

# ARCADE

ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN IN THE NORTHWEST

23



## Gentryville Missouri

Guest Editor **ACTION: BETTER CITY**

**On the State of Architectural Criticism**

David Dillon Randy Gragg Mark Hinshaw Reed Kroloff  
Mitchell Schwarzer Michael Sorkin Suzanne Stephens

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The Seattle Public Library

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Santiago Calatrava: The Architect's Studio

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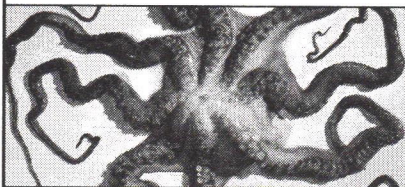
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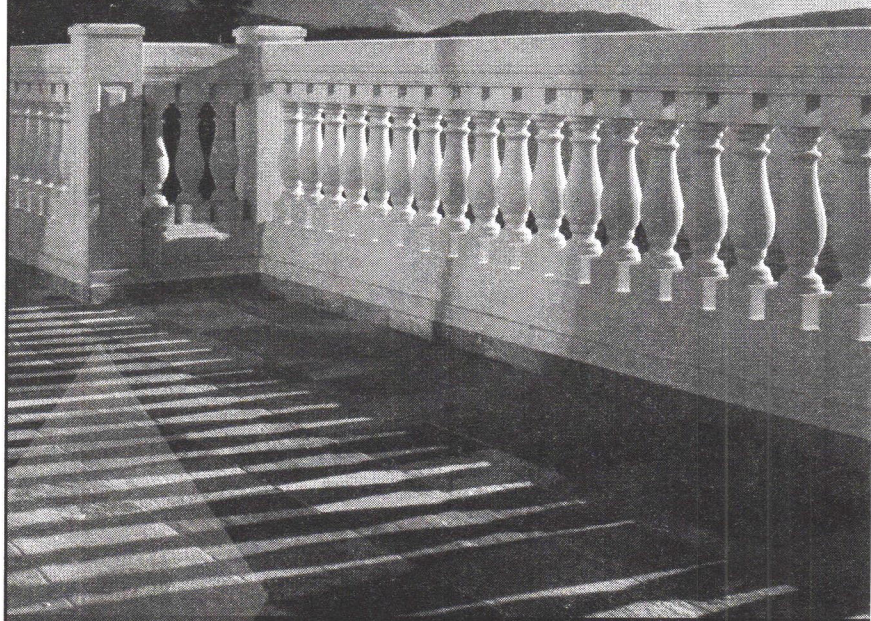
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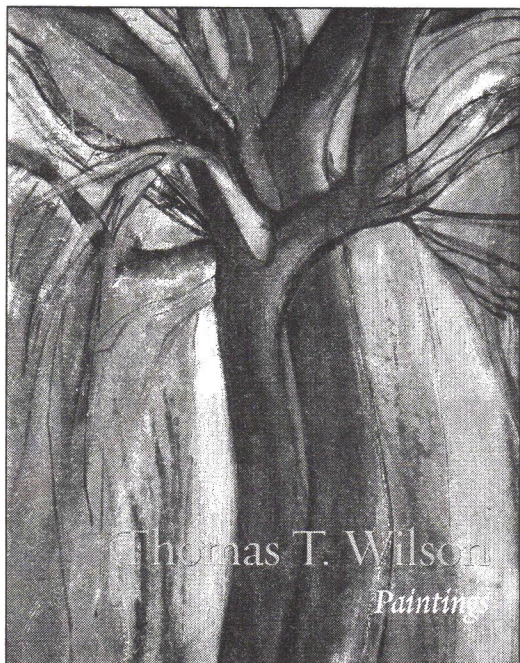


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**Thomas  
T. Wilson**

*Paintings*

Essays by  
Sally Hayman  
and  
Peter Simpson

Thomas T. Wilson is described in the preface of this book as "probably the best-known unknown painter in the Northwest." This book brings to light the private career of a masterful Pacific Northwest artist.

The bold lyricism and originality of Wilson's work is revealed in his vibrant landscapes. He is also a prolific portraitist, who captured Seattle society after the dramatic impact of the 1962 World's Fair, a period which saw significant growth in the city's art scene. Many of the people who were a part of this pre-Microsoft flourishing are Wilson's subjects.

This collection of portraits, self-portraits, and landscapes promises to be a revelation to all those unfamiliar with the many facets of the artist and his work.

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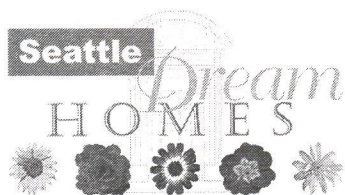
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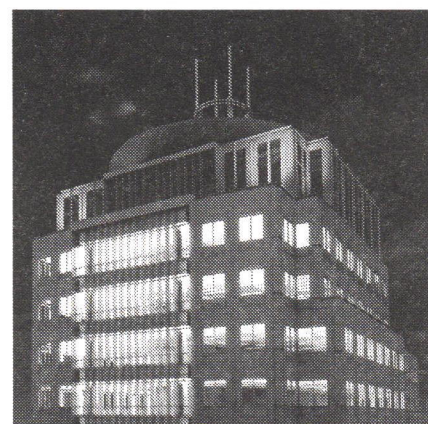
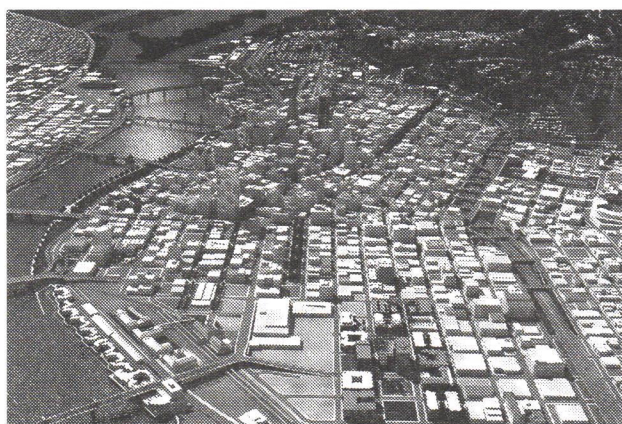
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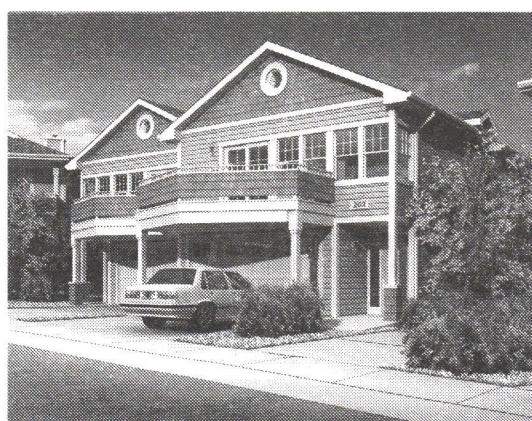
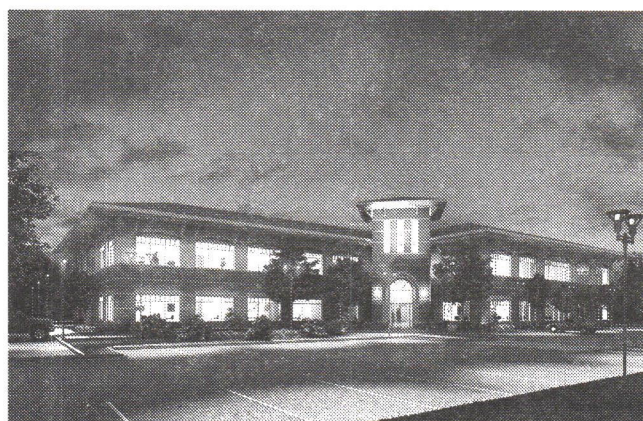
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## GENTRYVILLE, MISSOURI

22

## ACTION: BETTER CITY

Somewhere around mile 17,574 of their national tour, Seattle's own action: better city drove through the looking glass and stumbled across the not-so-ordinary town of Gentryville, Missouri. Hear one man's cautionary tale of a small town that dared to dream big.

## SHORT TAKES

6

**Move Over Alvar Aalto; Northwest Biennial: Buildingwise** VICTORIA REED

**ULI Seattle Seeks Consensus** KELLY MANN

**The Good Sit** HEATHER MACINTOSH

## NEW WORK

8

**Jeddeloh Residence, Molalla Oregon** JOHN CAVA

## ID

9

**2004 Northwest Invitational Product Design Concepts** JOSH KORNFELD

## THE SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

10

**What Do You Do With This Building?** BARBARA SWIFT

**A Journey Through Space** JOHN FLEMING

**Here is Urban** CHARLES MUDEDE

## LOCAL FOCUS

16

**Seattle's Thick and Messy Edge** CARY MOON + JULIE PARRETT

## CAMPUS + COMMUNITY

17

**The University of Washington Tacoma, the Arts, and Urbanism** JULIE NICOLETTA

## EXHIBITION

18

**Santiago Calatrava: The Architect's Studio**

## OTHER PLACES

20

**Narrative Sketching in Chile** STEVE BULL

## PHOTO ESSAY

36

**New York: City as Mise en Scène** MICHAEL BURNS

## OPINION

38

**On Architectural Criticism**

## TRIBUTE

48

**The Architect of Vancouverism: Arthur Erickson at 80** TREVOR BODDY

## SIDE YARD

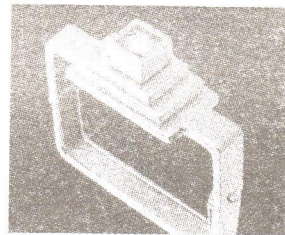
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**I've Stopped Dreaming About Sheri Olson** RON VAN DER VEEN



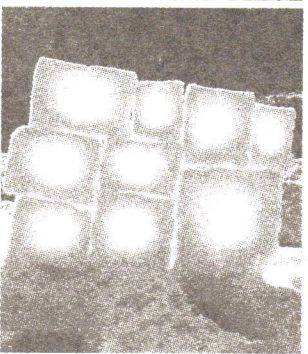
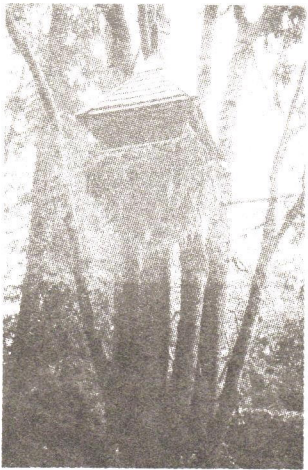
VICTORIA REED

**Move Over Alvar Aalto** Phil Jacobson, FAIA, first started designing “objects” in 1958 when he was searching for the right light fixtures for a project he was working on. He and Tom Wimmer, then head of Seattle Lighting, went to work in the basement of the Second Avenue Seattle Lighting store and created a wall sconce, a ceiling fixture and a pendant. Jacobson has been designing things ever since – along with his active architectural career at TRA as Design Partner for twenty-two-years, and lead designer for over thirty projects here and abroad, including the Washington State Convention Center. He is also the former head of the graduate program at the University of Washington’s (UW) College of Architecture; a visiting professor in Tokyo, Stockholm, Sydney and Copenhagen; and a former board member of ARCADE. One thing Jacobson says he enjoys about designing objects is: “If you design a piece of furniture or jewelry, it can be started and completed within a year – a building takes five or six years;” the Convention Center took six. Jacobson has designed furniture for his home and others, light fixtures and jewelry, working closely with crafts-people here and in Finland. Many of these designs were created for his wife, Ellie. The silver tea set he designed for his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary took three years to make. A current Jacobson light fixture design is on sale at Egbert’s in Seattle. The UW will present an array of Phil Jacobson’s designs in an exhibit at Architecture Hall in September of this year.

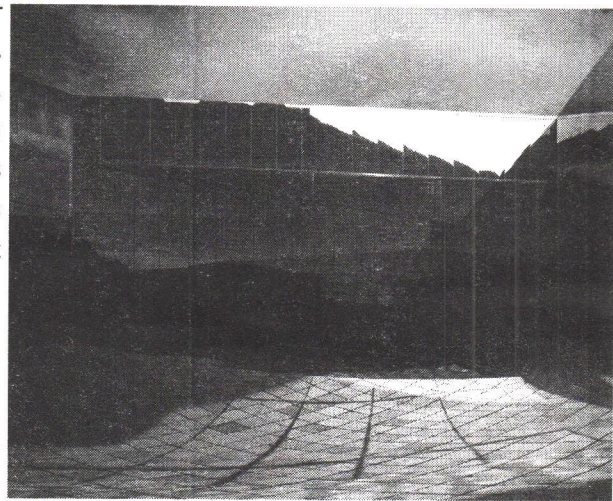


Phil Jacobson, designer, Zigzag Ring. With craftsmanship by Laurie Ferguson.  
Richard Rhodes, Untitled, 2003. Granite and mortar. Tacoma Art Museum. Museum purchase. Photo by Lara Swimmer/Esio.  
Andy Goldsworthy, Out early to work the cold, 1987. Silver dye bleach print, 43" x 43". Courtesy of Haines Gallery.  
San Francisco, California, and the artist.  
Roderick Romero, Nest (scaled down), 2003. M/M. Metal, 108" x 36" x 36". Courtesy of the artist.

**Northwest Biennial: Buildingwise** The theme of the Tacoma Art Museum’s Sixth Northwest Biennial exhibit (running through September 6) was inspired by their move into the new Antoine Predock designed building. Interestingly, only four of the 100 works selected by jurors Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, from a field of 500 entrants, are in any way “buildings”: a model of a house by Tacoma architect Mike Rosati; *Abode*, a woven basketlike piece by Dona Anderson; *Nest*, a tree-house by Roderick Romero; and *Center*, a meditative structure by Roger Feldman. The curator, Rock Hushka, grouped the pieces informally into categories: Building the Inner World, Building the Home, Building the Structure, and Building the Metropolis. The category *Building the Inner World* is by far the biggest. And I guess the question would be, what does this mean?



One of the intriguing *comments* on the built world is the permanent, *stone courtyard* installation by Richard Rhodes. Apparently Antoine Predock intended this space, enclosed by his “spiral” (they’re everywhere aren’t they?), to be a *mist and moss* garden. As it turned out, there was not as much mist in the Northwest as had been predicted in Sante Fe. (Who knew?) No mist, no moss. So the museum commissioned Richard Rhodes (who has worked with Predock in the past) to create a stone courtyard. What Rhodes came up with is remarkable. 700 pieces of stone from China, each carved to a different and very specific flat shape so that when installed, the effect is that of a “tilted courtyard.” Its continuously curving surface maintains the strict discipline of its straight joints, but arcs up the sides of the building, reflecting at angles in the enclosing glass, and changing in aspect with each elevation on the spiral. It was tricky to achieve, says Rhodes, especially as there are no square corners in the building, and no square corners on any of the pieces. The design was created on computers and with models (Gehry style), then sent to China where the stones were individually cut and carefully numbered, then finally shipped to Tacoma for installation. The stones came from abandoned roads in the Fujian Province. The effect is mesmerizing. Rhodes left the piece unnamed, but it has been called *Tilted Courtyard*, the *Wave*, *Hyperbolic Parabola*. *Hyperbolic Parabola* is not only fun to say, it also suggests – perhaps because of the mathematical inference – a kind of form that is natural and timeless.



Natural and timeless is what’s happening at the Tacoma Art Museum right now. They are also exhibiting Andy Goldsworthy through September 19. *Victoria Reed is a founding member of ARCADE and the editor of “Short Takes.”*

KELLY MANN

**ULI Seattle Seeks Consensus** The Urban Land Institute (ULI) facilitates the exchange of information, ideas, and experience among local, national and international real estate industry leaders and policymakers dedicated to creating better places.

ULI Seattle is the Puget Sound Region’s District Council. We view ourselves as honest brokers of information, providing insight into land use planning and development and the goals of smart growth. Four critical challenges face our region: affordable housing, transportation, environmental sustainability, and economic opportunity. As caretakers of the land, we share an obligation to understand and address these challenges. Our approach to reaching solutions includes a thorough understanding of the issues, respect for all perspectives, and application of best practices from other regions. ULI Seattle seeks to build a common ground on land development policy in our region.

On September 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:30AM (venue TBD), ULI Seattle will host Bill Hudnut, the current Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy at ULI. To get involved in ULI Seattle, send an email to [coordinator@seattle.uli.org](mailto:coordinator@seattle.uli.org). For more information about ULI go to [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org) *Kelly M. Mann is the Chair of ULI Seattle’s Young Leaders Group.*





HEATHER MACINTOSH

**The Good Sit** The Armani hangers (for airplanes, not for suits) should have tipped me off. Or maybe my experience in the Linate airport. Like most women on the plane from Barcelona to Milan, I proceeded directly to the nearest ladies room. As I stood in a line of about fifty women, I became acutely aware of my undergrooming. In the Pacific Northwest, hiking-ready attire is practically standard, but in Milan, especially at the annual design fair, schlubbiness, split ends and crotch wrinkles (in one's pants) are the equivalent of orange-tinted pantyhose and scuffed up white pumps from Payless here in the States.

The line went surprisingly fast, not because these women were especially efficient, but because half the line took one look at the facilities, deemed them too filthy, and moved on. Expecting the Augean stables, I found the toilets perfectly serviceable. It then occurred to me that I was entering a different universe. I checked my face for spontaneous buck teeth and an extra chin.

The Milan Design Fair, held once a year in April, is an aesthetics-driven world of color, light and form thoughtfully executed in a series of exhibits knit together by a tomato-red carpet and throngs of black-swaddled designers and buyers from around the world. Much of the city participates in the spectacle; red banners hang outside shops throughout Milan signaling displays within. In most cases, visitors view objects like butterflies under glass. The fair requires much walking, but is not a pedestrian experience.

Many of the objects displayed were not for sale, nor were touching or sitting encouraged in most cases. Given the size of the fair and the city, I was in constant need of a good sit, and hardly ever able to find it.

I entered the fair by impersonating an interior designer – I should have impersonated a journalist. Business cards grant access to take-away literature, conversations, and in some cases, generous use of a chair. I wistfully lingered, spying small clutches of journalists between the narrow gaps in divider curtains. Special schmoozing areas were set apart from the crowd; clinking glasses and laughter signified hype and high stakes business activity. But this was all technically behind the scenes – beautiful chairs, presented for viewing, not sitting, were the floor show.

The chair, a quintessential form with endless artful iterations, is my favorite piece of furniture; the act of sitting has been celebrated for ages in the chair's design. The significance of the sitter, his or her role in the world, and the purpose of the sit culminate in the form that continues to inspire designers the world over. This legacy was exceptionally clear at the Milan fair. A fugue of chair designs, along with those of its functional cousins: the couch, the chaise, the loveseat, the settee, and so forth, took up a tremendous amount of real estate within the fair proper, and in its many satellite exhibits. Some displays celebrated chair history, like the Thonet exhibit, which was a virtual museum piece.

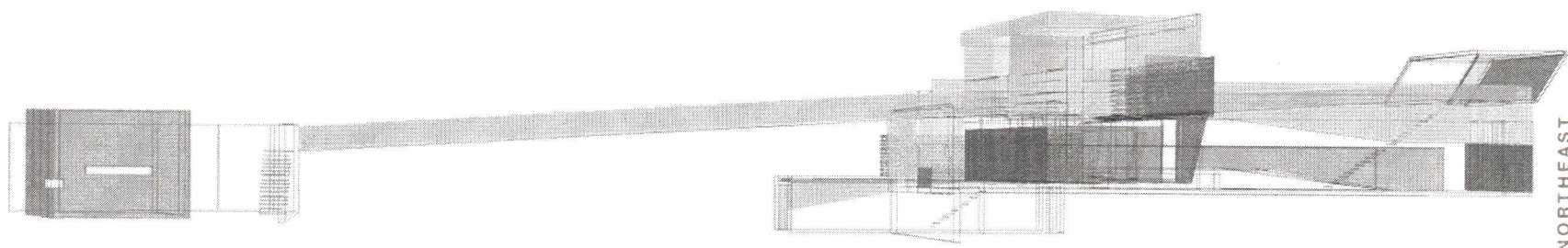
Sitting was prohibited, both by unspoken rule and gravity – a board room table and office chairs were attached to a wall at an 80 degree angle.

