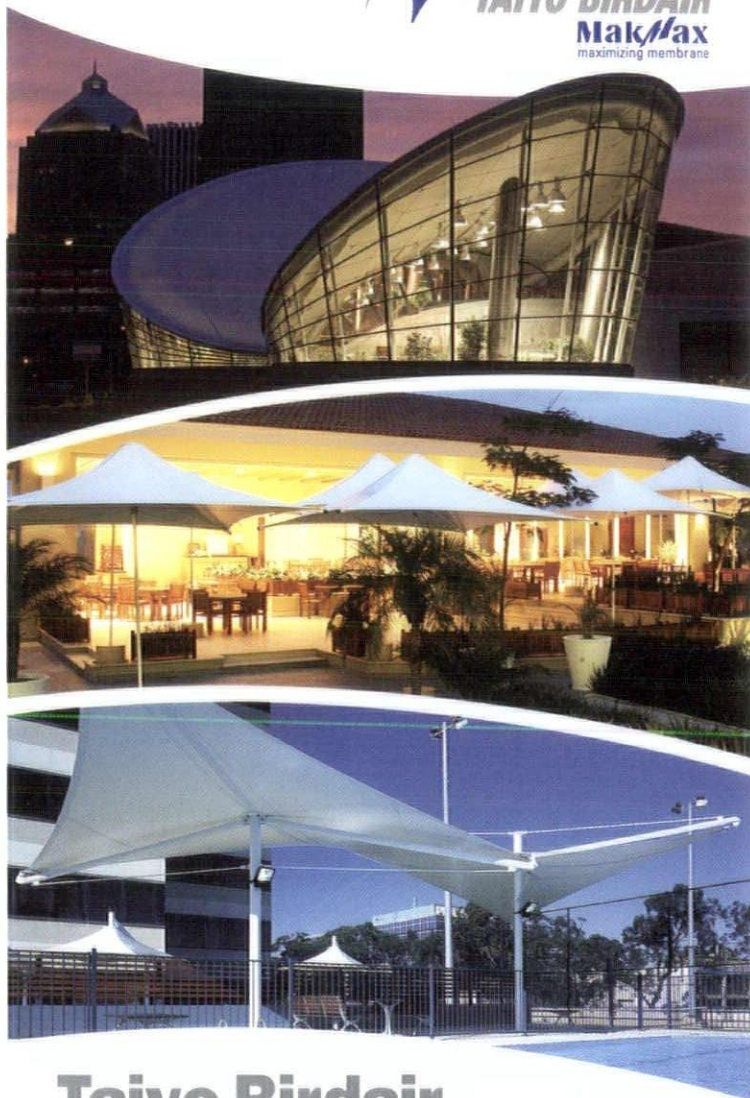
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carriages and sleighs in the 19th century, while modern commuters, traveling greater distances between home and work, find snowy roads dangerous and thus anxiety-provoking. Winters are both good and bad for New England's economy. Furious coastal storms are bad for fishermen and great for ski-area operators. Weather conditions in all seasons inspire the development of tools for physical relief (umbrellas and sunglasses) as well as social and economic relief (weather forecasting, insurance, disaster assistance). With the current focus on global warming and natural disasters, weather discussions have become a simmering caldron of science, romantic interpretation, and tall tales.

In this book, William Meyer, an associate professor of geography at Colgate University, offers remarkably clear insights into the historical relationship between Americans and their weather, from the early colonists planning according to the climate they mistakenly expected (identical to that of England) to the post-World War II migration to warmer climates when, for the first time, weather as an amenity influenced decisions as to where to live. Meyer addresses head-on the issue of climatic determinism, the belief that weather shapes people's lives, whether they are aware of it or not. He is critical of Thomas Jefferson for "retailing an error" that one can tell the character of people by the latitude in which they live: Northerners as "cool, sober, laborious" and Southerners as "fiery, voluptuary, and indolent." He also undermines some of the murkier prescriptions of environmentalists who urge that activities in an area conform to what nature intended. Nature, as Meyer insists, has no intentions. It simply is!

To dispel the idea that residential design develops determinately in relation to prevailing weather conditions, Meyer deploys the Gothic Revival style as promoted by Andrew Jackson Downing in the mid-19th century, with its dark paint, steep roofs, and small windows, so badly adapted to summer breezes and winter sun. Not to mention the proliferation of Cape Cod Colonials in California, and Spanish Mission in the Northeast.

One of Meyer's most engaging presentations is his take on post-World War II "climatic boosterism" led by slogan-eering entrepreneurs who recast Florida, long thought to be too swampy for year-round human habitation, as a paradise for retirees. California, offering cooler summers and lower humidity than Florida, attracted young families, their livelihoods no longer controlled by agricultural production or place-based activities. This freedom to relocate, based on weather as an amenity, disproves the moribund idea that for most people "where one was born and lives is the best place in the world, no matter how forsaken a hole it may appear to an outsider."

Phyllis Andersen is a landscape historian in Boston.



