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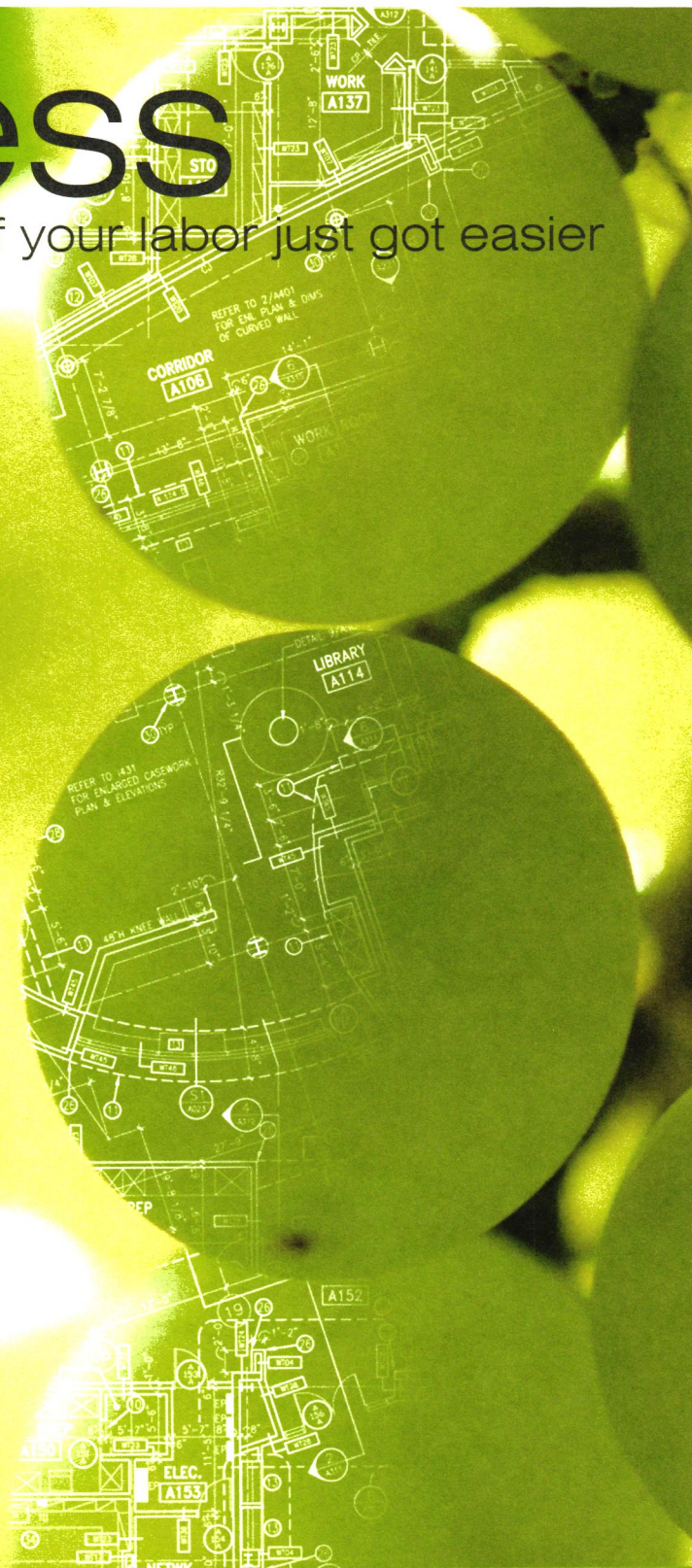
APR/08

The Best Architecture for Pittsburgh | The Making of a Downtown
Neighborhood: Vacant Upper Floors Program | Book Review: Buildings of Pittsburgh,
by Franklin Toker | AIA Pittsburgh, a chapter of the American Institute of Architects

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HOMEFRONT

BY BECKY SPEVACK



On the road of life, I am more of a passenger than a driver. Not that I don't care about the journey or where I am going, but I would rather be able to sit back, relax, and take in my surroundings on the way than focus on the road.

Looking back, there is a long history of being a passenger in my life, starting with some of my early childhood memories, one of which is that of the well-known "Sunday drive". As a kid (before gas prices soared through the roof and there was as much knowledge about emissions/pollution) my family would take long Sunday drives. From a starting point in the suburbs of Harrisburg, we would venture south in springtime and summer, heading into Lancaster County, driving the straight, long back roads through fields of grains and corn, a mere speck among the vast growth, stopping at roadside stands to buy a bag of snap peas or strawberries to hold us over on our journey, windows down. In the winter, we would go north, driving through the now-desolate coal towns, learning about and seeing firsthand the area where my grandmother had been born and raised, before moving to New York City to start life down a different path.

As I got older, the realization that I would have to someday learn to drive approached. It was not something I really had any desire for. Many teenagers cannot wait for their sixteenth birthday, when the process towards "freedom" begins. But sixteen came and went for me, with no real mention of a driver's license. I put it off as long as possible, and when I finally went down to the D.M.V. to test for my permit, I failed. My mum thought I was sabotaging this process on purpose. While she had no interest in teaching me how to drive, she also didn't like the idea of having to chauffeur me to soccer, ballet, band, etc., for the next three years. Finally the threat of having to get another doctor's examination to be eligible forced me to retake the test and pass.