Other rooms presented the chair as soft porn.

Small, dimly lit rooms with ambient slow tempo disco provided the soulful context for organic, ovoid, and sometimes vaginal chairs provoking short-term sits for purely recreational (and singular) purposes.

Occasionally, other weary fair-goers bucked the rules and copped a sit on the merchandise. I fought my fatigue for an hour and a half, then wandered outside for a snack. A few plastic café chairs provided seating for about a dozen people. I then found a small but common bond with my fellow hotdog-eating attendees, also in need of a good sit, who leaned onto exhibit buildings in the shade, or like me, made good use of a bollard. *Heather MacIntosh is a Seattle-based preservationist and freelance writer, and the guest editor for the winter 2003 issue of ARCADE, Seattle: Boomtown Politics and New Public Architecture. She wrote this piece relaxing in a black leather Le Corbusier chaise lounge.*





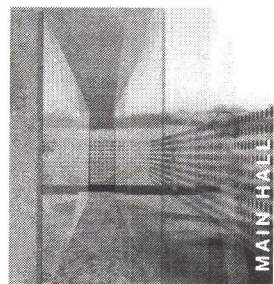
## Jeddelloh Residence, Molalla Oregon

JOHN CAVA

Ignoring the folk wisdom about in-laws, architect Jerry Waters designed a country house and guest pavilion in Molalla, Oregon – about 40 miles SE of Portland – to be shared by his own family and his wife’s parents who operate a nursery business. The 600 square-foot guesthouse was completed four years ago and is the temporary abode of the young architect, his wife and their daughter. Construction of the main house – around 5,000 square feet – is expected to begin next year.

The property comprises 90 acres: 60 acres of pasture and nursery stock and 30 acres of fir and oak forest, all with a clear view of Mt. Hood to the east. In addition to the three-generation, two-family shared compound, Waters’s in-laws required a “show” garden for display of their nursery stock.

“I worked with five ideas in this project,” said Waters, “their borders overlap, but along with our unusual program, they generated the form and character of the architecture. I refer to them as Landscape, Perspective, Windows, Rotational Symmetry and Movement. The last two involve de-centering traditional perspective in regard to the horizon line, something that fascinated me on this site where the horizon is ever-present.”



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Jerry Waters

### Guest House

**01 Boundaries.** A curved concrete wall marks the precinct of the house, within which sits a simple wood-framed box crisply detailed in black cement panels. Between these two elements a paved courtyard with an outdoor fireplace extends the living area outdoors.

**02 Windows.** The box has two distinct types of openings: large operable areas releasing space to the court or the view, and carefully incised fragments of fenetre longuer appear in precise locations for specific views.

### Main House & Site

**01 Landscape.** The main house sits well back from and above the guest house, its openings capturing the eastern view over the pavilion. The two separate wings of the house – one for each family – stretch north-south in an attenuated mass, and open to the east view of Mt. Hood while enclosing the nursery garden and court to the west. The two outdoor realms are separated by a central shared living / dining block, and a tube of space that joins the two wings in a triple height

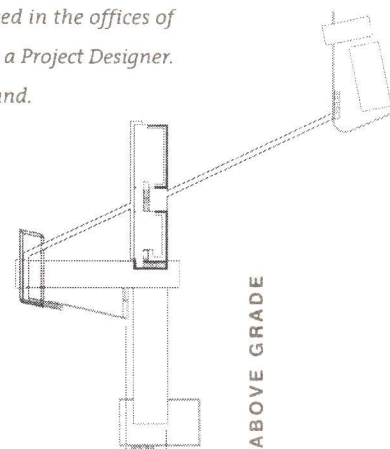
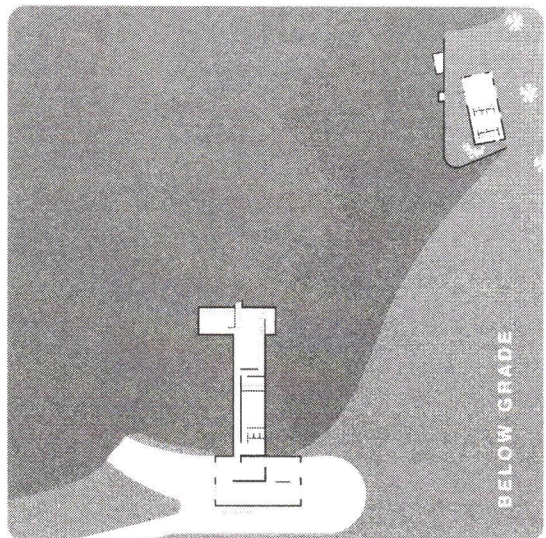
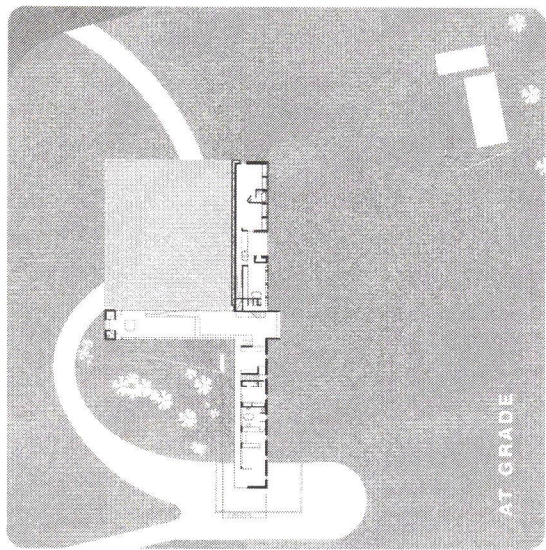
volume of glass. An elevated “widow’s walk” at the west above the entry is one end of a long bridge that reaches down to the pavilion, traversing the meadow and puncturing through the main house along the way.

**02 Rotational symmetry, marking the horizon, and de-centering traditional perspective.** Waters used three different assumed axes across the building(s), to allow space and volume to rotate metaphorically about them, while retaining their original symmetrical organization. On the site, a hypothetical axis through the center of the main floor produces a similar relationship between the main house, the widow’s walk and the guesthouse, even when rotated 180-degrees. In the longitudinal section of the main house, the upper third floor volume of the kitchen / studio and the lower floor of the opposite wing housing the garage / services are rotational about this same axis. And in the cross section of the main house, the *fenetre longuer* are placed in opposition to one another, rotated about a horizon line 5’-6” above the main floor.

Waters maintains that these kind of self-imposed strictures “are an interesting set of explorations for design, regardless of whether or not they are ultimately explicit or even perceivable in the building. I’m convinced that simply by engaging the intellect at a higher level, these concepts – in some unexplainable way – provide a much greater richness in the experience of the place.”

*Jerry Waters is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania who worked in the offices of Rafael Viñoly (New York) and TVA (Portland), before joining ZGF (Portland) where he is a Project Designer. John Cava is an architect who teaches, makes, and writes about architecture in Portland.*

*All images courtesy of the architect.*





# 2004 Northwest Invitational Product Design Concepts

JOSH KORNFEID

Although the 2004 Northwest Invitational design competition was comprised of eleven categories including furniture, environments, consumer products and more, ultimately it was the 'Concepts' category that proved to be the richest in terms of entry quantity and quality, and provided the liveliest debate among the jurors. Inherently, everyone has a different understanding of what a product design concept should represent, especially designers coming from diverse backgrounds and divergent schools of thought. This year, such jurors included: Guy Geier, CEO of Vitra; Tucker Viemeister, president of Springtime-USA; Klindt Parker, global director of design for Starbucks; and Ray Riley, head of the explore group at Nike.

Every two years the Northwest Chapter of the IDSA (Industrial Design Society of America) holds this prestigious product design competition. It was founded twenty years ago as an exclusive event, only accepting entries from the greater Seattle and Portland areas. Today's competitors span the entire west coast and as far north as Canada. In an effort to redefine the boundaries of product design, it is now open to all other design organizations in the area including the International Interior Design Association, the American Institute of Architects, and the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

Some of the questions explored during the judging of this category were: How rooted in reality does a product concept need to be? Is it a complete product solution, or is it just a detail? What makes a concept different from an idea?

As designers, we all strive to develop solutions that lie outside the box, but how far outside of the box can we go before the design itself becomes irrelevant? The debate concluded with this loose definition: a valid conceptual design needs to walk the line between something that is achievable at present, both technologically and in terms of potential for market acceptance, and something without implication of ever becoming real, a fantasy.

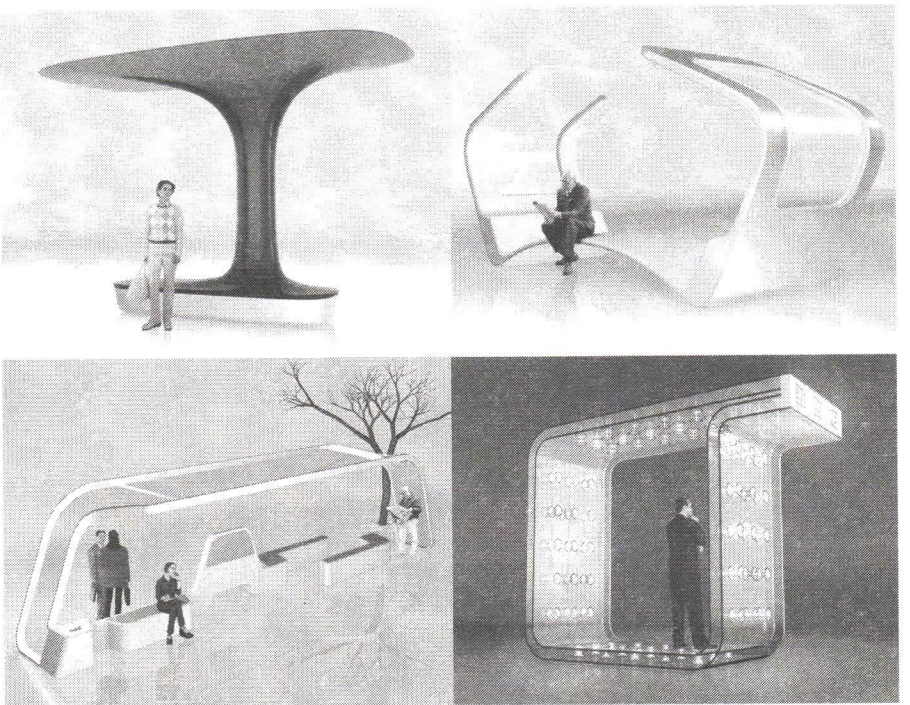
Ray Riley felt that technology-based product concepts must envision a time when technology can do more, be smaller and cost less. But if its claims are too far removed from present-day technology with no real project constraints, then it is difficult to understand the progression. Lunar Design from Palo Alto won Silver for their tablet computer concept for Hewlett Packard called *Slate*. At first glance this concept seemed too "space age," but in watching the entry video, it was determined that with its multitude of features – the integrated camera, calendar, LCD screen and navigation bar – Lunar managed to create an object that was functionally rich yet visually subtle. Tucker Viemeister saw this as a welcome change from many products on the market today. Origin Design from Boise won a Bronze for their HP *Slate* concept. This version was focused on providing the user with a digital book experience. Its intuitive, touch sensitive bars provide the user with an interface derived from that of an actual book. High-tech elements rooted in an old-fashioned format successfully balanced the achievable with the fantasy.

Teague, a Seattle-based firm, won a bronze award each for their Smart Display Concepts and Upright Mobile PC concept. The jury felt that these two entries, although beautifully designed, were so close to reality that they should already be on the store shelves. These entries sparked a panel debate over how concepts can be used for inspiration, when designers should educate clients about taking risks, and whether or not a concept so close to reality would achieve these goals even better.

One and Co.'s ADKD seating line used material with strategically placed perforations to vary the level of tension in certain areas, creating a simple ergonomic seating experience. Guy Geier saw that the minimalist chair frames help direct attention to its most successful design element – the perforations in the shape of silhouetted little people, which added a welcomed air of levity to the jury session.

Just as a design can become somewhat of a self portrait of the designer, a panel of jurors with the best intentions of simply choosing the most appropriate designs, are still in a sense curators of a show. Because of this it is no surprise that *The Bus Stops Here* by Fiori Product Development in Portland won the Gold award for this category. This entry had something for everyone. It had qualities of well designed furniture, environments and product and therefore struck a chord with all of the jurors almost immediately. This grouping of four bus stop concepts aimed at promoting public transportation ranged from the simple yet beautiful formal investigation to the far out exploration of pliable materials. They created spaces that react to changes in weather, the number of people waiting for the bus and encourage social interaction and awareness of surroundings.

As the jurors' definition of a solid product concept called for, this entry proposed materials that are conceivable, but not readily available, and forms that are progressive and provocative. These traits exhibited a wonderfully appropriate blend of fantasy and reality and made the jurors' choice to award it a Gold an obvious one. Josh Kornfeld, owner and principal designer of JMK, an industrial design firm, is based in Seattle.



The Bus Stops Here. Gold winning product design by Portland based Fiori Product Development. Image by Fiori Product Development.

TOP LEFT

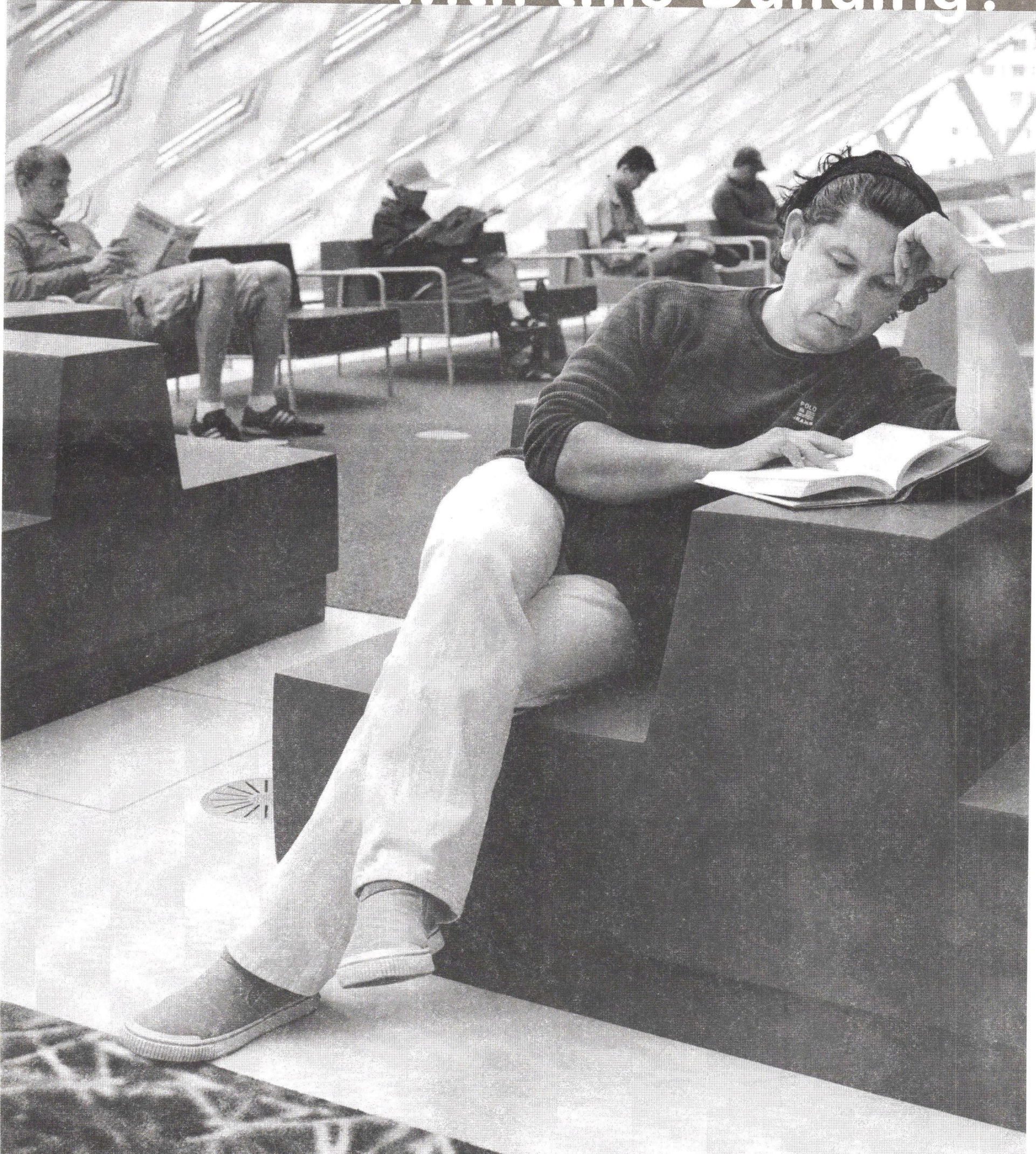
The 2004 Northwest Invitational Jury (left to right) Tucker Viemeister, Klindt Parker, Ray Riley and Guy Geier. Photo by Josh Kornfeld.

BACKGROUND

ADKD seating line. Strategically placed, people shaped holes make this material smarter. Image by One and Co.



# What do you do with this Building?





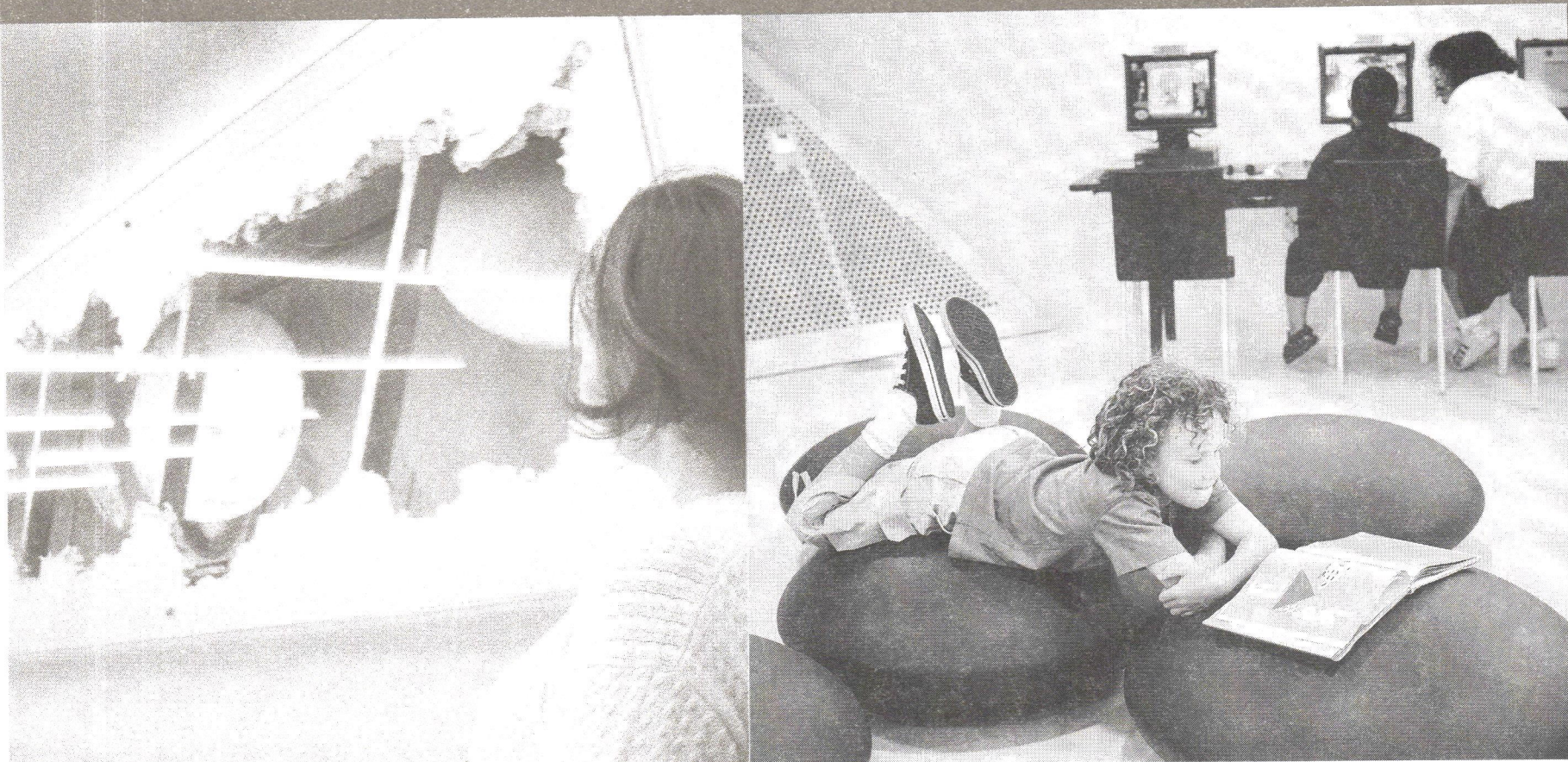
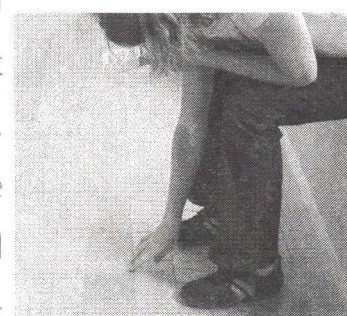
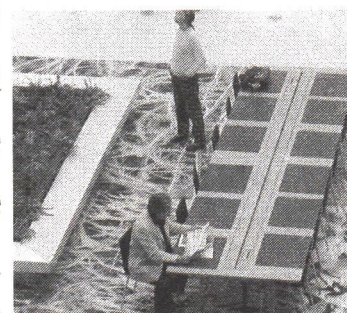


Photo by Peter Delory.

