



# COLUMNS

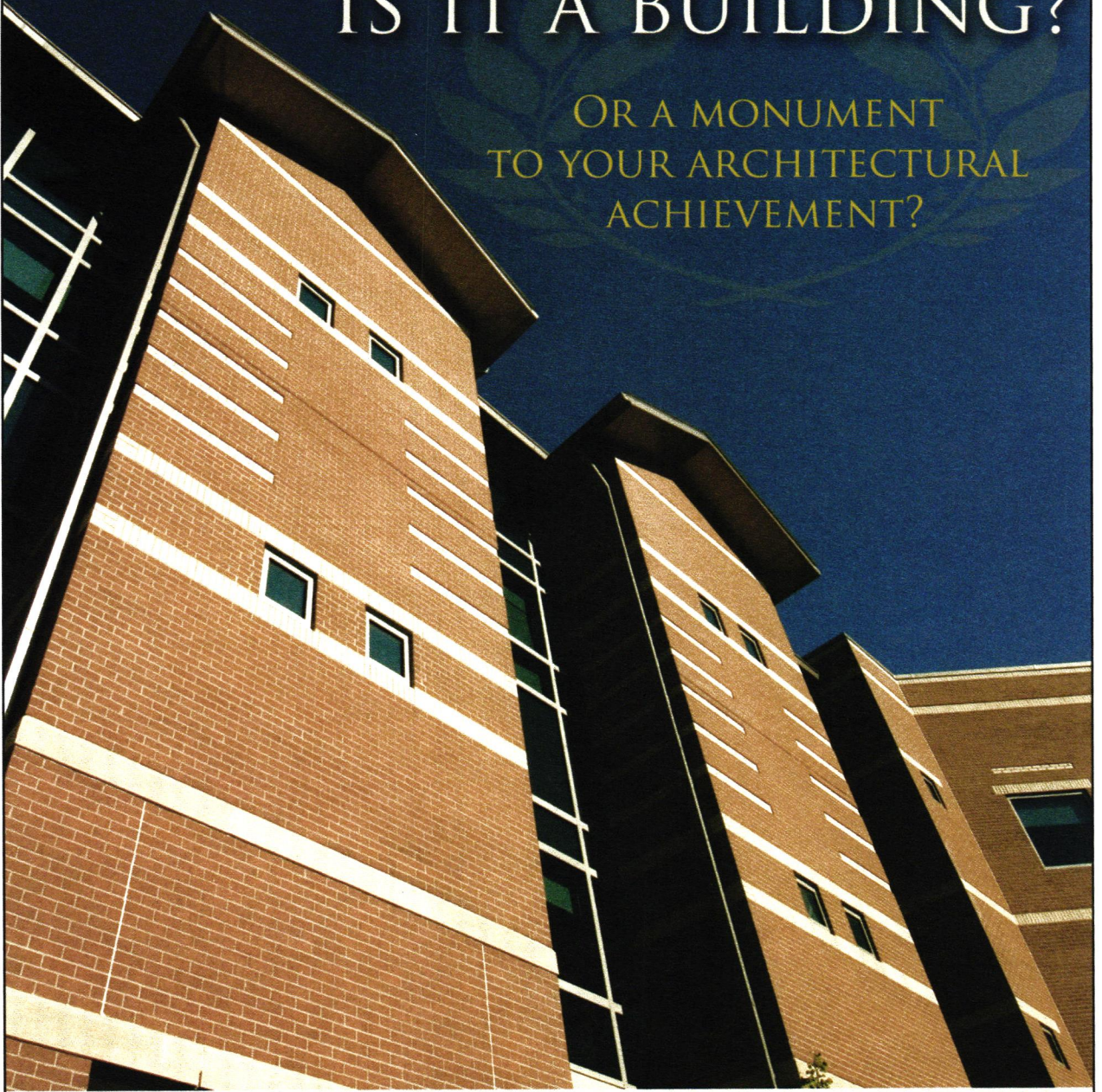
APR/07

The Classics of Tomorrow: Architects predict which buildings today will endure through the ages | Those Gritty, Witty Brits | The 2010 Imperative | AIA Pittsburgh, a chapter of the American Institute of Architects

# COLUMNS

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# HOMEFRONT

BY TRACY CERTO



**This is as good a time as any**, as we celebrate the AIA 150, to tell you about my correspondence with Angelo. He is a fan of architecture who is tuned into matters of importance to architects and planners.

It started a few months ago when Pop City ran an article titled the *Top 10 Unique Things to Pittsburgh* and we received an email from Angelo wondering why the Allegheny County Courthouse was not included. Why indeed.

I responded that it certainly could have been but we had decided to save that for a future article on the *Top 10 Favorite Buildings in the Region*. (Something we still must get around to.)

Here's what he wrote in response to my email and to my question as to how he, a New Englander, is familiar with the Courthouse.