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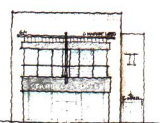
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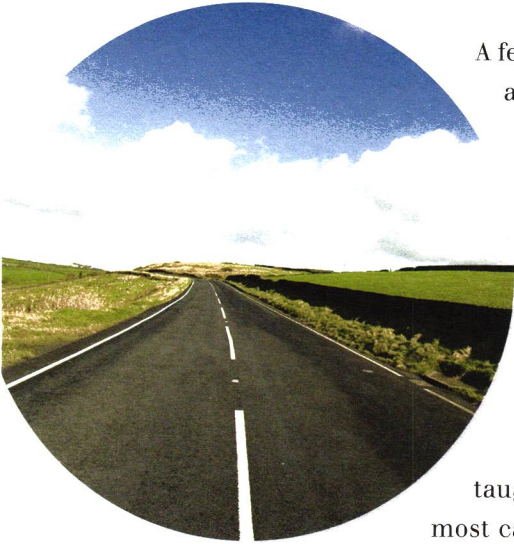


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A few years passed in which I drove my mum’s car, a small automatic, as need be, without incident. But a planned road trip to Boston eventually created the need for me to learn to drive stick shift, and my future father-in-law took charge. For perhaps three months he took me round and round in circles, repeating: “slowly release the clutch, ok, give it a little gas, ok, steady” and then... *clunk* - stalling out, over and over, in an elementary school parking lot. I passed this road block, was successfully taught how to drive a manual by a very patient man, but still called “shotgun” whenever possible.

College taught me another joy in passenger-hood. College taught me about Amtrak. Now, many people bemoan Amtrak, and in most cases, rightfully so; I understand the complaints, can even agree with them, but I still love traveling by train. Being a passenger on a train is a feeling of calm akin to riding in a car, only better. I spent this time productively – reading, studying, catching up on much needed sleep – but I also spent a good deal of time just watching. Watching as we went along the coast of the eastern seaboard, traveling through small port towns, and then into large industrial cities, through forests and into Manhattan. I loved it!

How does this tie into architecture, you may ask. The following pages focus on how to get the best architecture for this city. Is there one definition of “best”? No, absolutely not. But, as with anything in life – as I’ve learned through my experiences with driving – there are ways that work for you, or, in this case, for our city. Each person, each place, each situation needs to be considered individually, for what it is, and “best” can only be defined after those considerations are outlined. In this issue we’ve looked at Pittsburgh and thought about what defines it, what characteristics create the feeling of being here, and nowhere else. Going about things the same way they are dealt with in New York or Los Angeles, in Philly or New Orleans would all be wrong, would not address the things that make this city unique.

There are also many things Pittsburgh still has to discover and define for itself as a place, as a destination. Continually searching for what is best is a standard to which I feel comfortable holding this community of architects. **C**



POWERFUL VOICES

BY ANNE J. SWAGER, HON. AIA

Before I came to the AIA I worked for a small nonprofit community revitalization group. When I told my Board Chair that I had accepted the job at the AIA, he went on and on about how I was going to hate it. His contention was that architects have huge egos and because of that I would last less than a year. Of course, here I sit many years later, which refutes at least part of his assertion.

The reasons people stay in one job for a long time are easily as varied as the people who do it. For me, it is a combination of the job itself, the architects I represent, and the aspirations and art of architecture. Sure, there are egos and in some cases too much ego, but overly large egos seem to be the exception and not the rule. I wanted to use this column to recognize the efforts of some of your colleagues. The danger of doing this is that invariably I will leave out individuals who are very worthy of your attention. However, I have many more columns to write. So here is a snapshot of what some of the architects from Pittsburgh are accomplishing.

Maura Guttman, AIA has thrown her hat in the ring for Vice President of the Institution. You can see the speeches that each candidate delivered at the recent Grassroots Convention by going to www.aia.org. When you do, I am sure you will be as impressed with Maura's words as I was.

Maura was President of AIA Pittsburgh in 1996 and went on from there to serve in many roles at AIA PA. Currently, she is our representative on the Board of AIA National. Passionate about the environment and the architect's role in sustainable design, Maura is a citizen architect. She is impatient. She expects architects to participate and to be an effective voice in every level of government. If she is elected to the role of Vice President at convention, we are assured of an effective voice and a positive change agent at AIA National.



Another powerful voice we heard at Grassroots belonged to Andrew Caruso, Assoc. AIA, the current national president of AIAS. Andrew served on the AIA Pittsburgh board last year as the representative from Carnegie Mellon's AIAS chapter. Listening to him explain the passion the students bring to the Freedom by Design program was awesome. He reaffirmed for me a shared vision of architects making a difference.

This year at the AIA convention, we will celebrate the installation of the two architects from Pittsburgh who have been elevated to Fellowship. Jon Jackson, FAIA leads the local office of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. BCJ is recognized nationally for their many award winning buildings and projects in no small part due to Jon's efforts. Steve Quick, FAIA has been active in a number of local planning efforts, most notably the Riverlife Task Force. I have sat in any number of meetings with Steve completely baffled by his approach to a problem only to be enticed into a whole new way of thinking when I consider what he has said. His gift of creative thinking leads us to creative problem solving.

Finally, I want to mention the latest efforts of Rob Pfaffmann, AIA. Rob is the great great grandson of Daniel Burnham and known locally as a strong voice for historic preservation and adaptive reuse. Rob has organized a screening of Judith McBrien's documentary "Make No Little Plans: Daniel Burnham and the American City". The screening at the Heinz History Center is at 7:00 p.m. on April 9. A reception and panel discussion will follow. You are all invited!

These individuals are only a small sampling of the thriving and successful community of architects in Pittsburgh. Is it any wonder that I stay on the job? 