## BARBARA SWIFT

My husband and I visited the new Central Library late in the afternoon of opening day. The building was teeming with people. I watched how they used the building – their body language and behavior. I was looking for the patterns of engagement and degree of openness to spaces and forms totally foreign to life in Seattle. There were a handful of arms folded across chests, closed tight faces, scrunched eyebrows and bodies leaning away, disengaging in judgment. I saw body after body after body leaning forward, faces open with enthralled curiosity, people absorbed by the computers, the rational organization, the seemingly irrational forms and colors, the wholly new views of the city, people, and the books. The jaded veneer of life, assumptions and age slipped aside and raw human curiosity and the rich pleasure of exploring roared in. The body language said, “I am going to use this. It is mine.” Not a bad thing to have pulled off. • So, maybe we are less conservative that we think we are. • This building gives me a new tool as a designer. It scribes new shapes and forms. It gives me new volumes of space to feel and experience. It cranks my perception of the orthogonal and oblique. It gives prospect and refuge new meaning. I use it as a measuring tool – a different one – the way I use many parts of the city as measuring tools. Do I know yet what I am measuring? No. Is that important? Not yet. • Maybe we don’t know what we are. Maybe we are more than what we think we are. *Barbara Swift is a huge fan of libraries and principal of Swift & Company Landscape Architects, a firm that at press-time has enjoyed the great pleasure of working on twelve new libraries in the Pacific Northwest.*





# A JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE

JOHN FLEMING

Rem Koolhaas described Seattle as a unique place. We are a culture layered with intellectuality, dedicated to the experimental, yet most of us in this society do not live a modern life.

For two years we viewed drawings, models and computer renderings of the future Seattle Central Public Library. This was followed by three years of watching the building, like a piece of sculpture, rise out of downtown Seattle. Diamond checkerboards jutted out, sloping and cantilevering. What we saw was unique, original, strange, bizarre, beautiful and frightening.

None of us really knew for sure how this sculpture would work as a building, as architecture. We judged it as sculpture with our own aesthetic biases toward form, texture, proportion and color. I like it. I don't like it. It's pretty. It's ugly. For me it would shift. One minute I'd see a beautiful gem of shining optimism, and the next, it would morph into a *Star Wars*, *Robo Cop* like thing. Sculpture. What a dangerous way to judge architecture. It's interesting but I wouldn't want it in my living room. It's not my style.

Finally, this past May, the sculpture we had been watching from the outside opened to show us its inside. Koolhaas spoke of the shock of the aesthetic gesture, but now this gesture could fade to reveal the true nature of the architecture. He described the rational process of the design team as an absolute commitment to the library staff's programs. Since the opening we've all been allowed to participate and more fairly judge. It works.

It is proving itself. Functionality, durability.

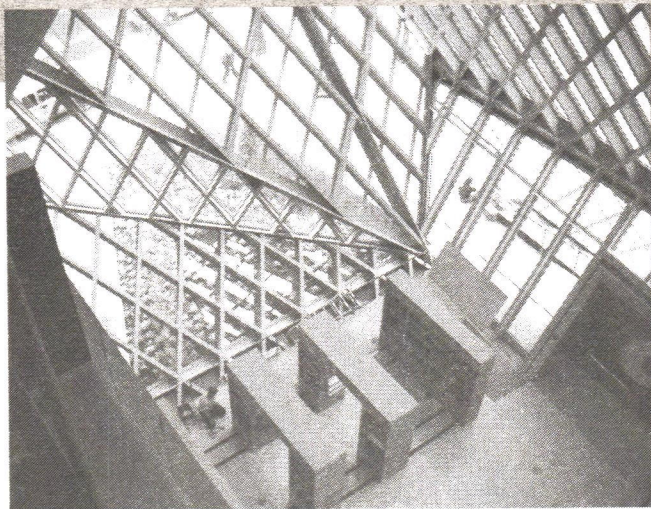
It's passing all the tests with flying colors. Reds, yellows, oranges and blues.

**Journey.** That is one of the ways the designers and the library staff described the collaborative process they undertook. Journey also describes the feeling I get as I wander through the building. I don't care if I'm here to check out a book, check my email, research my family's genealogy, or just find a warm, safe, free place to hang out. The library takes me on a journey.

Remember the joke where the architect calls it space, while everybody else calls it a room? The library feels like space, not rooms. Walls seldom go full height or completely surround. You don't know or care if you are inside or outside. Most *spaces* are missing a ceiling, or the ceiling is so far above it doesn't relate to the *room* you are in. All this supports the journey, enhances the journey. What is around that corner? Where does that yellow escalator take me? The FareStart barista directs me to the restrooms by simply saying, "Take that red stair." I may have come for a book, but walking about is way more interesting. I'd rather be exploring the spaces inside this building than inside a book or computer. (Maybe that's my bias for the real world.)



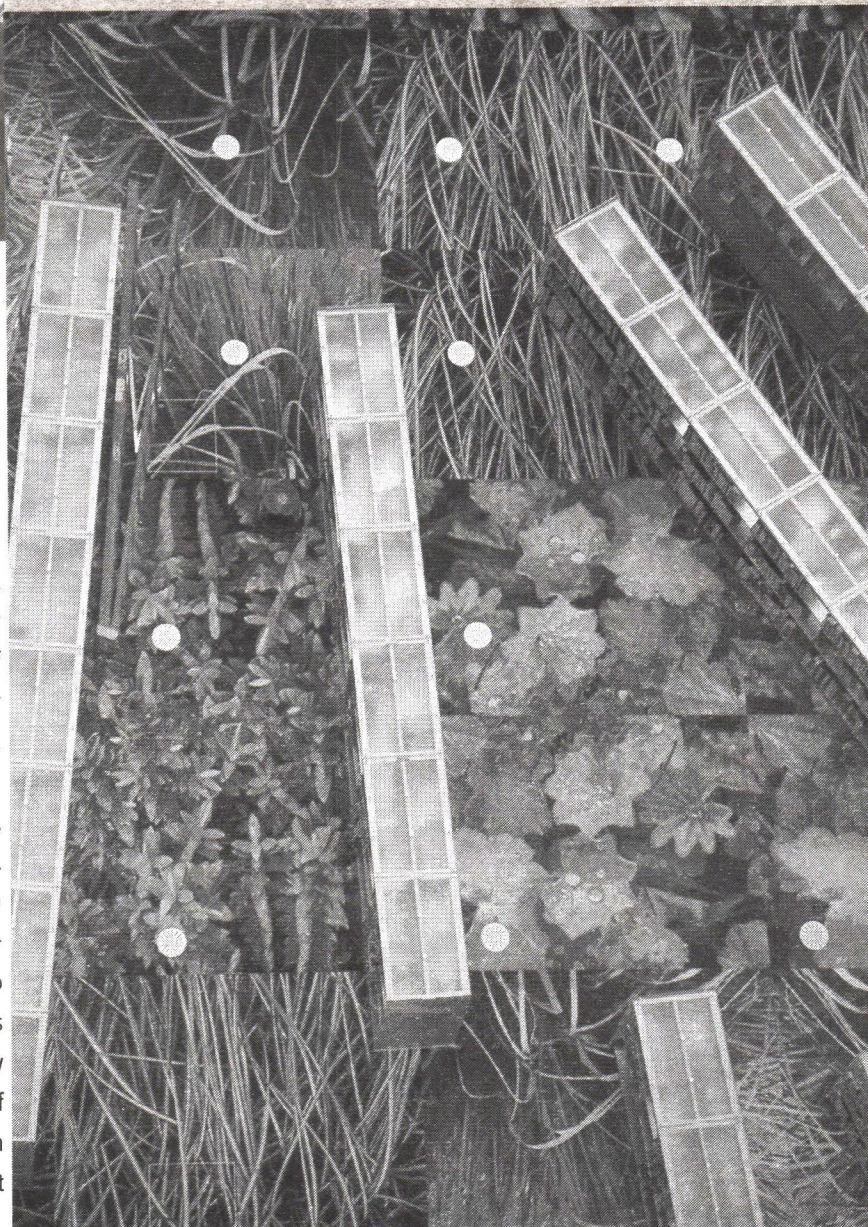




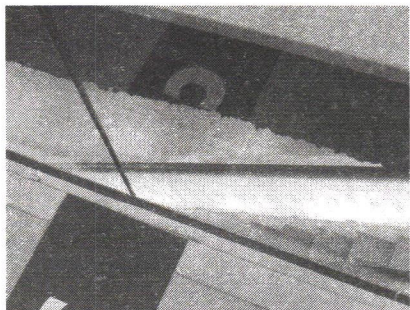
Photos by Juliette Cook.

I really enjoy the small parts of the journey, the details, the feel of my feet on the different surfaces. Aluminum, carpet, rubber and painted concrete, fir floors made from the cast off ends of wood joists. I love the way this ramp meets the level floor, or the way the perforated maple walls lean over the story room. Room? This is more like a cave or a den, not a room.

Handrails, guardrails, code compliance, ADA compliance, most architects lament our American over-the-top requirements. OMA (Koolhaas's office) and LMN (local architects of record) seem to embrace these regulations. They take it on as a challenge with zeal and enthusiasm. How many ways are there to keep a four-inch sphere from falling through? How many ways are there to achieve separation and still maintain transparency and visibility? Does a guardrail or handrail ruin the purity of the design? Do those nasty little sprinkler heads ruin our clean minimal concept? Hell no. Call them decoration, embellishment or texture. Call them reality.



The Seattle Public Library takes us on a remarkable, educational *journey*. In the same way we are learning that the computer can't replace the book, the library is teaching us that experimentation and exploration through modern rational design can offer us greater safety and freedom. All that glass opens us up to the world. This is how modern architecture shows us a new democracy.





# Here is Urban

CHARLES MUDEDE

In many of the articles and essays about Seattle's new Downtown Library it is directly stated or implied that as a work of architecture it is "refreshingly urban." Some writers, such as Jonathan Raban, whom I quoted in the first sentence, go as far as to say it is more urban than the city in which it was built. I think as a thesis this is correct: the building's urbanity far exceeds that of the actual city, which until May 23, 2004 (the opening of the library) has had, again to quote Raban, "no real consciousness of its own urbanity."

Seattle is a big city. It has many tall buildings, a massive highway, and covers a wider area than Vancouver B.C., which is also a big city with many tall buildings. But size doesn't make a difference when it comes to the matter of being urban. A small neighborhood of Vancouver B.C., for example Yorktown, is more urban than all of Seattle. (Southeast Seattle, which is a radically multicultural neighborhood, would be the one exception. But Seattle has yet to recognize itself in the diversity of Southeast Seattle. The neighborhood could up and leave the city tomorrow unnoticed. Not a Seattle but a Washington D.C. author and scholar Sheryll Cashin credited the defining character of Southeast Seattle in her recent book *The Failures of Integration*.) Though being urban is dependent upon being in a city, a city can exist without being urban. This is exactly how Raban reads Seattle – it is a city but it is not urban, or conscious of its urbanity (which amounts to the same thing).

What the Downtown Library did on the day its doors were opened is activate Seattle's urbanity. Seattle could have grown and grown, added more and more buildings here and there, but without the right building, the alembic of one piece of urbane architecture, it would have never been able to become "conscious of its own urbanity." There had been several attempts to awaken the urban in our city, but all (Experience Music Project, Seattle Art Museum, BAT) failed (often miserably) to shock it out of slumber and into a state of recognition.

To walk into it is to finally see Seattle. The awakening is occasioned by two shocks. The first shock is caused by the sudden appearance of a fabulous (in both senses of that word) city through the diamond glass skin of the library. From outside, by car or on foot, downtown seems small and easily negotiated; inside, it is huge and dreamy. What was once fixed is all at once liberated and soars up to what is now a crowded sky. The effect simply shocks you. Most buildings in Seattle

do not look out at Seattle but by what we can now recognize as a provincial and unconscious preference at the mountains, the water, the natural wonders. The library doesn't attempt to do this at all. It practically ignores nature. You can barely see the water of the Sound, which is only 6 blocks away.

From top to bottom, what the building forces you to do is look at the city – the new and old downtown buildings that surround it, the seemingly constant traffic that circulates around it. At each point within the library you discover a part or aspect of the city. For example, First Hill (the medical district), which can be viewed from the upper floors on the east side of the building, seems densely built. From Madison Avenue this part of the city may seem sparse and calm, but now you see a busy horde of buildings rushing out and up to a point in the sky. As for the usually omnipresent Mt. Rainer, the volcano may as well be in Florida because once you are in this building it is the last thing on your mind.

In 1960, Argentinean short fiction writer Jorge Luis Borges described the experience of entering a library that was either in his imagination or in the real world in these elegant terms: "Leaving behind the noise of the plaza, I enter the Library. I feel, almost physically, the gravitation of the books, the enveloping serenity of order, time magically desiccated and preserved." The very opposite happens when entering Seattle's Downtown Library. One instead leaves behind the serene order of the city and enters the seeming disorder of the interiors. Nothing inside the Downtown Library gives the impression of being "desiccated and preserved." Though quiet, the place is visually noisy. The floating platforms, the neon-bold escalators, the tummy-twisting hallways, the gulfs of sudden space, the hanging office on the eleventh floor (up there like a chunk removed from a Miesian skyscraper), the brutal fences, the sloping floors – all of this and much more shocks the senses in way that the first cast iron framed mega-structures of the mid 19th century must have shocked Parisians and Londoners. Here at last is a place for the *flâneur*, the ultimate urbanite.

At the end of his essay, "The Artificial Heart," which was published before the completion of the library and has been praised by Koolhaas as being the last word on his latest creation, novelist and editor Matthew Stadler describes the library as an artificial heart that OMA implanted, and he hopes that it will "oxygenate a population" and "circulate it sufficiently." The future has arrived, and now we know that the operation was a success. This is precisely what the library is doing – circulating and oxygenating. Citizens who have entered the library and breathed its "refreshingly urban" air have left as urbanites. Indeed, the population that has yet to visit the Downtown Library does not live in the same Seattle as the population that has been pumped through the new center of our metropolis. *Originally from Zimbabwe, Charles Tonderai Mudede is an associate editor for The Stranger, a founding member of the Seattle Research Institute, and his work has appeared in The Village Voice, Sydney Morning Daily, Radical Urban Theory, Ars Electronica, and The New York Times, among others.*

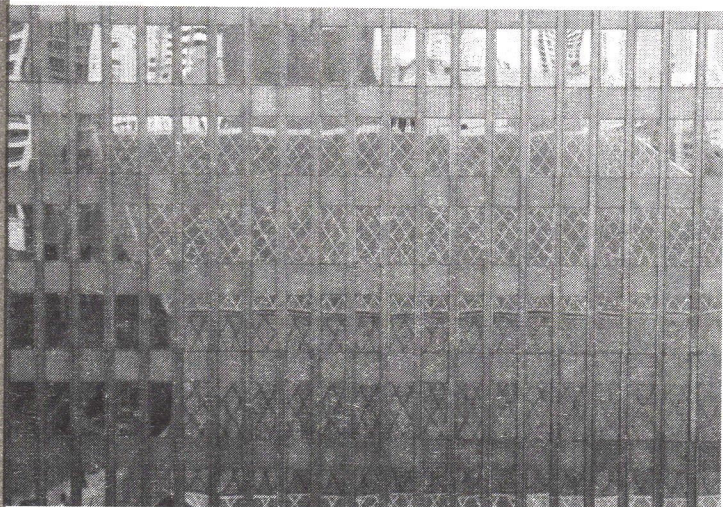


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PHOTO BY LARA SCHNEIDER



## Seattle's Thick and Messy Edge

CARY MOON + JULIE PARRETT

When does a city find 335 acres of public land along its shore in transition at the same time? Fronting one of the most striking panoramas and complex ecologies in this part of the world? Umm, never. This unlikely confluence of events—a failing seawall, sinking highway, shifting Port economics—offers Seattleites a huge and unbelievable gift: the chance to launch the reweaving of Elliott Bay with Seattle and reclaim the shore for future generations. Civic visionaries have been imagining life without the viaduct for years and years, and now everything is lining up to make it happen.

To no one's surprise, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is telling Seattle our city can't survive without their new highway. But accepting their logic without exploring the larger possibilities is not how the Seattle we love operates. Seattle's civic history is one of easy-going complacency spiked with specific and targeted disobedience. The early labor uprisings, the saving of Pike Place Market, blocking the destruction of Pioneer Square, stopping the Thomson expressway, protesting the WTO meetings all show what Seattleites are capable of when provoked by a truly bad idea. Watching the Viaduct replacement plan take shape is just the slap of civic injustice we needed to incite the activists within.

Imagine seven to eleven years of 24-hour-a-day pile drivers, dump trucks and detours downtown. Of the twelve hundred businesses within a block of the dig, project planners have forecasted, "The strong will survive and the marginal won't." Two gaping highway tunnel entrances, one right next to Pike Place Market and the other at Pioneer Square. Check out WSDOT's tunnel design, and the surface above it: this is not the tunnel you bought into, trust us. That one cost eleven to fourteen billion and was shelved. Even maximizing all projections for potential funding, and shaving the cost projections to the bare minimum, the highway planners have not identified enough funds to pay for even the cheapest and worst alternative: paving nearly all the available width (and removing 20 existing buildings) for a high-speed surface highway.

It isn't that easy to fool Seattleites, who know a bit about sustainability, about quality of life and about not wasting money. Seattleites can cite examples from other beloved cities, showing how they seized the opportunities presented by failing waterfront infrastructure to reconnect to their shores, to the benefit of their economies and communities. Seattleites are well aware that the rest of the state will not sit by and watch the pouring of billions of dollars of public money into a 1.4 mile stretch of a regional arterial. Seattleites have seen what happens when cities chase after congestion with more roads in Phoenix, Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles. If given the chance, Seattleites would be willing to consider an innovative transportation plan that offers a simpler, cheaper solution for mobility. Enough Seattleites have seen the shore at either Chicago or Rio de Janeiro or Nice or Annapolis, and wished for that connection to water at home. They can sense what they're missing.