*A list of the 10 best Pittsburgh-area buildings sounds like a great idea and will lead to tours, etc. As with the other great American cities, Pittsburgh will do well to celebrate its architectural heritage. And if that helps to bring in visitors and fill Pittsburgh's restaurants and hotels, it's a win-win situation.*

*I'm an unorganized but enthusiastic amateur fan of American architecture in general and of Richardson's work in particular. It started when, still a teenager, and with no preparation and no preamble, one day I happened to walk into Richardson's Trinity Church in Boston's Copley Square. Entering that building for the first time was a kind of architectural and artistic epiphany for me, and I resolved then and there to find out who Henry Hobson Richardson was and to see all of his surviving buildings.*

*Many years later I persuaded my wife and daughters (then 15 and 13) to go to Ohiopyle, PA, for white water rafting and camping. Although I did the white water stuff with them, I have no real interest in white water rafting. My goal was to see nearby Fallingwater and then make the 70-mile pilgrimage from*

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*Ohiopyle to Pittsburgh to see the Allegheny County Courthouse. I figured that the girls could hardly refuse to indulge my need to see the two buildings, when I had just demonstrated what a sport I had been in that rubber raft. It worked, and the good news is that Amy and Kate became Richardson and Wright enthusiasts too. But they didn't admit it right away. As for my wife, she said that seeing Fallingwater made her understand for the first time the transcendental power of great architecture, and ever since that day she's been looking at buildings with new eyes.*


*No thrill exceeds the thrill of discovery.*

*How do I know about the Pittsburgh building? Visiting it, reading about it, looking at photographs over and over — pretty much the same things that every amateur art enthusiast does. As for why we do these things, well, I don't know. Wordsworth wrote that every once in a while we have a chance to “see into the heart of things”. These great buildings perhaps offer an opportunity for this.*

*If you find yourself in Boston, be sure to visit Copley Square to see Trinity Church, which has never been absent from the American Association of Architects' periodic lists of the ten best buildings in America. Interestingly enough, Richardson himself thought “Pittsburgh,” and not Trinity, his best work. Fortunately for us, we have both.*

Great email, no? I wrote back to ask 1) if I could use what he had written and 2) to tell him the previous week we had been in Boston where we visited Trinity Church and, for the first time another classic, Fenway Park. Last minute tickets. Behind home plate. Talk about the thrill of discovery! Angelo got that.

Months later, when the AIA's list of the Top 150 buildings appeared with two of our own buildings included, who did I think of? Angelo. I emailed him, suggesting he comment on these classics by logging onto [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org). You can, too. Fallingwater (#29) has half a dozen postings at the moment but the Allegheny County Courthouse (#35) has none. We can't allow that.

In this issue, our first hailing our new design, it's a good time to celebrate the architecture in our own region—and people like the erudite Angelo who will travel here just to see it. 

We welcome comments on the new design of Columns: [info@aiaphg.org](mailto:info@aiaphg.org)

Trinity Church in Boston's Copley Square



# A LOOK BACK AND FORWARD

BY ANNE J. SWAGER, HON. AIA

**The year 2007** is a momentous time for the AIA. It is our 150th anniversary. As we mark this passage of time I have been thinking a lot about history, the meaning of history, and what is happening now that is making history.

Somewhere I read that children under the age of eight cannot grasp the meaning of history. They cannot truly comprehend that anything came before them nor that anything will come after them. They are truly small creatures caught in the here and now. Put in the context of the continuum of a human lifetime, I began to wonder about the concept of history we have when we are 18, 28, 38 and on upwards. I realized that the concept for me has taken on a whole new significance when you can say to your children “when I was a kid” and you are actually referring to a time that was 40 to 50 years ago. Then there are those annoying history books that the children bring home from school with real events that you lived through that are now considered history!

When the communications committee met and discussed what should go into our “birthday” issue of Columns, I suggested we take on this very issue of history: your input on how architectural history is being made or not made in the Pittsburgh region. What are those seminal changes that are occurring that are forever altering how you design and practice in the coming decades? What events are occurring that might be altering the perspective of the client world? Is the public interacting in new ways with you or do they have different expectations now than in the past? And which buildings will future generations passionately try to save from the wrecking ball?

While I have seemingly been with the AIA “forever” and admittedly I have been here a very long time given the current propensity of people to stay with one company no more than 5 years,

it hasn't really been all that long. If it were longer I might be able to come up with a cogent list of what has changed since I started or at least some momentous and scintillating comment on what it all means. While my observations hardly qualify as wisdom, I have seen profound change and I expect I will see more.

Quite simply, the most profound change I have seen has been driven by the Internet and the use of computers. Construction documents are now electronic. We now have electronic media, eColumns and the website to push out information. In fact, so much information is available on meetings and gatherings in Pittsburgh that we are often overwhelmed. How you engage with us is changing as well. We still have meetings but many of you meet nationally with other architects concerns within your area of practice. Virtual meetings and forums have widened the discussions and broadened the community of participants.

On a more Pittsburgh-centric level, we are more engaged than ever with other groups trying to make positive change in the community through good design. Public process is no longer just hoped for but rather, demanded. Yet, I am sitting at home writing this column, which I often do when I have a pressing deadline and I need to limit interruptions. While we have become a world where we can pick and choose how and when we engage, many more of you are choosing the AIA as one of your communities of choice. The conversations remain compelling and interesting whether delivered electronically or in person and they still center on how life and community can be made better with good design.

As we move forward I expect the change to continue to accelerate but the need and desire for good design will remain constant. 