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This Could Be You By Tracy Certo



“Here’s how I might do this,” he said as he flipped the photos like cards into pairs, two on a page, and narrated the story they presented. Magic.

It was a big day in the Flynn household

in O’Hara Twp. A crew from Better Homes & Garden’s Kitchen and Bath Design flew in for a day and a half photo shoot of their master bathroom and powder room. Homeowner Karen Flynn submitted the prize-winning photos (by her next door neighbor, the photographer Dennis Marsico). I was invited as the local field editor, (on the lookout for great kitchens and baths, hint hint) for Meredith Publications’ many magazines.

I had the good luck to work with a great photographer, King Au, and the design director of the magazine, Stephen Peretto who, throughout the course of the day taught me quite a bit—notably the fine points of editorial photography. At the end of the long shooting day, Stephen laid out the Polaroids of the six money shots and explained why each one worked, what story they told and how they related to each other in the design layout. “Here’s how I might do this,” he said as he flipped the photos like cards into pairs, two on a page, and narrated the story they presented. Magic.

I mention this because sometimes a bathroom is not just a bathroom. In my limited photography experience, I might have taken a wide-angle shot that showed as much of the bathroom as possible. Not these pros. They teased and coaxed the scene forward, first setting up a scenario with props: a newspaper angled on the stool before the tub, a cup of coffee (diet Pepsi, actually, fizzy and all) with a teaspoon at tub side and a myriad of artfully and yet realistically arranged soaps, sea sponges, bottles of creams and lotions, metallic tubes and brushes. It turned an attractive bathroom into an inviting one, steeped in details and meanings. There was the robe, dangling by the shower (which was transformed into a lightbox) with slippers placed below, one angled on top of the other. On the vanity, a large glass vase with cherry tree branches blossoming at their peak. (And may I say right here this was my big contribution. The challenge was to find some forced flowering branches in Pittsburgh and I did, second phone call. They were beauts.) Watching King at work was instructive: he shot low to get the tub at eye level and catch the vanity beyond and the window behind it. Perfect in capturing the

architecture and the details without capturing the entire scene. The “tile shot” was from an angle, not dead on, for a more arresting photo with the robe in the background.

As I surveyed the scene that day, absorbing as much as I could, I kept connecting this to architecture and photography and how critical the relationship between the two. Presentation is everything in this case. From the art of propping (is that indeed a verb?) to the final angle of the photograph. Designing a beautiful room is one thing; showcasing it with top-notch photos is yet another. King is an architect and he’s done plenty of architectural photography. Knowing my position with this magazine, he referred often throughout the day to the difference between architectural photography and editorial.

Meanwhile, the homeowner, Karen Flynn, turned out to be a bit of a stylist herself, preparing us a lavish lunch (roasted beet and blood orange salad for starters—I got the recipe if you’re interested). Then her mom stopped in, and three sisters, a sister in law and baby Roberto, her husband and an assortment of friends. Not to mention the architect, Susan Tusick, the Valley News Dispatch, the Sewickley Herald and, the next day, the Trib-Review. It was great fun and I was surprised to see that the photography team was unruffled throughout, granting interviews, posing for photographs and answering many questions (including mine). Someone along the way said to me in an aside, “You know, I dread covering these “national” stories because often times the photographer is so arrogant.” Not these guys.

It was an inspiring day on many levels: watching the pros in action and seeing them relate to everyone so well, meeting the very large and very warm Flynn family and of course learning the ropes in styling and editorial photography. As I said, we’re looking for a few good kitchens and, especially, baths in the Pittsburgh area. Send your photos to me by email and who knows, you, too can experience a day like this with your name in a national design magazine. Just make sure the homeowner is an outstanding cook.

Email the editor at tcerto@adelphia.net

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On the cover: The spectacular views from Grandview Avenue make this a public realm. For the Mt. Washington CDC, that means a greater say in design issues. Photo: Tracy Certo

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

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Meanwhile in Mt. Lebanon

by Anne Swager, Hon. AIA

My first husband spent his entire

childhood in Mt. Lebanon. After graduating from college, he returned to a condominium in nearby Scott Township. Not too many years later, we married and returned to Mt. Lebanon. I soon learned I had to move over and make room for the ghosts of his childhood. At one point he wanted to buy his parents' old home but he finally settled for living only a stone's throw away. I heard repeated stories about buying his school clothes at the old Horne's and early attempts at romance over milkshakes at Isaly's. His nostalgia for the yesteryear of Mt. Lebanon was mirrored not only by his high school buddies who had returned to good old Lebo but also by a number of long time residents.



Main Street strongly advocated (and still does for that matter) that a downtown could compete with a mall by underscoring its uniqueness inherent in its architectural forms.

Soon bored with my lot in life as a stay-at-home mom living in Mt. Lebanon, I volunteered to work with a group dedicated to revitalizing the main business district of Mt. Lebanon. Washington Road had been home to Horne's, Isaly's, a thriving Denis Theater and a number of other small businesses that in many residents' minds contributed to making a perfect hometown. By the time I arrived, the Denis Theater was a sad parody of its former glory years. We had several discount drugstores, constantly selling paper towels at a great bargain, and most first floor spaces were professional offices. Washington Road's former glory was well hidden behind inappropriate storefront modernization attempts and the streetscape improvements had a very dated early 60's look. Nevertheless, our group had heady plans and we dove in.