Design professionals are still the masters of one channel in the complex game of city building: helping people visualize a different future. Collectively, designers can stir public imagination, and help elected officials shake off the death grip of highway-builder logic. Instead of participating in the discussion as WSDOT has framed it—how much highway, how convenient the commute, what to do with the leftover space—design professionals have the power to reframe the discussion. Paint an irresistible image of a richer future. Inspire the uprising.

Fast-forward 15 years. Instead of talking about how downtown is just starting to recover from the construction devastation, and grumbling about how bad congestion still is, Seattleites could be having a different conversation about the shore. How hurried the sky feels, how salty the wind, how many eagles gliding, (what festival is it this Saturday?), how dogged the salmon, how silent and powerful the new cranes, how shimmery the water's surface, how flock-like the kayaks, how cool that new housing project, how surreal to see starfish here, how good the kids are getting at stacking rocks.

This site, because of its fundamentally messy, shifting, untamed condition, could catalyze a change in direction from the generally bland and inoffensive path of recent downtown development. Seattle has a new opportunity to create a place where the urban and natural worlds mix, and in which the city's character is enriched by that confluence. Dynamic! Messy! Real! Experimental! That is the Seattle we want to inhabit in the future. A downtown that expresses our city's memory of recent wilderness, our city's love for its watery terrain, our city's shared knowledge of landscape as active and visceral, our city's history of obscene land-shaping. We want to help figure out how to inject the civic energy of Pike Place Market and the creativity of Bumbershoot into the ecological mix at the shore. That is the city we imagine and want to help build. We do not want to accept WSDOT's offer to simply shrub up a new highway, and be satisfied with contributing to the scenographic amelioration of an unquestioned compromise to the automobile.

Check out [www.peopleswaterfront.org](http://www.peopleswaterfront.org) to see a simpler and cheaper transportation solution and a vision for the water's edge. Join in action to convince WSDOT to at least study the No-Highway alternative—it's the first step toward reconnecting Seattle to Elliott Bay. *Cary Moon and Julie Parrett are landscape and urban designers in Seattle, and led a fabulous team of talented and passionate designers in the two charrettes for the waterfront. They co-founded the People's Waterfront Coalition with Grant Cogswell.*



## The University of Washington Tacoma, the Arts, and Urbanism

JULIE NICOLETTA

Much has been written about Tacoma's downtown renaissance over the past decade—the rehabilitation of Union Station into a federal courthouse; the construction of new museums, such as the Washington State History Museum, the Museum of Glass: International Center for Contemporary Art, and the Tacoma Art Museum; the year-old light rail line; and a burgeoning commercial district around the seven-year-old campus of the University of Washington, Tacoma (UWT). Whereas the investment in urban infrastructure and striking new and rehabilitated buildings has made a significant, visual impact on this revival, such an economic turnaround would not be possible without a strong relationship between the University and the community. The City of Tacoma's emphasis on cultural tourism as part of the economic equation has helped fuel a synergy with UWT, as the campus has expanded its own offerings in the arts and in urban studies. In this brief article I would like to focus on some of the recent collaborations between UWT and the community, specifically regarding the arts and urbanism, that have helped contribute to this revitalized urban area.

UWT was founded in 1990 with the mission of educating and serving the South Puget Sound community. Though the scope of the campus's mission has broadened over the past fourteen years, public interaction is still seen as an integral part of UWT's purpose and many of the academic programs at the university have a strong community-based focus. New courses and programs, particularly in the arts and in urban studies, have helped enhance relationships with the larger community.

This year the arrival of UWT's first two permanent, full-time art professors in the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Program, marked a strong shift toward creating more comprehensive offerings in the fine arts. Both artists have a strong interest in community-based or public art. These professors have taught several courses requiring students to engage with the surrounding environment and create works for public spaces. Using the UWT campus, students have recently created temporary works of art addressing diverse themes, such as body image and homelessness. Tacoma's High School for the Arts, an alternative high school for students pursuing a career in fine arts, located adjacent to and on campus, has provided another means of collaboration, as arts faculty at both institutions share facilities and equipment. Although this relationship is still in the early stages, a more integrated curriculum may develop in the future.

This spring, the opening of UWT's art gallery, located in commercial space along Pacific Avenue, marks the first space dedicated to displays of artworks on campus. Although the gallery has gotten off to a slow start this season, plans for the coming academic year will include rotating shows by students, faculty and outside professional artists. For example, this fall a show entitled "Ground Zero," by Rudolf Knubel (Professor of Design, Emeritus, University of Essen, Germany), which tries to make sense of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 will be on display. The gallery will help make connections to the larger community by participating in Tacoma's Third Thursday art walks, which have become well attended in recent years. The area around the university, made vibrant with new museums and private galleries, has attracted hundreds of visitors on third Thursday evenings.

The Urban Studies Program at UWT has also contributed extensively to building community ties in new areas in the three short years of its existence. In addition to sponsoring student interns and conducting research projects on urbanism in the South Puget Sound region, the program has recently collaborated with the City, as well as the Tacoma Housing Authority. During the winter quarter of 2004, urban studies faculty and City of Tacoma employees arranged a series of public forums through a UWT course entitled, Urban Government & Organizations, offered concurrently as part of the City of Tacoma's Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute's mission is to educate and inform citizens on the basics of City of Tacoma government operations, services and public involvement opportunities. UWT students shared classroom space with Institute participants interested in particular aspects of urban government. UWT and the City plan to offer this course again next year. The Urban Studies program has also spearheaded a campus-wide effort of collaboration with the Tacoma Housing Authority to study the effects of relocating residents during the leveling and reconstruction of the Salishan public housing development, originally built in 1943. The revitalization of Salishan is currently underway as is the study.

The City of Tacoma's focus on cultural tourism as a path for economic development has been successful so far. UWT's commitment to building connections with the city and its larger community through an expansion of offerings in the arts and urban studies has taken advantages of these efforts. As both the City and the University concentrate, respectively, on economic and intellectual growth, it is hoped that the relationships established to date will continue to offer opportunities for fruitful collaborations. *Julie Nicoletta is an Associate Professor in the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Program at the University of Washington, Tacoma. She specializes in the history of art, architecture and public history.*



HENRY ART GALLERY JULY 17 - NOVEMBER 21, 2004

# Santiago Calatrava: The Architect's Studio

*Santiago Calatrava: The Architect's Studio* highlights the work of one of the most celebrated and original architects of the present day. From the Olympic Sports Complex in Athens to the PATH terminal at New York's Ground Zero, Calatrava is responsible for many of today's signature building sites. *The Architect's Studio* was conceived and selected by Guest Curator Kirsten Kiser for the Henry Art Gallery.

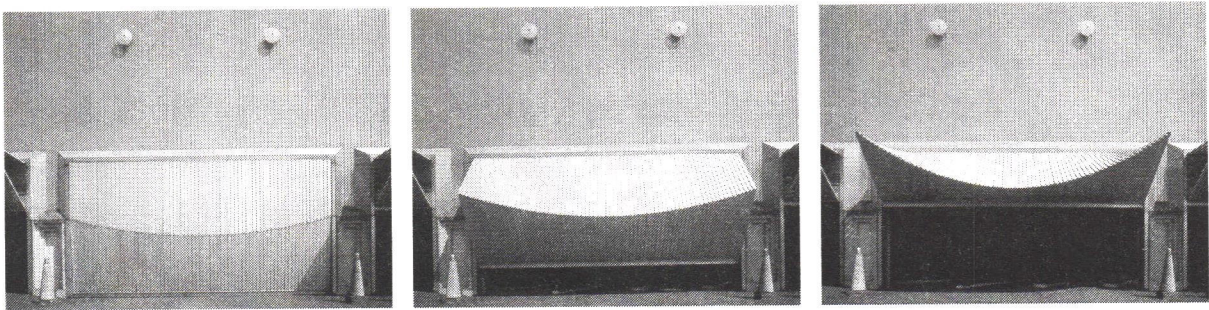
Figurative sketches and biomorphic drawings are a key to understanding the ensemble of Calatrava's work. The sketches selected for the catalog and exhibition range from early projects, the Ernstings Warehouse and Stadelhofen Station, to his latest designs for the Light Rail Train Bridge in Jerusalem and the Path Terminal at the World Trade Center in New York. A constant in his many sketchbooks, among buildings, bridges and engineering details, are figures in motion, birds in flight and, true to his Spanish roots, charging bulls. The exhibition also includes models for ten major projects from 1989 to the present.

Born in Spain, architect, artist, and engineer Santiago Calatrava has an eclectic background. His career has taken him around the world for design commissions and he is now based in Switzerland, with offices in Paris, Valencia and New York. Calatrava's buildings, bridges and other structures are known for their innovative design and remarkable interweaving of space, light and evocative form. His designs reflect the artist's generative creative energy, providing new landmarks for cities and affirming the importance of art and design during difficult times. Each bridge or building is rooted in Calatrava's understanding of a particular site and his intuitive sense of a source form or movement. His immense structures begin with small gestures in a sketchbook; bridges and roofs grow from birds' wings, apartment towers from the twist of the human torso—walls open and close and shutters lift. Visiting his buildings and walking across his bridges, both familiar and new, is a joyful and inspiring experience.



Ernstings Warehouse 1983–1985

CLIENT: ERNSTING COMPANY, GERMANY DESIGNER: GERZI



The corrugated southern facade responds to sunlight as if it were a giant sculpture. Its verticality contrasts with the northern facade, which only receives light when the sun is at its zenith, and horizontal lines are emphasized, with a specially formed S-profile cladding. For the loading bay doors, vertical slats are hinged along a curved line and connected at their lower points to a horizontal frame that can be raised or lowered. The doors were the first application of an idea that originated in a sculpture by Calatrava; a form based on the shape of the human eye. Here, the form became an experiment in kinetics, an investigation of the mechanical transformation of planes in a building.

The City of Arts and Sciences 1991–present

CLIENT: GENERALITAT VALENCIANA, SPAIN TOTAL SITE AREA: 86 ACRES

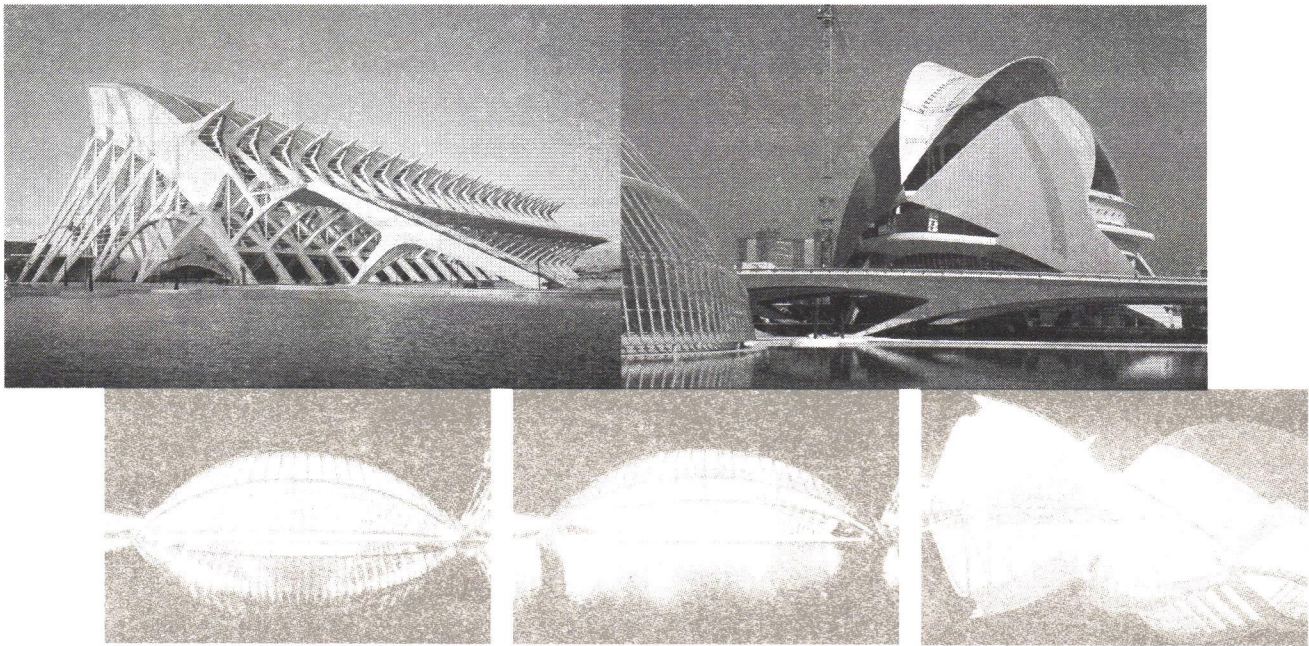
The City of Arts and Sciences is located in the dry bed of the Turia River, midway between the old city of Valencia and the coastal district of Nazaret. Nearly four miles of promenades allow visitors to stroll through the complex without entering the buildings. The complex includes a science museum, a planetarium and an Opera House (*Palau de les Arts*). The Opera House, Planetarium / IMAX Theater (Hemispheric Theater) and *Príncipe Felipe* Science Museum form a linear sequence from west to east. A fourth structure, known as *L'Umbracle*, is a promenade and parking garage built within an open arcade, providing a contemporary reinvention of the winter garden. A raised, axial walkway offers views to the sea and serves as an ordering element, with gardens and reflecting pools on either side.



The Science Museum (below left) is a spatial tour de force, 341 feet wide and 791 feet long. Like the grand exhibition pavilions of the past, it is a longitudinal building, created from the modular development of transverse sections that repeat along the length of the site.

The Planetarium / IMAX Theater (below right) resembles a human eye, set within a 258,334 square foot pool. The “pupil” is the hemispherical dome of the Theater, which is transformed into a globe through its reflection in the pool.

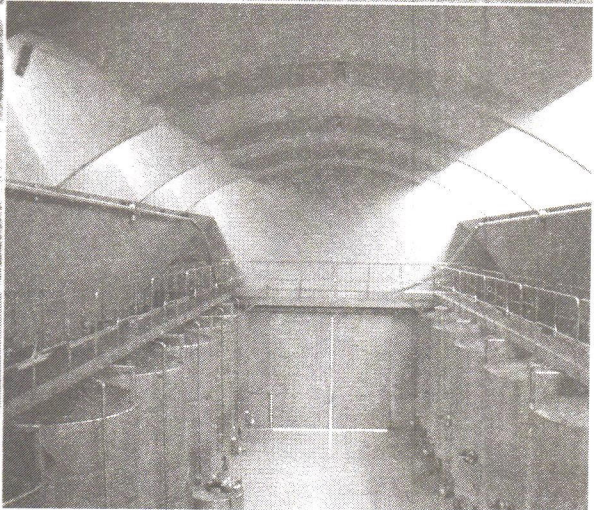
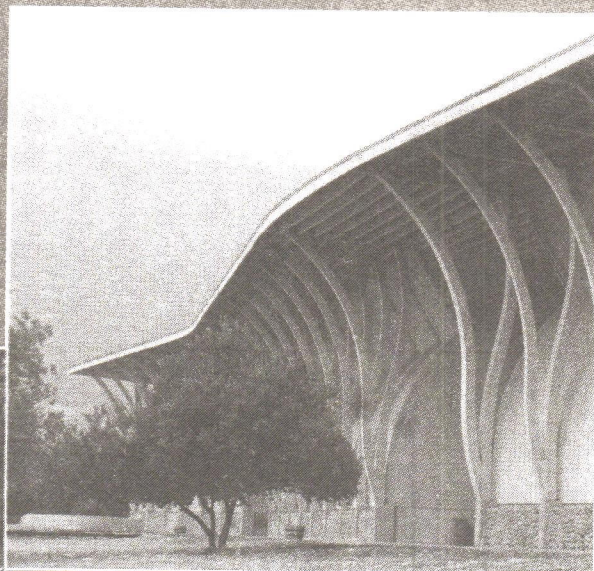
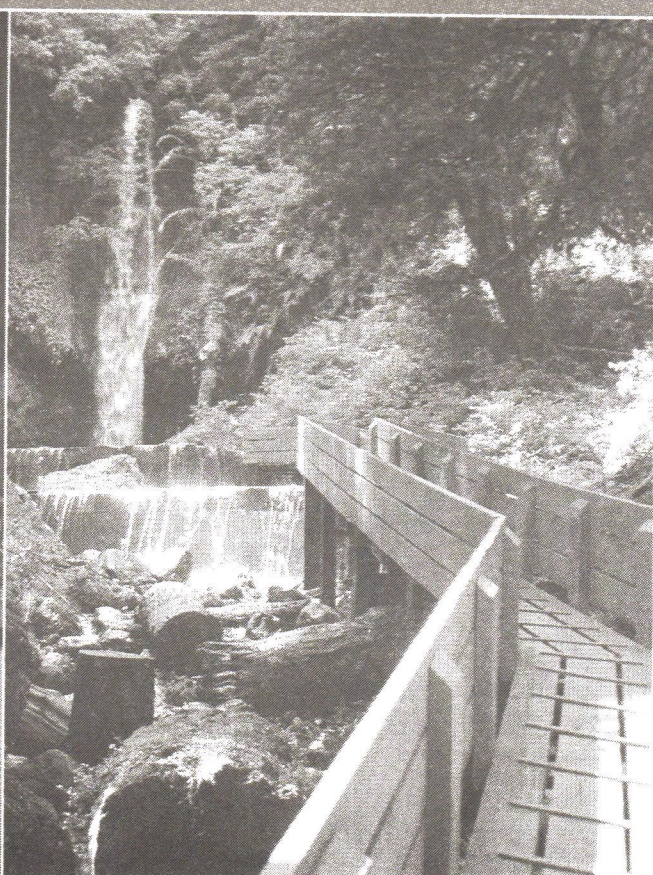
Conceived as the final element in the City of Arts and Sciences complex, the Valencia Opera House (bottom row) has been designed as a series of apparently random volumes, which become unified through their enclosure within two symmetrical, cut-away concrete shells.