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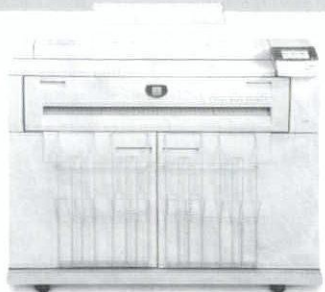
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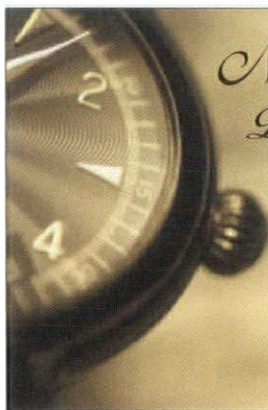
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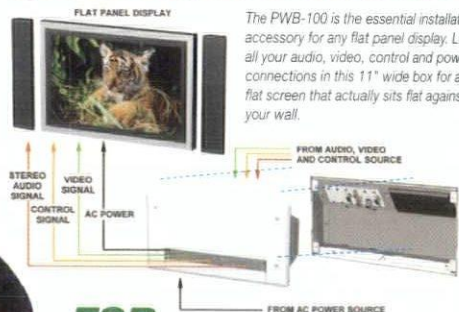
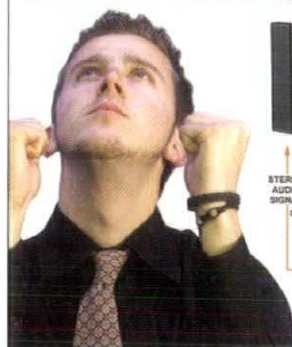
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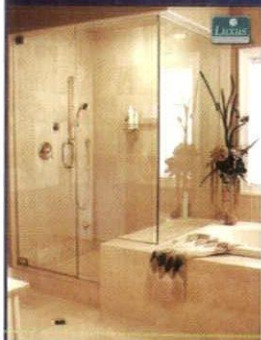
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# Colby College

"One must have a mind of winter," Wallace Stevens writes in his poem "The Snow Man," and I, ever drawn to dialogue, respond, "I do. That's *exactly* what I have."

"And have been cold a long time," the poem continues.

"Cold? I'm freezing," I say. I'm a Maine resident, after all, one with Raynaud's Syndrome, a minor circulatory disorder that makes my toes and fingers numb easily.

"To behold the junipers shagged with ice, / The spruces rough in the distant glitter / Of the January sun."

Stevens' poem shifts, but I stay with these lines, busily disagreeing. The coldness of my home state hampers exploratory perception. Or it hampers mine. Ice on the roads, snow coming down. Best to stay in.

I don't ski and I don't skate, though I do shove my son down sledding hills. I have a pair of snowshoes, and I occasionally tromp around a field, while complaining that I am the only person in the world whose nose has Raynaud's. In general, though, I scuttle from one interior space — my home, my car, my office — to another. Not that I can completely indulge my disinclination to go out, as I live 64 miles from Colby College, where I teach fiction writing.

I try to pack as much as possible into my two days a week on campus. Mornings of paperwork lead to afternoons of classes, then multiple meetings. I get nervous when I bump into a friend in the hallway — I've got the desire, but not the time, to chat. I've got a mind of winter, all right. I never look up and see anything.

Except...when I make my way down from my office and out the doors of Miller



Library. The library — with its cupola and clock tower — sits at the center of Colby's hilltop campus in Waterville, Maine. I often leave Miller with only one minute to get to the neighboring building where my classes are held. And yet as soon as I step outside, I stop. I'm out in the cold and willing, or willed, to look. From where I stand — between the giant pillars of Miller Library's portico (where unrepentant smokers do their unrepentant smoking) — the view is expansive. The campus quadrangle descends — by stairs, stretches of lawn, more stairs, more stretches of lawn — to the faraway street, and then far beyond the campus to the forest (where Colby has its nature preserve) and the more distant forest (which hides Waterville's homes but reveals a lone smokestack). I might want to pause here — and think about the paper mill that once employed the town and polluted its air and river — but my view is drawn farther still to the hills in the distance, just north of the more famous Camden Hills. Sight stops here, but I always *sense* what is beyond: the open promise of the sea.

I've spent a summer in Switzerland, so can I say this is a stunning view? Not really,

but it is big and inspiring. It does something to my mind of winter, which is so short-sighted. Looking, I slow down. I take a breath. It's the view — not the lesson plan in my hand — that makes me ready to teach.

I have been in attractive buildings in winter, but I don't remember them the way I remember looking *out* of buildings in winter. I think of an ugly academic building in Madison, Wisconsin, which offers a starkly pretty view of the icy reaches of the lake it borders.

In winter, I want to be *situated* for a significant view. In the summer, I don't really care. A summer view may give me broadness, but then so does a summer day. In the cold, I need help. It might come in the form of a window, but where I work, it comes in the form of a building setting itself on high, so that its denizens can discover (for isn't this what an undergraduate education is all about?) the outside world. ■

Debra Spark is the author of the novels *Coconuts for the Saint* and *The Ghost of Bridgetown*. Her most recent book is *Curious Attractions: Essays on Fiction Writing*.



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