We quickly adopted the National Trust's revitalization strategy, entitled the Main Street program, and formed a local development corporation. The Main Street program is scaled for small downtowns that have suffered from our love for the almighty automobile and the lure of the indoor mall. The four tenets on which the program is based include building consensus and cooperation through an organization focused on revitalization, bringing residents back downtown through a series of special events, attract-

ing new uses appropriate to a downtown, and Design. Main Street strongly advocated (and still does for that matter) that a downtown could compete with a mall by underscoring its uniqueness inherent in its architectural forms. I soon learned that while a bit of Mt. Lebanon's art deco architectural heritage remained, most of it had been demolished to make way for a fair amount of mediocre mid-rise buildings.

We formed a façade grant program that was tied to design approval. It covered everything from paint colors to signs to complete redos of storefronts. Modest in its success, it nevertheless underscored the importance design should play in a revitalization strategy and it even carried over to better streetscape improvements. Mt. Lebanon's revitalization efforts were taken in-house a few years after I had moved on to AIA Pittsburgh. The downtown still struggles with a number of the same problems although several new restaurants have reinvigorated the street. Current dreams include a boutique style hotel on a now vacant lot across from Rollier Hardware. A look at the preliminary plans shows a building in scale with its surroundings only through its relative size. The materials are decidedly out of sync and the concrete parking pads over the LRT look like aircraft carrier landing decks. Fortunately, Mt. Lebanon's Commission is committed to good design and they own the land which gives them a modicum of control over the project.

Bravo to the many city CDC's profiled this month by Tracy Certo. Each and every one of them is stressing good design and recognizing the long-term values it brings to a community. The Municipalities Planning Code which governs the planning in communities like Mt. Lebanon severely limits their control over design. While the ghosts of time passed have set the wheels in motion, Mt. Lebanon will need new models and systems if it hopes to be vigilant in guarding its greatest asset, its architectural heritage.





AIA Call For Volunteers

AIA PITTSBURGH seeks contact with persons interested in providing one day of community service for the repair of homes for our elderly, disabled and low-income neighbors.

WHEN: SATURDAY, April 27, 2002 from 8:00 am. To 4:30 PM.

WHERE: This year we will be doing repairs for the home of Catherine Wheat at 7549 Hamilton Avenue in Homewood. Repairs will include painting, clean up, carpentry, plumbing and electrical work

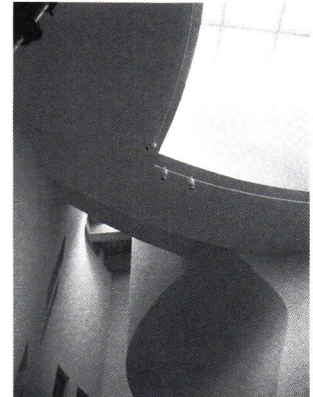
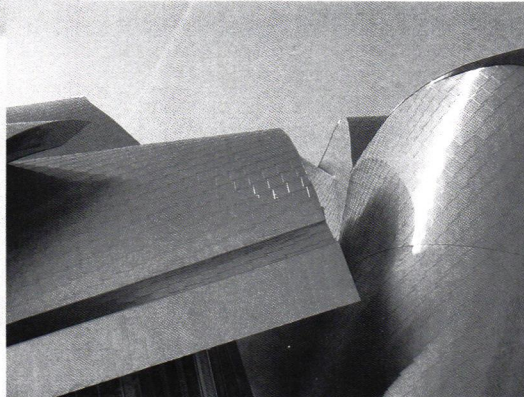
TEDCO CONSTRUCTION will be providing the skilled trades people and project management as they have for the past seven years. Their assistance has been invaluable.

WHO: Both skilled and unskilled volunteers are needed to assist.

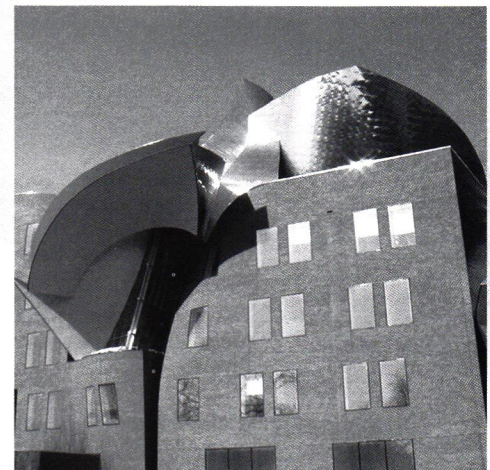
NOTE TO IDP INTERNS: This is a great way to fill those community service credits.

CONTACT: Jennifer McCarthy at 412-361-7878. She will be coordinating AIA volunteers. Please get in touch with her so that we can organize work assignments. For other information you may also contact Todd Havekotte 724/495-4282 at **Baker and Associates**.

A Sneak Preview



Work progresses on Frank O. Gehry's creation in Cleveland: The Peter B. Lewis Building for the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. Since construction began, the architecture critic for the Plain-Dealer called it, "the best show in town". The \$61 million project, \$24 million of which was donated by Lewis, is meant to symbolize the creative, beyond-the-lines thinking needed for future business leaders. The building is a block away from the Cleveland Museum of Art. Trust us, you can't miss it.



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