# Narrative Sketching STEVE BULL

## CHILE One country Six places Eight projects Eleven photos Eight hundred words



### february 25 THE CHURCH

*My first instinct is not to look, but to smell.  
To inhale deeply and absorb the rich odor of oil  
and wood.  
To absorb the age and material of the space not through  
light, but through slow breaths.  
Floors, columns, vaults, ceiling and ornament built from  
staves of wood, four inches wide.  
Not rough-sawn, not sanded, just simple wood nailed to  
a hidden armature.  
The entire interior warm, dark, honey-colored wood.*

*And this church is not small.  
It is a cathedral.  
Here, wood creates grandeur.  
And intimacy that embraces the space in a warm even  
light and texture.*

### march 2 RED

*Red  
Striking, powerful and simply perfect against the green  
moss, trees, ferns and the steam that hang above geo-  
metric stone pools.*

*It is simply a path.  
Elevated over the rushing noise that creates a silence  
between the pools and the walls of the small verdant  
canyon.*

*However, it is much more than a path.  
A path is a terrestrial thing, forever bound to the earth,  
to gravity.  
This thing floats.  
It bends and turns and rises up the canyon.  
A single red gesture.  
Of structure.  
Of material.*

*Of simplicity and great length that transport you from  
the everyday, deep into a world of clean pure warmth  
and isolation.*

### march 5 WOOD

*Later, I would meet the architect, Jose Cruz, and we would  
talk about form, abstraction, light and wood.  
A material that is not abstract, in a modernist sense.  
But Jose believes that it can be.*

*Now, days before I would meet the architect, I feel this.*

*A winery, made of laminated timbers and staves, on a  
stone base.  
Stacked like the century old walls that enclose the fields  
and pastures of the viña.  
Stacked in front of concrete that is structure.*

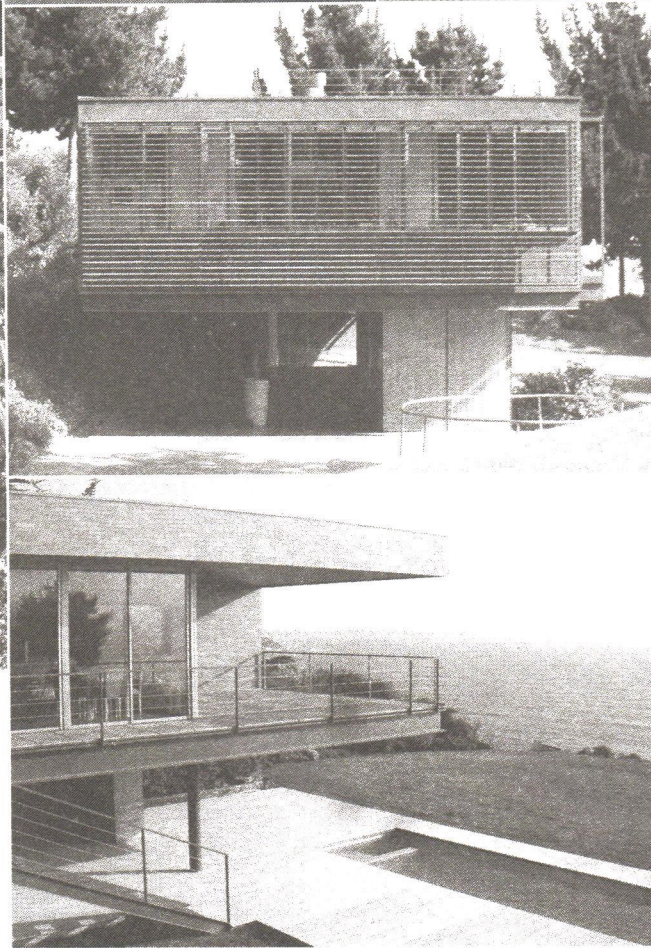
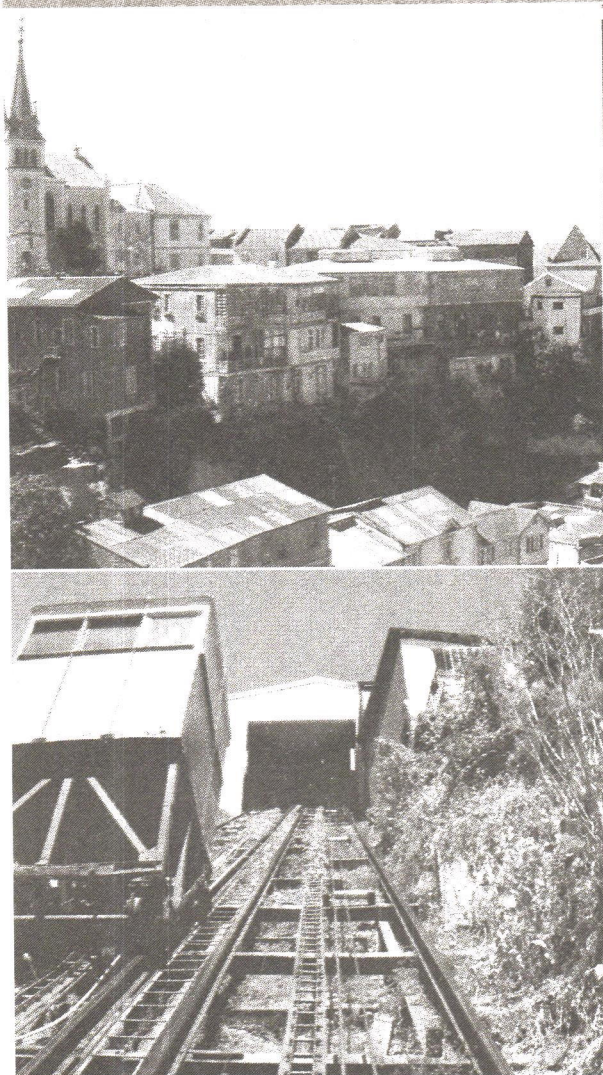
*Three large buildings, at slight angles to each other,  
and a single roof.  
A unity.*

*Inside they are specific to the needs of the wine  
production process.*

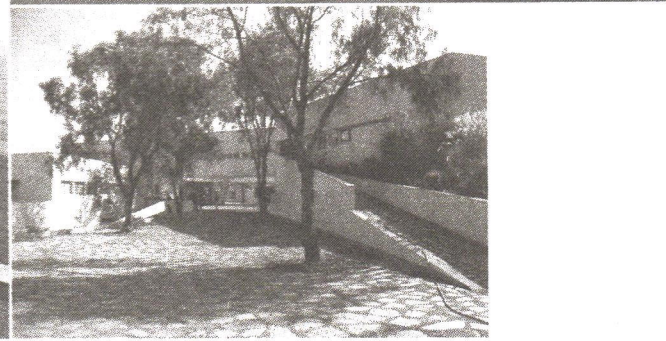
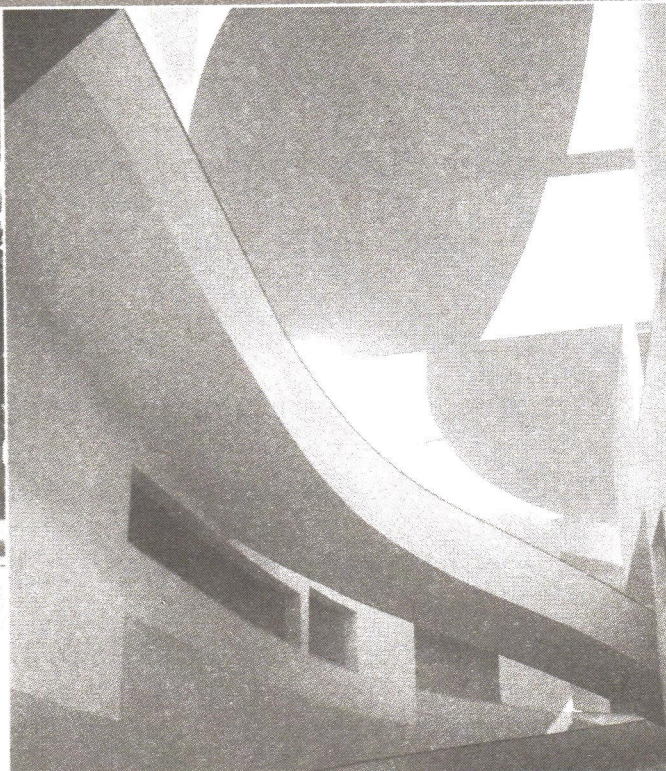
*It is here, standing in these spaces, days before I would  
meet Jose, that I experience his thoughts.  
It is here that I remark how I had never seen such  
simplicity of form and material combine to create such  
considered and luminous light.*

*Even, soft and completely different.*





Seattle architect Steve Bull was awarded a 2003 Rotch Traveling Scholarship through a two-stage design competition. He traveled for three months in South America documenting the cities, landscapes, and structures through narrative, photography, and drawing. All photos by author.



## march 7 NERUDA

*in this house,  
it would have been impossible  
to not create things of beauty.*

*for Neruda that is.  
perched above his beloved city of Valparaiso,  
in a house that is of the city  
and of the man himself.*

*a tight stair twists irregularly upward,  
walls as brilliant and varied as the city itself.  
it is the city.  
the city condensed.  
distilled.  
the rooms purposeful and open to the structures  
that cling to the ridges and canyons,  
to the harbor, the bay and the infinite ocean.  
blue, more intense than the sky.  
a panorama.*

*in this house one lives in vivid color,  
one lives full of movement,  
immersed in a place,  
its structure,  
its essence,  
its changing image,  
its changing beauty.*

## march 9 LAS CASAS

*Here, three houses challenge the conventions of  
suburban development.  
Each a unique response to subtle differences of site.  
One long and narrow with trees and a slope toward  
the sea.  
One across the slope, within a curve in the road.  
One below the road, at the edge of the bluff, open to  
the sea and the west.*

*Lifted off of the earth, living spaces float above the  
uniform green lawn that spreads from one yard  
to the next.*

*Boxes, really, of glass that hover above the contoured  
topography.  
But the homes are not simple.  
Layers of movement extend beyond, within, below and  
beside the simple volumes and create rich experiences  
of arrival, privacy, and expanse.  
And openness to the sky and sea.*

*Each unique.*

*One, refined, like a cherry floor.  
One raw, with rusting steel, bare lamps, concrete pavers,  
plywood and hammered concrete.  
One thin, a veneer of grey stone.*

## march 12 THE UNIVERSITY

*High on the mountainside, stretched long and visible from  
great distances is the University of Adolfo Ibañez.  
White against the earthen colored mountains.  
Two parallel public spaces bend and curve along the  
contour of the hill.  
The outside as a series of courtyards facing east. To the  
mountains and away from the city.  
The inside as a sinuous space of ramps, corridors,  
sculpted volumes and sculpted light.*

*It is the experience of constant becoming and change.  
Each step or the passage of time bringing a different  
space and a different light.*

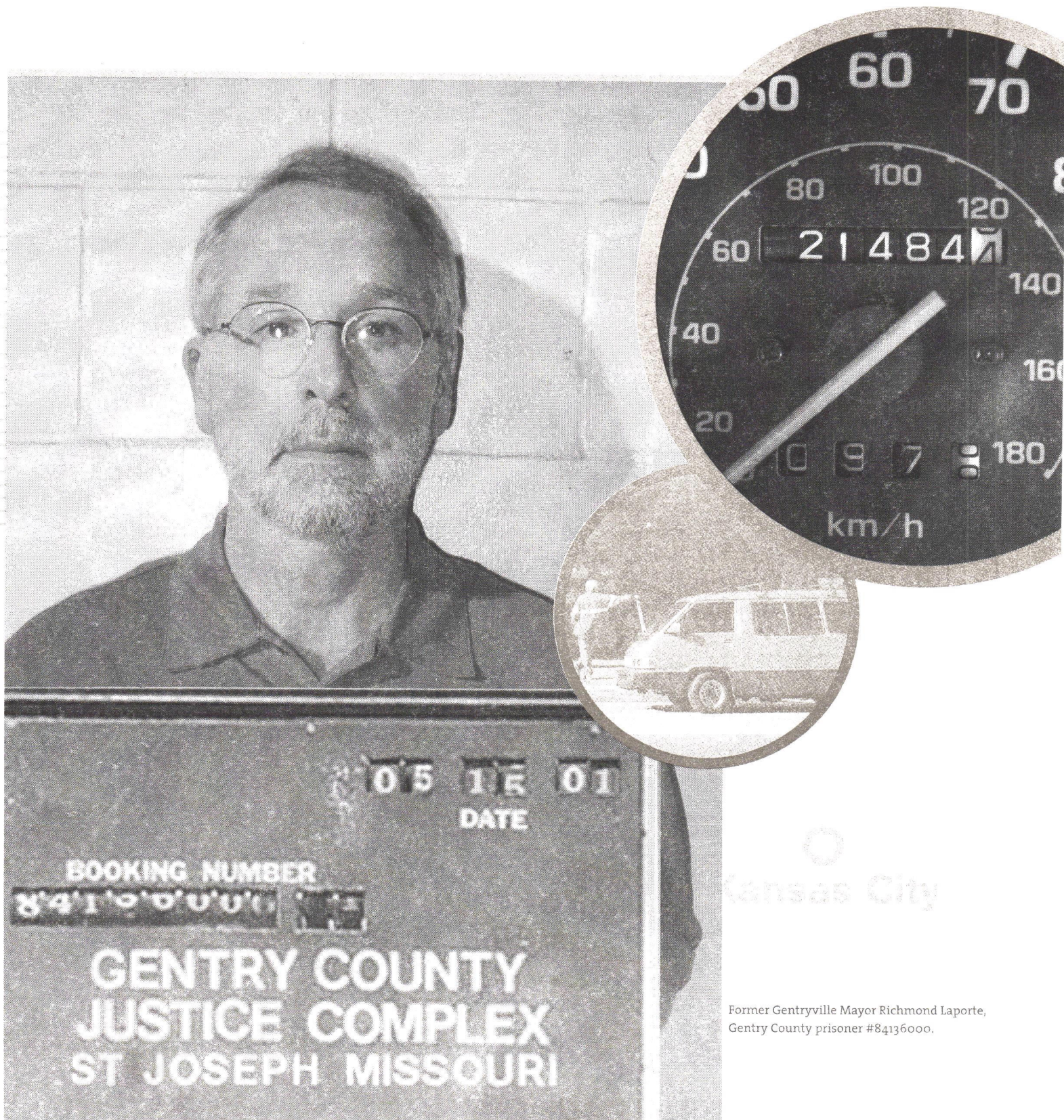
*It is like two buildings, one built and the other implied.*

*With its own variety and changing scale, its sequential  
movement, its continuous connection to the mountains  
and its intermittent connection through the structure  
down to the city below, the outdoor space acts like a  
building.*

*Defined and programmed, but open.*



Check the tripometer of action: better city's Saffron Croozer and you'll find the number 21,484 — twenty-one thousand notches on the proverbial belt of urban exploration. This hemispheric, counter clock-wise journey through every major American city brought us to the desks of urban planners, conference rooms of developers, drafting boards of architects and homes of political activists who share action: better city's passion for city life. • Fresh with clues from our spiritual brethren, the action: better city crew loaded up the cameras, and embarked to document the streetscapes, public parks, open spaces and architectural wonders and blunders of American cities. Add the numbers 5,020 (photographs) and 83 (hours of film footage) to the Saffron Croozer Index. • As we departed Seattle, the emotions and controversy of the presidential election of 2000 still filled our gas tank with commitment. Urban dwellers voted blue and the rural ranchers voted red, the country we were about to explore was polarized. With the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 polarization turned to petrification, as every American citizen was forced to re-define his or her country. Cities were being discussed in terms of safety, not livability, a bunker mentality that could derail a decade of urban progress.



Former Gentryville Mayor Richmond Laporte, Gentry County prisoner #84136000.



Cities that had been slowly crawling from the demolished ideals of Urban Renewal, White Flight, and the Modern Movement for the past 50 years, now teetered with fear on the crater’s edge. • Our journey through this new American landscape brought hundreds of experiences of hope, vision and determination for improving the future of city life in America. But the experiences of the first two thirds of the trip could not prepare us for mile 17,574. Upon arrival in Gentryville, Missouri (2000 census population 92,000) we encountered a stunning example of the clash between progressives and obstructionists. We were immediately fascinated, drawn into the tale of Gentryville’s Richmond Laporte, a visionary architect-mayor now felon, thanks to his attempts to revitalize downtown Gentryville. Was this just a mere tale of big-city dreaming versus small-town thinking, one of the growing examples of the conflicts that today seem almost fabled? Is the story of Laporte and Gentryville just another tale of one man’s dramatic fight to bring something fresh, new, alive to a community that not only wants the status quo but is addicted to it? Or perhaps there was something more: could this story be a harbinger of our own city’s fate? action: better city decided to find out. >>

# Gentryville Missouri

**Northwest Missouri Mirror:** Who are you, and what are you doing in Gentryville?  
**action: better city:** We’re basically a non-profit studio for architecture and planning filmmakers based in Seattle. We produce short films about cities current issues and hot topics. But, we also dress up in orange jumpsuits and participate in charettes and workshops around town to shake things up a bit. We are currently on a seven-month sabbatical from our day jobs, touring around the United States filming American cities. We were driving from Marceline to Kansas City and stopped here in Gentryville for a bite to eat. The waitress told us about the amazing story of the past few years, so we had to see for ourselves.

**NWMM:** Why orange?  
**abc:** I guess it reminds people of the color of construction, but it’s also the color of caution. We’re trying to say that we should all pay attention to what we’re building – it’s the future of our communities.

**NWMM:** How did your group get started, and how does it keep going?  
**abc:** It actually started in 1968, a wild time in Seattle’s history. Fred Bassetti, a patriarch of Seattle architecture, got together about 50 architects, planners, artists and photographers, and proposed new ideas for spaces around town. Most of the proposals actually got built. The group lay dormant for 30 years until we woke it up in 1998 with a new bunch of crazed citizens. As we huddle in our studio in Seattle’s International District, we survive on small grants, donations, bubble tea, and the kindness of strangers. We are 100% volunteer-run, and proud of it.

**NWMM:** So, what are the main goals of action: better city?  
**abc:** The whole “goal” thing is really a two-way street – in the process of uncovering issues and educating the public, we learn a lot ourselves. I guess our goal is to keep that cycle going. We have a great team of activists assembled, and together we have a lot of fun exploring the potential of cities. We are trying to get others to get that feeling as well.



When action: better city had the privilege of interviewing Mr. Laporte, he had been incarcerated for 18 months. The following interview is a compilation of two sessions recorded on consecutive days in late May of 2003. Other anecdotes and recollections of Mayor Laporte's fall were collected, researched and recorded in the sidebars accompanying his interview.

***ABC:** I've heard of architect-mayors, and I've heard of mayor-criminals, but I've never heard of an architect-mayor-criminal.*

**RICHMOND LAPORTE** (laughs): Good start. Well, if you define an architect as a person who designs and monitors construction, and a mayor as the highest level of elected official in the city, that would be me. As for the criminal part, I guess I would have to admit that I was sentenced to prison for my alleged crime, even though I still plead my innocence. There have been several architect-mayors in the history of the U.S., but I haven't heard of any with the triple-bill, either.

***ABC:** I'm surprised there haven't been more famous architect-mayors.*

**RL:** Yeah, I am, too. I would say that at least half of mayoral decisions are architectural issues. From housing development, to hospitals, to cultural buildings and streetscapes, there is a lot to tackle three-dimensionally. Some architects will have the business-savvy skills to handle it, but one also has to battle the "ego" baggage. Imagine a Mayor Frank Lloyd Wright or Governor Koolhaas (laughs).

