

# C O L U M N S



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THE PITTSBURGH CHAPTER, AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

MARCH 1992

# P.J.DICK

We Have An Attitude About Architects.



At PJD, we've always had a strong attitude about architects. In fact, our positive, practical attitude has helped us earn the trust of many architects over the years.

We view architects as our partners in the increasingly complex and demanding business of construction. We may disagree occasionally, but we recognize that everyone benefits when we work together to solve problems and meet the customer's objectives.

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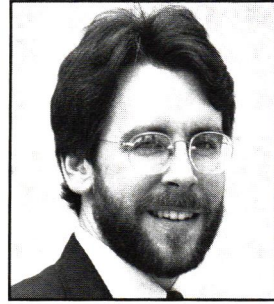
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**View Point: Can Architects Save the Economy?**

**Rob Pfaffmann, AIA, President**



*"There is one profession and one only, namely architecture, in which progress is not considered necessary, where laziness is enthroned, and which the reference is always to yesterday."*

*LeCorbusier*

As I write this View Point I'm about 37,000 feet over the North Atlantic, returning home from an unusual business trip to Germany and Switzerland. As we architects are prone to do, any opportunity to squeeze in some intensive architectural sight-seeing along the way is an important consideration. One usually expects the primary highlights of any architectural touring in Europe to be related to the great monuments of the past. But since the design of a sophisticated glass curtain wall for CMU's Center for Building Performance was the object of this trip, I found myself focusing instead on modern architecture and construction quality throughout my tour. Classical or early modernist ideology of the first half of this century advertised many things that were not achieved: better buildings, a better quality of life, and most importantly, a relentless optimism about the future.

For me, the post-Cold War issues facing the architectural profession are not so tied to political ideology, but to the non-ideological issues of environment and the material quality of our work. As I head back home on the last great symbol of American technological supremacy, an aircraft, we are debating whether we're getting a fair deal from the Japanese and whether we have lost our will and/or ability to compete in the global marketplace. The talk is about autos; it ought to be about the largest economic engine, the construction industry! We all know the icons of modern German auto engineering innovation: BMW, Porsche, Mercedes. But what about the construction business?

After visiting the amazing curtain wall factory of Dr. Fritz Gartner in the little town of Dinglefingen an hour or so east of Stuttgart, I came away with the distinct impression our construction industry may go

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Western PA Biotechnology Manufacturing Center, one of many facilities currently under construction in the area. Architect: Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. Contractor: TEDCO Construction. *Story on page 6.*

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the way of the U.S.' steel or auto industry. The high, consistent level of commitment to quality in all aspects of Gartner's business was a clear reminder. As we toured the factory, we could see that there are commitments everywhere: to the environment, to R&D, to workers, to the art of making things for the sheer joy of it. And, oh yes, making a profit, too! These days the issue of corporate and employee commitments to quality is a hot topic, when we aren't childishly bashing a Honda (why don't we bash our Sony's?).

Where does our profession fit into all of this? Are we as a profession becoming more like the American auto industry, looking for others to blame, or are we like Fritz Gartner's curtain wall company, setting the standards that others will follow? Maybe it's my relentless ideal-

ism showing, but we are positioned to make a difference in the direction of our building industry. If we keep telling ourselves that we have no control ("it's the client, it's the contractor, it's the banks, it's the government..."), it is likely that someone else will determine our profession's fate. So what can architects do to contribute to the dialogue about our country's economic competitiveness? At the local level we need to communicate with and support our allies in the construction industry. We need to talk about the way projects are realized. We need to listen to what clients and builders are telling us about the quality of our work.

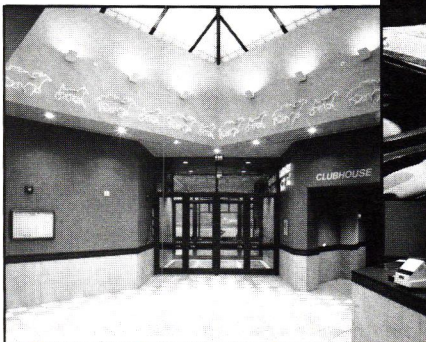
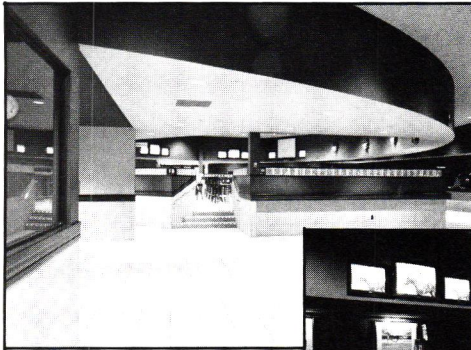
Our Program Chair, Kevin Silson, AIA, is providing a way for that dialogue to occur at our March meeting on quality in construction

documents. Maybe Corb's caustic comment above is much like the extreme generalization of a Japanese executive referring to American workers, but we must nonetheless look hard at the way we achieve quality in all its many forms. And of course, when we're all done agreeing how we are going to improve the quality of our business, we can remember that we haven't even had a chance to blame the lawyers! ■■■

COLUMNS welcomes your input!  
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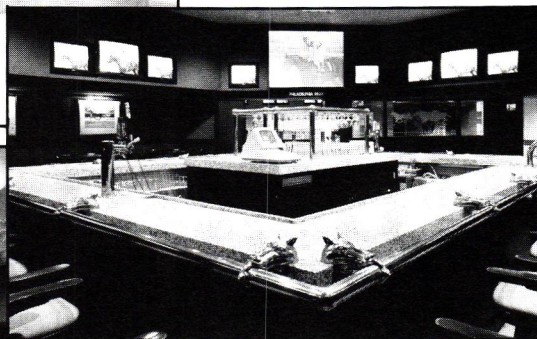


Above: Ladbroke's third Offtrack Betting Facility in Harmarville.

Arch.: Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Assoc.

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