

# C O L U M N S



*Case Studies: A Student Perspective*  
*Dreams and Schemes*  
*A Quaint Historic Piece on AIA Pittsburgh*



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# Views and Perspectives

By Tracy Certo



*It was particularly meaningful to christen the new space at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center by showcasing the great work of our area architects.*

## If you missed the Design Pittsburgh Gala

at the new convention center, you missed not only a grand event but also a sensational view of the Allegheny River and the North Shore from the window-walls on the second floor. The view to the south offers a gorgeous perspective of the Sister Bridges, one after the other after the other. It was almost as if the bolts of lighting that split the sky and lit the city that night were planned as special effects.

It was a great evening, as ever, and it was particularly meaningful to christen the new space at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center by showcasing the great work of our area architects.

With the new construction on the riverfront the past few years, Pittsburghers are getting some fresh perspectives of the city that are knockout. From the river walk which extends the length of the North Shore to the renewed Station Square with its splashy fountain and open courtyard, there is much to appreciate.

One view we now appreciate more than ever is the grand one we get exiting the Ft. Pitt Tunnel. For that, among other reasons, Elsie and Henry Hillman received the Gold Medal Award on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Elsie in particular was instrumental in getting the clearance to use the Pennsylvania barriers in lieu of the view-blocking Jersey barriers.

Another view worth mentioning took me by surprise. It was the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Aviary in September and nearly 600 guests in formal wear were ushered into a tent the size of a football field next to Heinz Field. It was hot in there as we sat down to dinner. All those guys in black tuxes and women in long black gowns were in need of cool, fresh air.

Soon enough, we felt a sudden breeze and heard an appreciative murmur buzz through the crowd. Looking up, we saw every tent flap raised high, exposing a dramatic and stunning view of the city, from the Golden Triangle to Mt Washington and beyond to the lit football stadium. It was another wow moment, made even better when guests later strolled to the river's edge for drinks and conversation.

Again, on the North Shore: At the WYEP Summer music festival in June, the stage was set at Allegheny Landing, casting the city in the role of backdrop. As one musician said, the scene was so amazing it didn't seem real. It was beautiful by day and magical by night.

If I may mention one more occasion, on the Fourth of July, my family was invited to a residence on Grandview Avenue to watch the fireworks. The setting: a swank doublewide condo with window-walls open to the Point. On a pitch perfect evening on the deck, we watched spectacular fireworks light the sky over the new stadiums. The view keeps getting better, said the satisfied owner.

At the Design Pittsburgh Gala, Henry Hillman read New Yorker writer Brendan Gill's comments on the unique beauty of Pittsburgh — where he said if this city were in Europe, tourists would go out of their way to see it.

It's one more view to appreciate.

###

In this issue, former Carnegie Mellon student Megan Nash offers her perspective in an article about case studies (p.6). Megan wrote about the disconnect between the academic world and the real world and how students long to enter the professional world while professionals wax sentimental about collegiate life. True enough, I suppose, although most professionals might wish to do it all over again—but this time with computers and cell phones.

In the past month, I've visited three of my nieces on college campuses. Rachel, from Canandaigua, New York, is here in town as a premed student on an academic scholarship at Pitt. The other two are at SUNY in Albany. All have fast computers, busy cell phones and a stocked refrigerator, not to mention active social lives. I sounded like a character from a Dr. Seuss book when I said more than once, Do you know how lucky you are?

Soon enough they, too, will be in the professional world and they'll look back fondly at these years. All well and good but my advice to them, should they ask, is don't wish it away.

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**On the cover:** Detail of the Triangle Building, 1884, by Andrew Peebles. Photo by Tracy Certo.

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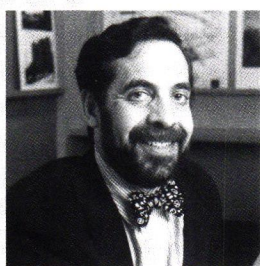
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## Design Rewards

By Jon Shimm, President AIA Pittsburgh

### When I first came to Pittsburgh

twelve years ago, I found many aspects of the city intriguing and confusing. I was immediately enamored with the rich architectural palette of the city, from H.H. Richardson to Harrison Abramovitz, and yet, every major building of note but one designed within the past 50 years had been by out of town firms.



*The quality of the work and its civic nature are commendable but what is equally rewarding is the fact that much of it has been done by the hands of Pittsburgh firms.*

Although I never knew the rivers as the thoroughfares of the departed steel industry, I could not immediately grasp why they were such an underutilized resource. I could not believe that life long residents of the city had never viewed the city from the water until I discovered there were few opportunities to travel by water and equally few to walk at the water's edge.

The urban fabric, though frayed around some of the edges, was remarkably intact. Neighborhoods had identities with commercial districts, rich housing stock, beautiful parks, and views to die for. Why were people flocking to Cranberry when there was so much potential within the city?

A lot has changed in that time, and while all is not right, it is much better. Pittsburgh has had an awakening and though I am not so naive to believe this is due to entirely to design, I can say that the importance of design and how it affects our lives and the development of the region has been recognized by public and private interests. Not only are these organizations making a more concerted effort to incorporate quality design in projects, but there also seems to be recognition of the breadth of talent within our region and how we can be heroes in our own town. We are able to look across the city and see major improvements in the cityscape, public amenities and more new buildings than we have seen in a generation. The quality of the work and its civic nature are commendable but what is equally rewarding is the fact that much of it has been done by Pittsburgh firms.

Pittsburgh has become a hotbed for green architecture with a great percentage of the LEED rated buildings as well as some of the largest. No longer are we the smoky city; we are a showcase for sustainable design and the talent to implement it.

There is more to be aware of than the fact that the 1990s brought us good opportunities to demonstrate our talents on an individual basis. For that we have the annual event of the Design Awards of AIA's Design Pittsburgh. What is more important in my mind is that as a community we celebrate, 'Design's Rewards'; the fact that both government and industry have come to realize that the quality of design does in fact matter. It matters not only to the people who use the buildings and spaces on a daily basis but also to those who pass by and observe. It affects the quality of the work produced by the businesses and the quality of life for the city as a whole. It affects the health and well being of the users both physically and psychologically. It creates a sense of safety as it engages people in urban life. It makes us aware of our environment and better appreciate the richness of our region.

The rewards of design can be subtle, but they are evident. The fact that the economy of the past decade has allowed us to bring this to the forefront has been a great opportunity for our professions. The test of whether this has had any real impact on owners will be in the coming years when the economy is not so robust. Our task is to be vigilant in helping them to understand that design does matter, that its impact is broad beyond the boundaries of an individual project, and that it does impact the bottom line—from the services provided to the workers you can attract. Design has many rewards and we are fortunate to have as many good examples to point to as our proof.