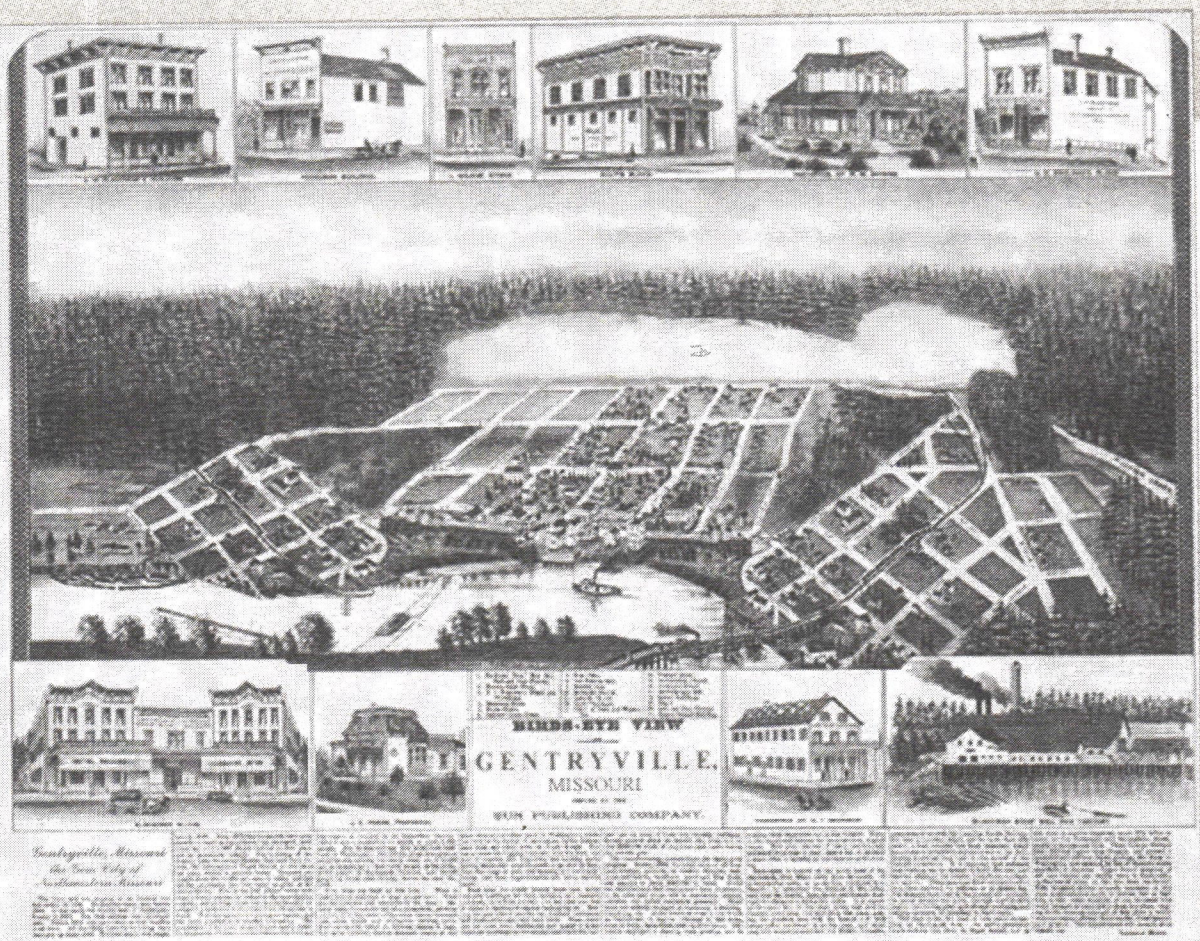
***ABC:** How did you get started as an architect, or architect-mayor for that matter?*

**RL:** I grew up in my family's hardware store, watching my father basically solve everyone's hardware problems. A customer would walk in and show my dad some sketch of some plumbing contraption, and my dad would say, "Oh yeah. You see, you have to do this, then this, then that. Aisle four, lower shelf next to the 1/2" copper tubing." The guy would come in the next day with a fruit basket and hug my dad. It was fascinating, and taught me the importance of knowledgeable problem solving. It's scary. I can call my father in someone else's hardware store, on my cell phone, and he'll tell me where to go (laughs). So, with the profession of the architect being one big exercise in problem solving, I dove in. I never got a hug from a client though.

***ABC:** Did it help you as mayor?*

**RL:** Yes, definitely. Beyond the problem solving, it also showed me the importance of preventative maintenance. The regular customers who came in for small maintenance problems were very different from the poor schmucks who sloshed in with wet, rolled up pants, sweating and panicking, five minutes before closing time. As a plumber who also did house calls, my father would say "you can visit me now, or I'll visit you later." Pay a little bit now or a helluva lot later. This is the biggest lesson for towns and cities; plan it now or react later. Take your pick. It's very similar to the life cycle of a house, except with tens of thousands of people.





# GENTRYVILLE HISTORY

Each founder drew out his plan and argued for years...

Beginning with the Louisiana Purchase, Missouri's early history was a tumultuous one. It was the Missouri Compromise that helped divide the country in an event that ultimately led to the Civil War. During the war, the state's citizens fought fiercely for both the Confederate and the Union armies.

The town of Gentryville first found prominence as a trading depot after the war. Since St. Louis was already known as "the Gateway to the West," the town became known as "the Gateway to the Gateway of the West" as a secondary departure point for the Gold Rush.

Positioned in a narrow strip of land between Lake Madison and a bend in the Grand River, Gentryville was first founded by a fur trader named Abraham Humphrey, known by local Native Americans as "Hunter of the Beaver." The Midwest had already been established as the fur capital of the country when the Missouri Fur

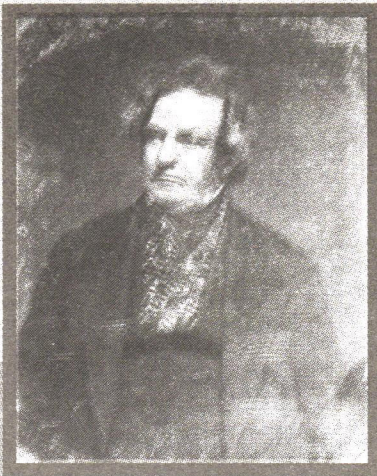
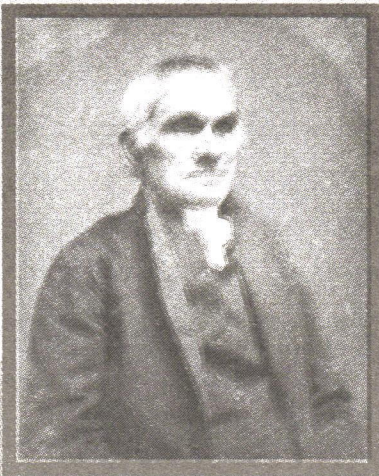
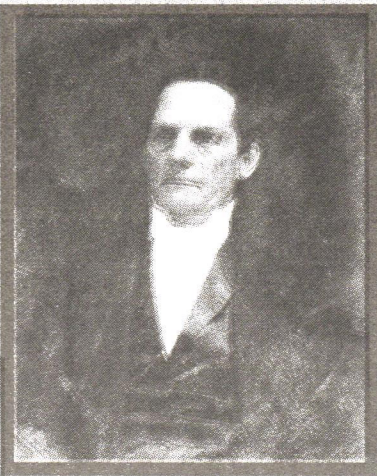
Company was chartered in 1809. Giving up his stake in the company, in 1851 Humphrey moved to establish Gentryville as the premier western trading spot for beaver pelts.

He had more in mind than just the fur trade, however. He wanted his new town to follow the cosmopolitan footsteps of another Louisiana Purchase city, New Orleans. But dreams of achieving a prominence equal to the Queen City were thwarted early on, as Gentryville was surrounded by rough, lawless country. Interference from the likes of Jesse James, of St. Joseph just down the road, was a big obstacle to the town's growth. Some say his first robberies targeted trains coming in and out of Gentryville, which discouraged intermediate train stops. This eventually took its toll as the railroads began to bypass Gentryville for St. Louis. The town was on the verge of ruin, had it not been for two smart businessmen who saw an opportunity.

Samuel Ellsworth Wedgstrom and Chester Lacey settled in Gentryville to make their fortunes through manufacturing. Wedgstrom founded a very successful furniture factory, while Lacey introduced the West's first women's apparel distribution company, bypassing the more established East Coast factories. He did quite well "providing frontier women with the corsets they need."

It may have been manufacturing that brought the three founders to Gentryville, but it would be land speculation that became their legacy. Between the three of them they owned 90% of the land that makes up today's downtown Gentryville. There was no grid system, just haphazard development along a meandering Main Street, until they decided to plot the city in a way that maximized their land ownership and power. Inevitably this led to disagreement.

Each founder drew out his plan and argued for years with the others without reaching a settlement. Three separate street grids were laid out, maximizing each landowner's relationship to the river. Where one street grid met another, a triangle of land relating to neither was left over. One of these triangles became known as the "Wedge" after Samuel Wedgstrom. Despite its role in a late 19th century scandal, the "Wedge" faded from public consciousness for over a century.



Above: The three founders of Gentryville, Missouri, from left to right: Samuel Wedgstrom, Chester Lacey, and Abraham Humphrey

Left: Though new development continues to consume Gentryville's history, some of its original building stock remains, such as the First Gentryville Bank on the left in this photo.

Top: An 1877 bird's-eye view of Gentryville, a town originally defined geographically and economically by the two bodies of water surrounding it.





# We're competing with Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Topeka!

*ABC: And not all the "house" residents will agree on things.*

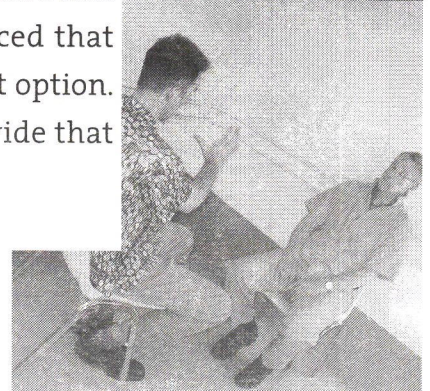
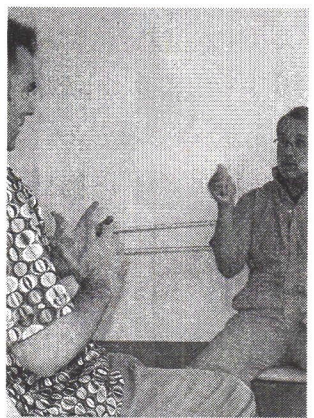
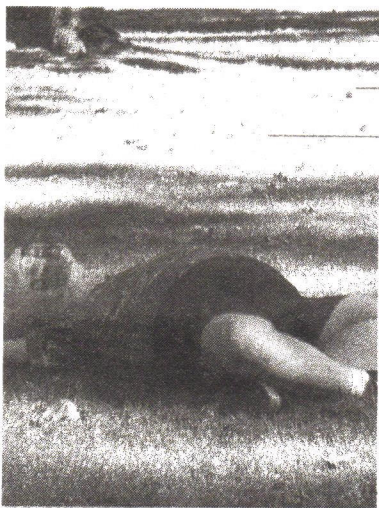
**RL:** That's an understatement. But, unfortunately they have to, or at least a majority has to understand all the issues and compromise. Listen, Gentryville didn't have huge problems of poverty, severe unemployment, or crime when I was mayor. But I tried to elevate the city into a happier, healthier community. Couple that with strong economics and a progressive tax base, and you got a good combination.

*ABC: Explain your happier / healthier concept.*

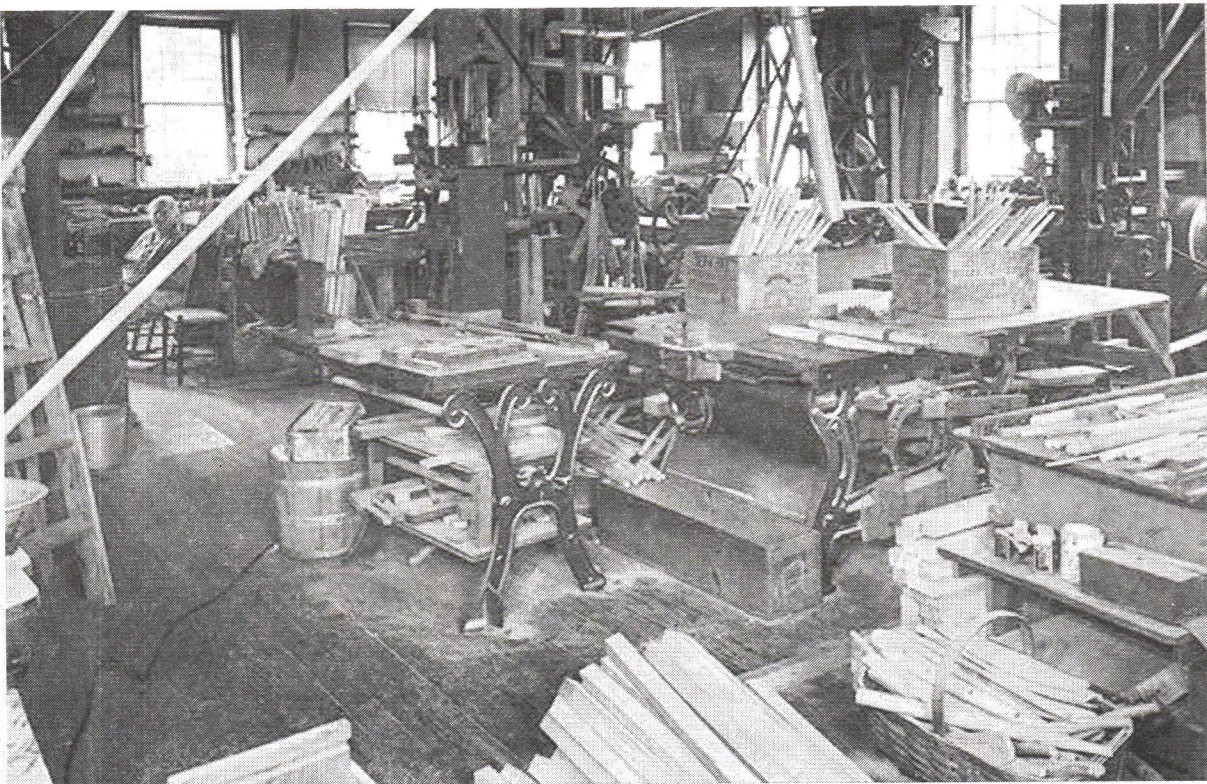
**RL:** The United States is always at the bottom of these polls that test happiness and health. I guess it's always been intriguing to me to see Nigeria and Mexico, two supposed "developing countries" at the top of the "happy happy" poll and the U.S. a distant 34th or whatever. We all know that America has got a fat thing going on, too. The child obesity and diabetes numbers are appalling. We're fat and sad, and I'm certain it has everything to do with the way this country has developed in the last half-century. Come on, we all know the culprits — suburban sprawl, no walking, no stimulation besides the television. It is just bizarre to see a debate about this stuff. No, it's actually pathetic. All the signs are there, but we still jump up and down, followed by coughing and wheezing, when a new Sprawl-Mart opens up. I was absolutely determined to undermine this kind of garbage-growth in the city of Gentryville, and that starts with a vibrant downtown. Green spaces, attractive cultural institutions, all types of downtown housing, streets for both pedestrians and cars, I could go on and on. This is absolutely nothing new. In fact, we all know it's completely old concepts. We have got to find ways to get our new lives into these old concepts. The tax base will then follow. Look, Gentryville may like to think that it will compete in some global marketplace with Singapore and Hong Kong. Ridiculous. We're competing with Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Topeka! You know that Seattle competes with Tacoma and Vancouver, Phoenix battles for position with Scottsdale and Tempe, while Denver fights to keep people from moving to Boulder and Longmont. The only way to keep your tax base, and keep 'em happy and healthy, is to keep up your downtown.

*ABC: That's hard in this non-downtown cultural age.*

**RL:** Yes and no. There is definitely a comfort-driven anti-tax sentiment out there—the school of voodoo economics is alive and well. It's wrong, but it's alive. But, more and more people are re-discovering downtown living and lifestyles. I'm convinced that people are tired of driving around the suburbs, and they are ready for the next option. It is up to us—the architects and mayors and everyone in between—to provide that for them.







## THE ORIGINAL VISIONARY SAMUEL WEDGSTROM (1825-1901)

The first attempt to create a civic space for Gentryville was initiated and led by Samuel Ellsworth Wedgstrom, the most colorful of the three industrialist “city fathers.” The son of an ex-Shaker turned timber magnate, Wedgstrom built his Fine Un-Fancy Furniture Factory (p.31) on the river’s edge, adjacent to the leftover city blocks that today are known as “The Wedge.” At the peak of production in the 1870s, his factory employed close to 200 people making all manner of furniture. Reflecting his Shaker roots and their philosophy of “That which has in itself the highest use, possesses the greatest beauty,” Wedgstrom’s wood furniture was years ahead of its time in its simplicity and functionality. Close access to the rail lines for shipping and a keen sense of marketing his products as essential to one’s daily comfort, “To Lose One’s Seat is to Know Defeat!,” enabled Wedgstrom to enjoy decades of wealth and success.

The Shaker influence was also evident in his egalitarian stance on civic matters. As a strong believer in an individual’s rights, but also ones responsibilities to build a better society for all, Wedgstrom built a number of schools and the first town library in Gentryville.

In 1880 he made an inspiring trip to New York City, where he visited a relatively new Central Park. He was so motivated by Olmstead’s masterpiece that he returned home determined to give Gentryville its own grand green space. It would be a place where every citizen could “enjoy both refuge and prospect,” something the bustling industrial town was sorely lacking. And he knew just the spot for what would be his grandest civic gesture: conveniently located right next to his furniture factory!

The Wedge was the largest undeveloped parcel of land in town, victim of a dispute between the fellow founders. In 1881, Abraham Humphrey died suddenly, allowing Wedgstrom to buy the land from the remaining heirs. Finally there was nothing standing in the way of his grand park plan, or so he thought...

A national design competition was held the following year, won by Arthur Brodsky & Sons of Boston, who soon drafted a plan and renderings of the “People’s Park.” The scheme was initially received with great enthusiasm, but then the scandal broke and soon excitement turned to skepticism. That skepticism in turn became outrage when it was learned that Wedgstrom the Businessman, and not

just Wedgstrom the City Benefactor, would benefit from his grand vision. For scattered among the gardens, pathways, pergolas and water features were almost five hundred park benches! The brief stated, “No ambulating person should find themselves more than ten paces from a restful seat, likewise for all avenues leading to and surrounding the Park.”

It was no secret who would be called upon to supply this and other street furniture for the park, all of it to be “simply but finely made.” The thought that the great industrialist would benefit so handsomely from a civic vision of his own making was just too much for the people of Gentryville. Within days the Gentryville Gazette called for shelving the plan and for local jurisdictions to “cease all business dealings with W. M. Wedgstrom, he of nefarious intentions thinly veiled.” Vengeful business partners cancelled their orders, more for being left out of the scheme than from any moral indignation, and the furniture factory closed by year’s end. Chastened and scorned, Wedgstrom packed up his family and left Gentryville for good. Even today a mention of the Wedgstrom family name evokes disdainful comments from some of the older residents, who grew up hearing stories of the scandal.

Despite its notoriety, the furniture factory survived the ensuing decades and subsequent other uses relatively unchanged, and became recognized as a valued piece of the town’s history. Many of Wedgstrom’s original furniture studies and prototypes were left packed away and undiscovered on its upper floor well into the 1990s when another civic visionary would inadvertently draw them into a brand new scheme, and a brand new scandal.

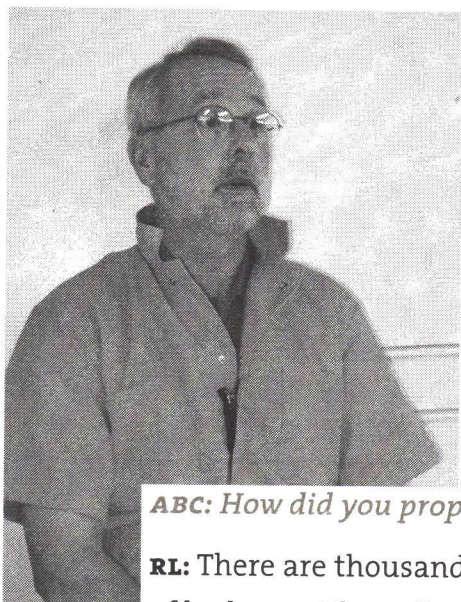
Above left: A rare quiet moment is captured inside the Wedgstrom Fine Un-Fancy Furniture Factory (date unknown).

Above right: Artist’s conception of one of Wedgstrom’s Shaker-inspired park bench designs. No prototypes are known to exist.

*ABC: I understand you tried to provide that option for Gentryville.*

**RL:** Yes, I did try (pauses). This... these issues are incredibly intertwined. Cities are the largest things humans have built. They are more intricate than the space shuttle, more temperamental than any animal. The first step in all this is helping people understand the issues enough that they won’t be frightened of change. The cultural education of Gentryville had taken a back seat for a while, and I tried to get it into the front seat. Problem is I got kicked out of the car (laughs). The media, the schools, the word-of-mouth are all-important communication tools that need to be on board. I feel that I got none of their support. I was so tired of all the plans and talks of trying to revitalize our downtown. I wanted to start something. Anything to get the ball rolling and get investment, both financial and spiritual, into the center of town and away from unsustainable suburban development.





**ABC:** *How did you propose to bring change to your city?*

**RL:** There are thousands of good examples of urban changes around the world, and lots of bad ones. They all started with some kind of spark—somebody showed up, or some new building, or some new group of people did something. Something started with somebody. I wanted to get that somebody and that something rolling, and preserve some of the spirit of the city. It was called “The Founders Museum.”

**ABC:** *So what went wrong?*

**RL:** Unfortunately, this is also where controversy starts. No one wants to displace low-income residents, but we also need to encourage growth for all types of housing. These are the residents that will buy ranch-burgers in the ‘burbs if the downtown isn’t attractive. The hardest part is getting things started. Current residents often resist change, sometimes to the point of fanaticism. They even dragged my relatives into it. You see, it turns out my great-great grandfather was a founder, so the obstructionists claimed that I was just trying to immortalize my family. I didn’t even know that.

**ABC:** *The Wedge redevelopment proposal and Founders Museum are probably the most obvious examples.*

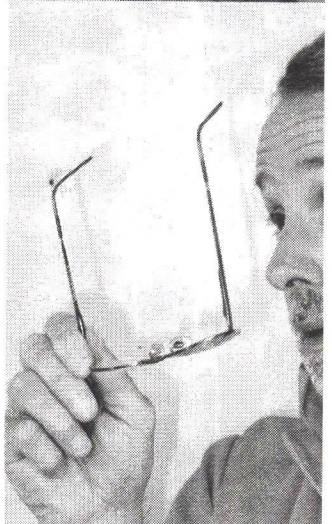
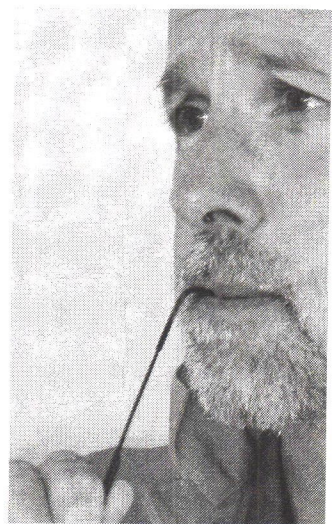
**RL:** The Founders Museum could be a case-study for any city. I felt that it would be a catalyst for change and cultural education. The public-private Wedge plan was a two-for-one deal, when I think of the lost opportunity... what were people thinking?

**ABC:** *I hear the architect wasn’t exactly welcomed with open arms.*

**RL:** Well, you could say that. I had traveled to Japan for the International Mayor’s Conference in 1998. A reception was held at the new Louis Vuitton showroom, attended by the building’s architect Sakae Ishii. The Founders Museum idea was on the table, so I invited him to enter the design competition. He eventually won and the building was completed last year.

**ABC:** *There is a hint of sadness in your voice.*

**RL:** It was a very difficult process. Not only did the funding initiative for the project barely pass, but the support was also teetering throughout the course of design and construction. There were protests and recall votes. There were scathing editorials. The least enjoyable were the thinly veiled “off-color” comments about Ishii’s ability to design our one and only museum.



I wanted to get that somebody  
and that something rolling, and preserve  
some of the spirit of the city.



## The Deal was intended to be good for the community as well as beneficial to Al Pollen.

The lunch was a light, courteous affair, where the participants avoid spotting their ties or literally greasing the palms of their company. After an opening cocktail, two men shared their vision for the future of downtown Gentryville. What evolved was a grand scheme, which would no doubt look good on paper. Now, they had to sell it to the voters. A haze of cigar smoke swirled as waiters passed through the back rooms of the mahogany-lined restaurant. Through the haze, the two men shook hands.

For the better part of a year, Mayor Laporte had been looking for a way to celebrate the bicentennial of Gentryville. The usual ideas were tossed about by his staffers: fountains, gardens, street name changes, statues, even renaming City Hall. At each suggestion, the mayor cringed. The founders of the city were true visionaries of their times: progressive men and women who brought the city to prominence, left an enviable neighborhood park system as a legacy to future generations, and established the town as the "Gateway to the Gateway to the West." They simply could not be honored with mere street signs.

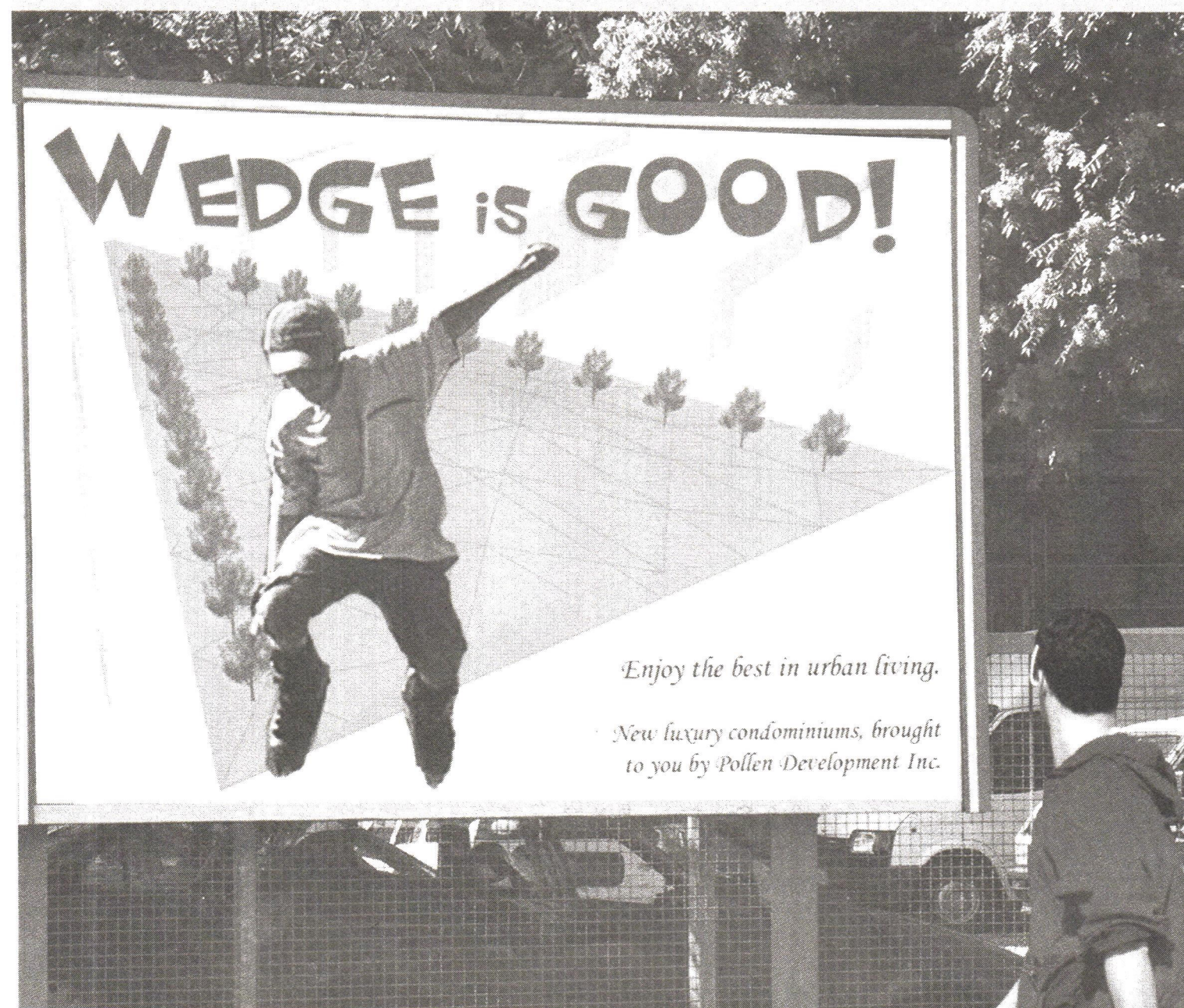
That's when the mayor approached Al Pollen, resident philanthropist. Mr. Pollen, who owned much of the land in the Wedge District, had been looking for ways to "maximize the potential" of his properties for years, but the current zoning prohibited much of anything that could revitalize the area. As industrial jobs were outsourced, his warehouses sat empty and unused. Recognizing a trade-off with the City might be his best chance to realize his vision, he accepted the mayor's lunch invitation.

The Deal was intended to be good for the community as well as beneficial to Al Pollen. The goal was to revitalize the "Wedge," a leftover remnant of land between two of the city's street grids. Once envisioned as a grand central park linking the river and the lake, it never fulfilled its promise to the urban fabric. Light industry warehouses, big box stores, office parks and their supporting parking lots filled the void, separating the downtown from adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Over drinks the two discussed the grand vision; over appetizers, method; over lunch, financing. By the check, the Deal was fleshed out. Mr. Pollen would donate the

original furniture warehouse of Samuel Wedgstrom for a Founders Museum, providing a major tourist attraction for the city. An international design competition would be held to select the architect, bringing caché to the project. The three-story structure would anchor what would become "Wedgstrom Park," revisiting a controversial project first proposed by one of the town founders. The land for the park would be donated and maintained by Pollen, but in return the adjacent land (a considerable chunk of Mr. Pollen's portfolio) would be upzoned to allow mixed-use high-density housing.

This public-private plan seemed to benefit the entire town, providing a major open space that would link the citizens with downtown, the river and the lake. Upzoning would create high-density development and an increased tax base. The mix of open space and density would support new local businesses, as well as attract larger business looking for the quality of life their employees desired. The Deal could have been a win-win for everyone if only they hadn't underestimated the community reaction.



But not good enough! An early billboard heralding the doomed Wedgstrom Park.



## WHAT'S KELP GOT TO DO WITH IT?

During the spring of 1997, Gentryville began the ambitious work of procuring a design for the Founders Museum that would inspire the city and meet the budget, as promised to voters during the Wedgstrom Park funding initiative.

Upon winning the city-sponsored design competition, internationally renowned architect Sakae Ishii selected the Gentryville architectural firm Tran/Scend Associates to be the local architect. Known for their technical acumen and prowess in public facilitation, Tran/Scend had a reputation for bridging the esoteric world of architecture to a familiar world of vernacular typologies.

The city hosted a series of public workshops in its neighborhoods. As sold to the voters, the museum project would reuse and restore the Wedgstrom Fine Un-Fancy Furniture Factory building adjacent to the proposed Wedgstrom Park. This building was perfect for the project, not only because of its history, but also due to its three floors being physically and symbolically appropriate for its mission of honoring the town's three founders.

As expected, preliminary meetings were well attended by citizens wishing to have their say about the town's only museum. Judging from their comments, Gentryville's populace wished to see a design that reflected the town's history and fit well within the neighborhood context. Some were more literal than others as evidenced in the following excerpts from the meeting minutes.

"In honor of Abraham Humphrey, use beaver pelts on the wall of the grand stairway."

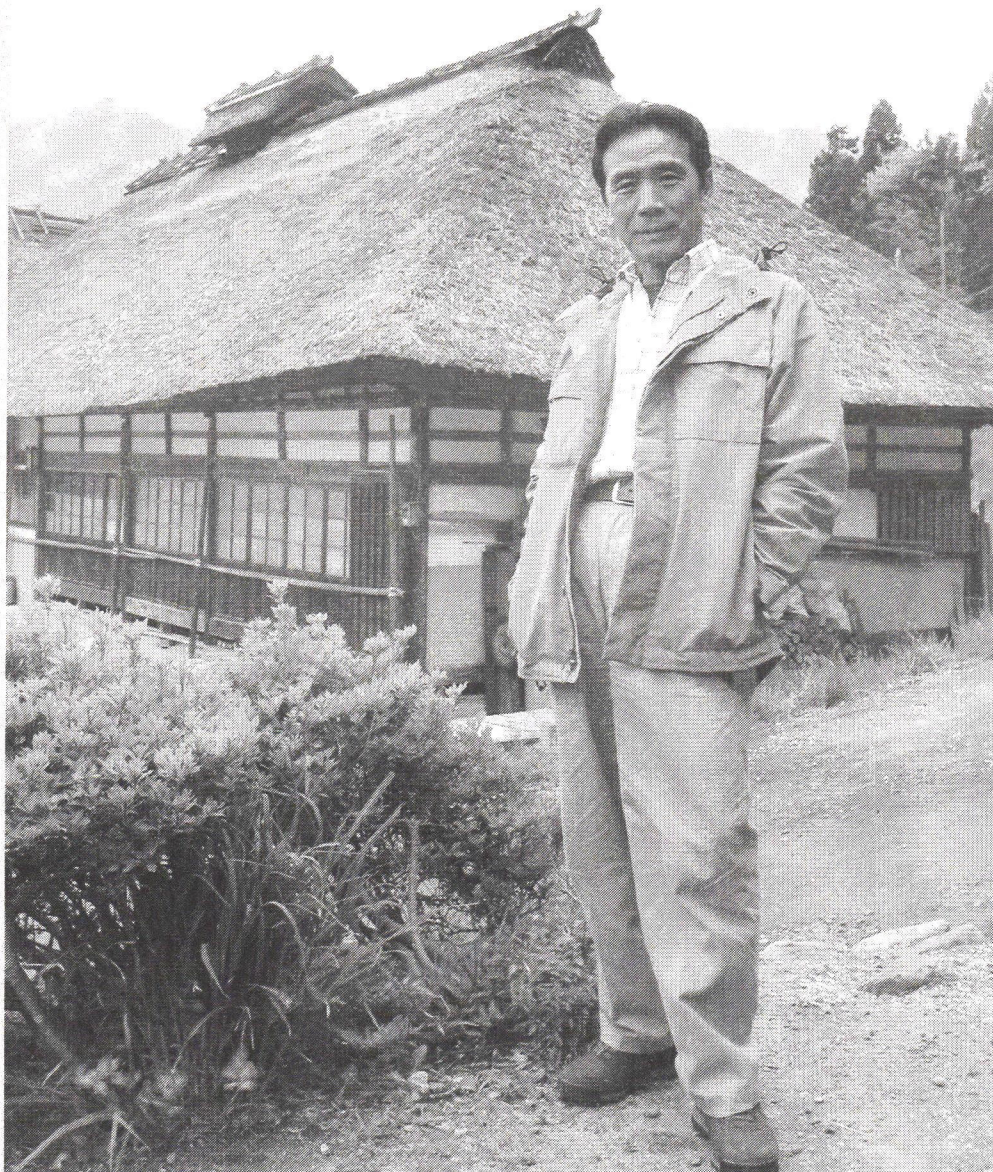
"Make it look like a giant log cabin to reflect our pioneering days on the frontier."

"What if the entry doors of the building looked like an exposed corset?"

"It should have a central stone hearth in the middle."

A Gentryville City Council member even proposed that her private collection of almost 1,000 horse tie-ups recovered from stops along the Pony Express be incorporated as public art.

Back in Japan, Ishii was contemplating kelp. To him it seemed so right as a theme for this design, and for Gentryville. An Ishii edifice would put Gentryville on the map. What a gift to a little-known, Midwestern town! The cutting-edge architect made a conscious decision not to research the founders or their controversial history. Instead he focused on the experiential aspects of the design. Specifically, the building would have an "internally meditative spatial arrangement, but with an outwardly expressive gesture to the world."



Internationally renowned architecture master and kelp aficionado, Sakae Ishii, in his native Japan.

## The controversial design provided just the opening that the local opposition needed.

To Ishii's way of thinking, juxtaposing the introverted town's community values with a blatantly extroverted façade would elevate people to a heightened sense of "world connectivity and unity." The most controversial element though was the "partial" demolition of the existing building. Ishii proposed that only half of one street front façade remain. Also, the three floor plates would be removed and replaced with blobular, bubble-like forms. Though this resulted in much smaller floor plates than the museum had planned, Ishii defended this programmatic shift with his aesthetic rationalizations. Kelp-inspired forms would cover the roof, spilling through and over the facade.

Although well intended, Ishii's design missed the mark when it came to satisfying the locals. The design was attacked as "too foreign" and disconnected from the public's vision of the building. Citizens cried foul at being sold one thing in the proposals but then receiving something completely different. The public's trust of the celebrity architect began to unravel rapidly, and even progressive Tran/Scend Associates felt it was a bit much for a Midwestern town to embrace.

The controversial design provided just the opening that the local opposition needed. A political action group called Citizens for Better Architecture (C:BA) formed to fight the Founders Museum. Members of the group showed up at every public meeting with alternative sketches, expressing the desired local "vernacular" design ideas desired by the general public. Through petitions, demonstrations and passionate letters to the editor, C:BA pushed toward their actual goal, which was to stop the museum entirely. For the group was less concerned about the museum's design than it was about the zoning changes that would accompany Wedgstrom Park. Within the referendum for building

the Founders Museum was a little-known provision that made the upzoning conditional to launching the project. C:BA leader Harmony Rivers described the language as "buried in mountains of legalese so no one would find it" – an accusation museum leaders vehemently denied.

"That's completely false," Ted Heller, the museum director said at the time of the controversy. "The museum and the Wedge district plan were openly sold as a package. Yes there is some private benefit, but there is an opportunity for the city to acquire open space for future generations to enjoy. To give up this chance would be ludicrous, and we will come to regret it."

Despite all the opposition, the Founders Museum was ultimately completed. Notable architecture critics lauded the design, and grand predictions were made for a new architectural awakening where the public would see that buildings could be more than meek, functional and pragmatic.

But even more damage was done in the public's mind when it was discovered that Mayor Laporte was actually the great-great-great grandson of Samuel Wedgstrom! That the mayor actually descended from one of the most controversial figures in Gentryville history was the tipping point. And the coincidence that both men had business connections tied to grand civic proposals was not lost on anyone. Public anger boiled over in the form of a recall vote against the Greater Wedge District Plan, which passed handily. So, history repeated itself as dreams for a grand civic space for Gentryville died at the hands of an indignant citizenry.



*ABC: Really?*

**RL:** Oh yeah. Remember, this is Missouri, a border state. Not the Canadian border, and not the Mexican border. This is the Mason-Dixon line honey. It probably didn't help when he unveiled his "kelp" scheme.

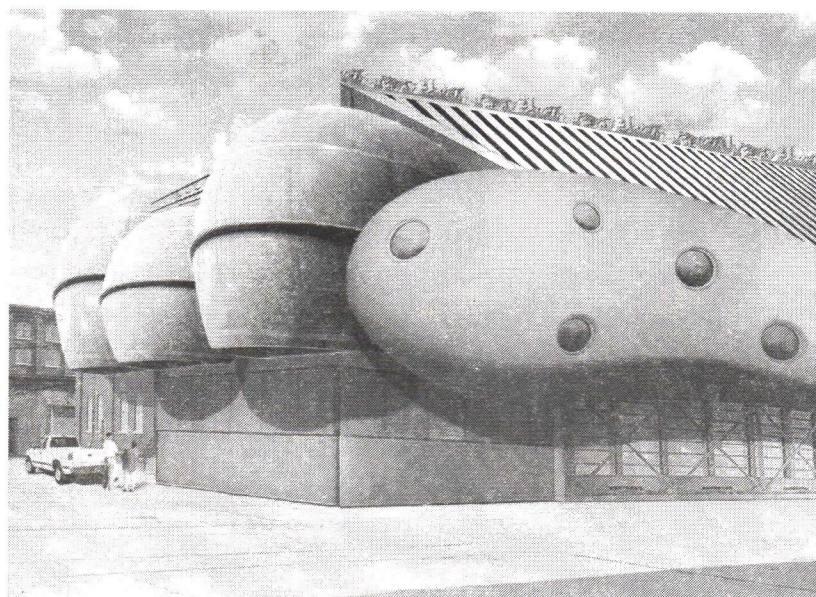
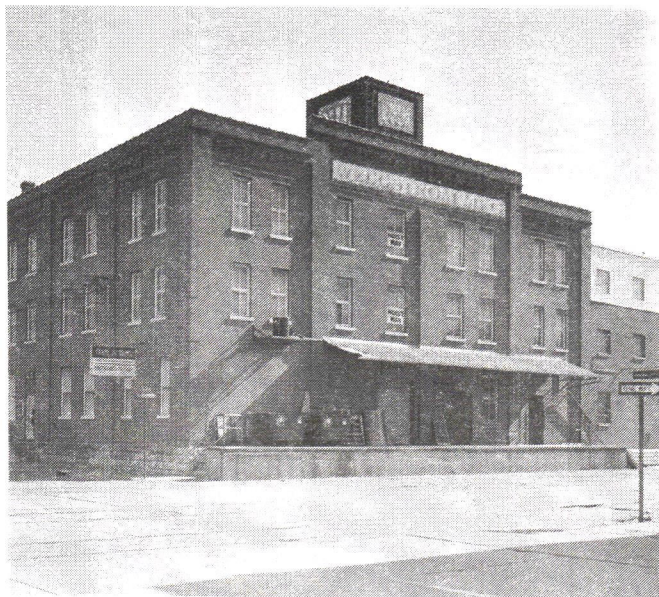
*ABC: I'm sorry, I thought you just said "kelp."*

**RL:** You heard me. Kelp. The building would evoke a theme of kelp, which reflected the irony of neo-modern spatial dramatics. Gentries started calling it the "sushi building" and the flames spread from there. It might have been too big of a jump, when you think about it now. We had been behind the times in terms of architecture debate, and the people were bombarded by "neo-ironic spatial dynamics." Lots of people just wanted a big log cabin, which was ridiculous of course, but they wanted "It's a Small World." Too much too fast, I guess.



Darius Reynolds, the national journalist says, "the public does not have the right to remain ignorant." Can you really be, in this day and age of information accessibility, ignorant? The government should help educate citizens on civic issues, but some of the responsibility lands on the people themselves. For instance, there are a lot of people that call themselves environmentalists but are really just hypocrites. They despise SUVs and urban sprawl. But, these same enviro-minded activists drive their Jeep Cherokees to the local town hall to fight urban development because it blocks their views, changes the neighborhood, or God forbid, lets a developer make a buck. These obstructionists gain political power with their big mouths. Their lips flap but provide very few solutions. This mix of liberal knee-jerk reaction, Reagan-era under-funding, and over-criticizing government has got to stop. It blocks the progress that our cities need.

The building would evoke a theme of kelp,  
which reflected the irony of neo-modern spatial dramatics.  
Gentries started calling it the "sushi building"  
and the flames spread from there.



While far from a "restoration" of the old Wedgstrom furniture factory (left) as called for in the initial brief, Ishii's controversial design of the Founder's Museum (right) has at least rejuvenated its immediate neighborhood.



**ABC:** *Your views sound fairly radical to me. What's happened to the public's respect for government?*

**RL:** I don't know. When we unveiled our 50-year strategic development plan for the city, a person stood up and said, "You planners and architects think you know it all." I thought, wait a minute. Would you go into a dermatologist's presentation and scream, "You dermatologists think you know about skin!" Of course they do, it's their job! Who else is supposed to know, for crissakes? Maybe I'm a bit of an elitist, but if a person has a degree and thirty years experience in a field, you defer to him or her. Make some comments to help out, but defer to him or her. We might have some explaining to do about the urban renewal of the 50s and 60s, but that was almost 50 years ago people. I've forgiven most of my doctors for the blood-letting leeches of their past.

**ABC:** *Can you learn from Seattle, or can Seattle learn from you?*

**RL:** In the end it's about choices, like I said before pay now or pay later. We were watching your transportation problems like a hawk. Heck, the whole country was. Now we're going to watch you try to build the solutions. You guys are about eight times the size of Gentryville, but we still can learn from big cities. Yet, we tend to watch cities like Boulder, Madison, Charlottesville, and Flagstaff. Remember, our weather here is close to atrocious—hot and humid in the summer and frigid in the winter. People aren't going to flock to Gentryville like they flock to the Sunbelt cities. We would have to make an amazing town to be attractive on a national scale. I was determined to try. I figured our history was the most intriguing, so I tried to build upon that. Add that to the fairly affordable land prices of the Midwest, and an idea grew. Seattle seems to be in a different situation.

**ABC:** *Yes. Very little history and expensive land.*

**RL:** Yes, but you have, by far, the most amazing setting of any city in the country. Too bad you copied Cleveland for the town part. Don't print that.

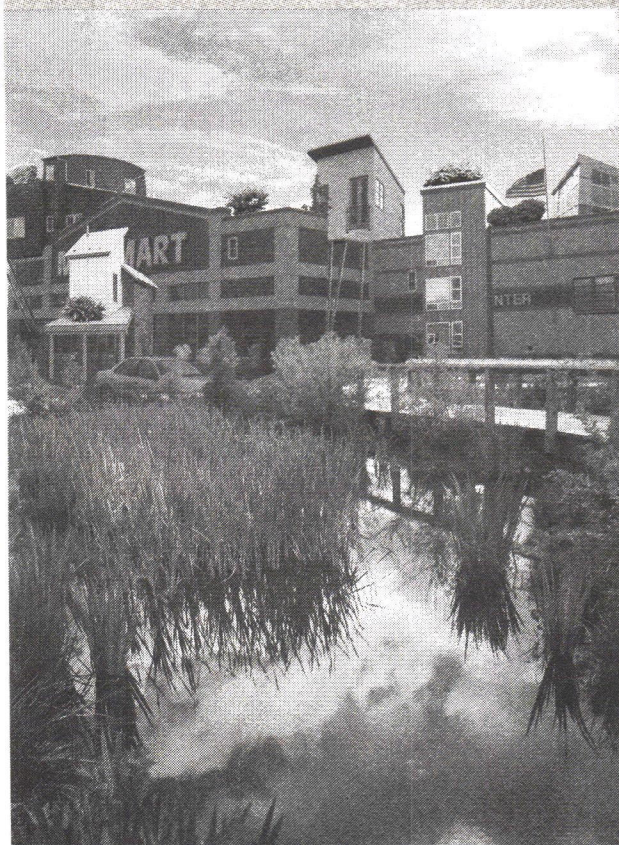
**ABC:** *We won't.*

**RL:** Yet, where are we supposed to find inspiration? I hope we can get it from anywhere, from all ends of the spectrum. On the local side, there's Country Club Plaza in Kansas City and University City in St. Louis. On the less-than-local side, we should look at Athens in 500 B.C., Beijing in 500 A.D., Kyoto in 1300 A.D., Philadelphia in 1776 and 1920s New York City. The information and how-to is out there, we just need to understand it and implement it. We need to creatively retrofit the knowledge of the ages and the success of our neighbors into our contextual frames.

But what really irks me are the collection of obstructionists that block any sort of change and take the wind out of any inspired ideas. They parade around in funky clothes and make silly furniture, and we're supposed to trust them with our city's future. They can paint up some old building façade, but they have a hard time helping a city change for the better. I won't name any names.



# BIG BOX RE-PACKAGED



is at HomeDepot- a new look for a new shopping center.

photo by David Wax

## ew MegaMart ansformed by tivistists' Group

Gentryville- A g  
activists has tak  
partially constru  
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the group, calle  
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lot to say about  
"Read it and we  
This is what it sh

In 1994, an attempt to open an urban supercenter in down-town Gentryville ended in defeat. The big-box retailer MegaMart spent over a million dollars in a public relations campaign to win over the town. Employing poll-tested rhetoric, the corporation touted the benefits their stores bring, such as new jobs and increased surrounding land values. However, a local grassroots group led by artist/activist Harmony Rivers saw through the lies and launched a community campaign that united the neighborhoods against the proposed supercenter. Construction was halted when the citizens found out that the retailer had illegally obtained an exemption from environmental and zoning regulations.

When Ms. Rivers and a group of artisan squatters took control of the unfinished MegaMart structure, the retailer retreated. But instead of resting after their victory, the squatters took their work to the next level as they brought tools and scrap materials to the site and began to transform the building. MegamArt Village, an artisan live-work co-op was created over the next two years. As a reporter for the Gentryville Gazette wrote, "the synthesis of David and Goliath could not have been greater."

Initially only temporary shelters were created, but when the mayor failed to curb their transgressions and even encouraged the council to pass the Squatters' Rights Ordinance, a more permanent architecture began to develop. For some, the exposed structure, big-box skylights and tall ceilings were the ideal setting for new artists lofts. Others were less concerned with the architectural constraints than in making political statements. Using abandoned materials and scrap, residents adhered dwelling pods and balconies like parasites to the tilt-up structure. Workshops grew like tumors across the acres of concrete floorplates and makeshift studios extended from the loading docks like prosthetic urban appendages.

The new walls, partitions and fenestrations were practically artworks in themselves, built from found materials such as glass, stone, chunks of recycled concrete, music CDs, and all manner of tiles. Vibrant mosaics swarmed across and covered up the MegaMart beige. Some designs seemed to take delight in celebrating the suburban sensibilities of the MegaMart. Astroturf lawn patches with lawn chairs and plastic flamingos greeted people in interior courts. Several "blue lights" adorned faux-porches, reflecting an odd nostalgia of sorts.



This isn't your father's MegaMart- the interior of the new artist colony  
Megamart (con't)

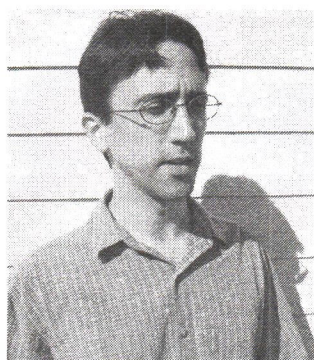
and they turn around and leave," Rivers says. Most of the puzzled people do, scratching their heads in disbelief. Some actually walk around and buy some art for their homes. None leave without a reaction. And that's exactly what Harmony Rivers wants. "Everyone has some

Public and private spaces meshed and intertwined, evocative of Piranesi's fantastic interiors. Gaudiesque sculptures masked the rooftop mechanical systems. A series of linked garden "pea patches" made a de facto green roof, with myriad pipes, gutters and drains intertwining to form a rainwater collection system. Outside, discarded shipping containers were converted to artisan candle shops, glass bong galleries and cafes. The asphalt parking lot was dug up and landscaped over with grassy bio-swales and marshes for stormwater treatment.

The creators of this revolution, the MegamArt squatters and their fellow artisans, redefined their own business culture that embodied a public spirit, local aspirations and environmental concerns instead of anti-competitive hegemony. An entirely new grassroots architecture was created in the skeletal husk of the invading corporate giant. The artisans now saw themselves as modern-day dragonslayers, ones who not only would, but should lead efforts to raise public awareness about the vernacular of Gentryville. This attitude was frequently at odds with the design community, not to mention Mayor Laporte himself. His early support of their neighborhood transformation efforts would come back to bite him in the following years.

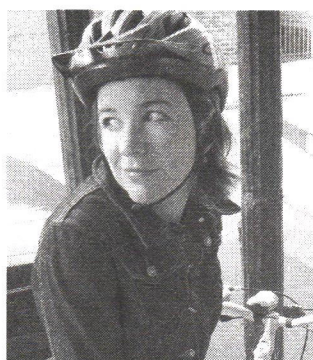
For though they were once the very catalyst of change, the group later vehemently opposed the changes that would be wrought in their neighborhood from the mayor's Greater Wedge District Plan. They once more took on "the system" to preserve their young community. But despite some initial victories, they ultimately lost to the steady march of growth and progress. The homes they'd created in the big box carcass eventually succumbed to the higher development demands of "highest and best use."

## abc: What is your verdict on the Founders Museum?



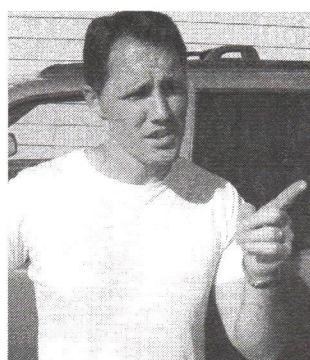
"Well, the neo-irony is lost on me, and I've even been to Japan. What does kelp have to do with Gentryville?"

KHRIS COCHRAN  
Actor/Dancer



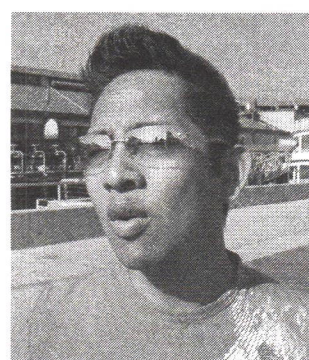
"My pet clinic used to be where the museum is now. Maybe I'll visit it once. Just once."

PAPRIKA KOWALSKI  
Veterinarian



"If you raise my fawkin' taxes one more time, I swear to bejesus I'll crack your ass."

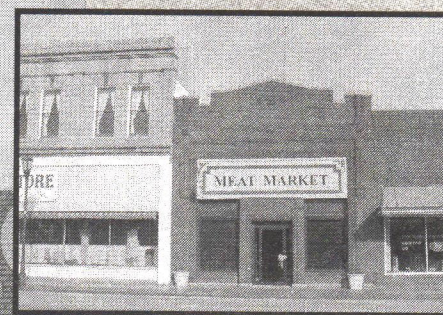
TONY MARONI  
Mechanic



"Is that what that thing is?"

ENRIQUE DE LA GUAPO  
Junior Accountant Assistant





Left: "Extreme Makeover" tactics confront small town America in a showdown on Main Street.

Below: A "guerilla art attack" asks some basic questions about basic human needs in our towns and cities.

## "We get lots of our of inspiration from home improvement reality shows on TV..."

"This is our greatest accomplishment to date!" she squeals as she points to what was going to be a MegaMart supercenter. Swathed in bright yellow stripes and covered with a myriad of materials from rusting steel panels to mirrors, the building is crowned with what looks like a giant twisted metal tiara. Looking at this barely recognizable superstore-that-wasn't, one could be forgiven for thinking that an alien home improvement store exploded on the downtown Gentryville site.

Harmony Rivers welcomes you to... MegamArt.

The transformation is the handiwork of a collective of quirky artisans and their passionate supporters. Laboring under the philosophy that "design can make a difference," these urban activists have made a grand and bold statement about urban design issues right in the heart of Gentryville.

This "big-box reclamation" is the culmination of three years of several large and many smaller urban interventions that Rivers's group has completed, and they've gained more and more attention with each new project. One of their first projects was a jarring commentary on the lack of public restrooms in Gentryville. To the dismay of public officials, one night the group placed 100 ceramic yellow painted toilets on the sidewalks of Main Street, complete with signs stating, "Downtown Gentryville welcomes your business."



Despite criticism decrying their efforts as "guerilla tactics," according to de facto leader Harmony Rivers, these artistic interventions are meant to inspire, create conversation and gather support for better design. "We are trying to make a statement and stand up for what we believe are needed improvements to the urban condition. If we don't take action and call attention to these important issues, who will?"

As design guerrillas, they've been known to completely refurbish dilapidated storefronts in downtown Gentryville overnight. Business owners showing up the next morning hardly recognize their own buildings. The artists covertly record these reactions, ranging from surprise to shock to livid anger, through digital video and photography. "We get lots of our of inspiration from home improvement reality shows on TV. But we're making an artistic statement as well," Harmony Rivers says. The photographs are often on display on the walls of the organic MegamArt coffee shop and roastery.

Surprisingly, to date only a few have called for tearing down the group's creations, despite the often shoddy construction. "It's a lot better than the typical strip mall," said one anonymous citizen.

The larger questions remain, however: Do these efforts truly elevate design, or can a twelve-hour makeover somehow be better than a carefully constructed building or renovation? And do tactics such as these only illustrate the lack of good design in our everyday community? Harmony Rivers for one feels that she's making an important difference: "I think design is introduced to the everyday conversation through these efforts. As a result, many people have flooded the hardware stores and junkyards to do their own makeover projects, and it's really increased awareness. I think we're going to see a real Renaissance."

The group recently took their efforts up another notch, however, when they formed a new political organization, Citizens for Better Architecture (C:BA), to fight the mayor's proposed Founders Museum / Wedgstrom Park plan. The

proposal would have upzoned much of the land adjacent to the "Wedge," including MegamArt Village, as part of a deal to create the park. Fearing the inevitable neighborhood gentrification that typifies such development and their subsequent eviction, C:BA targeted the museum as the keystone of the entire development plan. By swaying public support away from the project, they hoped that the larger deal would collapse. No museum and no new park; no "fancy new development" that would allow the experiment in big-box reclamation to continue.

Under the leadership of C:BA, The Greater Wedge District Plan was defeated in a recall vote. The development plan, born of a public-private deal, went down but the victory was short-lived. It wasn't too long before the growing regional economy heated up and the entire area eventually was upzoned anyway. MegamArt finally succumbed to development pressures as the increased zoning forced their inevitable notice for eviction. Today, Al Pollen is proceeding with his plans to redevelop his many Wedge district properties, including MegamArt, with speculative offices and high-end housing. Gentryville's citizens will most likely sit back and ponder the grand parl they didn't get.

In a recent interview conducted as she dismantled her hempskin yurt inside the doomed MegamArt, Harmony Rivers was philosophical at first: "Well, you know, change happens." But it wasn't long before her anger with the "system" came out in full. "We felt this so-called 'city beautification' project was a complete step in the wrong direction for Gentryville. The public costs outweighed the benefits, and our neighborhood was threatened. It was just another thinly veiled giveaway to developers. Unfortunately, they built that god-awful museum anyway and the neighborhood has been upzoned, but now there's no public park. So that stinks but at least we exposed the deal between big business and politics. And we remind people who gets left behind while the rich just get richer. I'll always be proud of that."



## Voice your educated opinions and act upon them. Change your mind, and change your city.

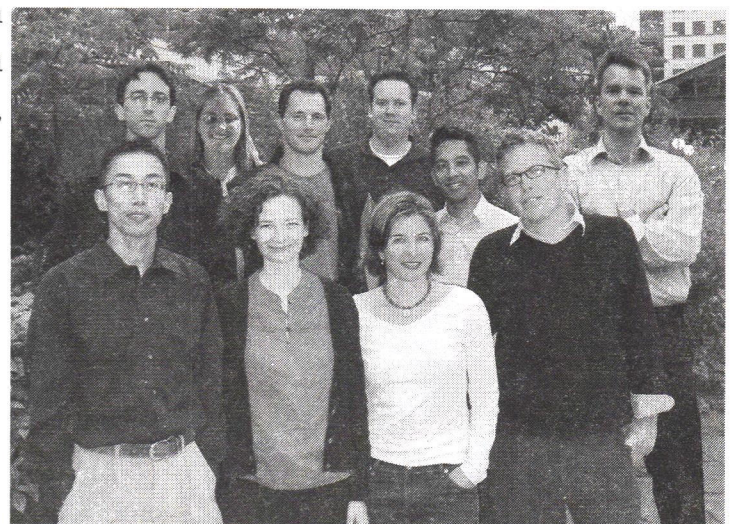
**ABC:** *Your talk of change is very ambitious.*

**RL:** No, it isn't. You can walk into any library or go onto the Internet and find a thousand examples of good planning and development. Notice how I put a time frame, or a date, next to the historical cities. Cities are constantly changing, and will always change. People have this strange subconscious predetermination that cities are huge slugs that change mysteriously and infrequently. You can't tell me that 1978 Manhattan and 1998 Manhattan are not drastically different. That's only twenty years, in our largest American city! The economics were in line, the leadership was in line, the planners were in line, and the people were fairly in line. Vail, Colorado was a sheep pasture. Ten years later it was the premier ski resort in the country, for better or for worse. I won't mention the speed of Las Vegas' growth and change.

Walk into any magazine store today. You have articles about the "10 Healthiest Cities in America," "The Top 10 U.S. Cities," "Best Cities for Singles," "Best Places to Live 2002," "Best City for This" and "Best City for That." Most of it is propaganda, but some have some great insight on what people are investigating. Heck, it's just great to see the issues and discussion out and about. Remember the 1980s attitude of suburban flight? You didn't see analysis of "Best Cities for Rock Climbing," you saw movies like "Escape from New York," and "Escape from L.A." Why did E.T. land in the suburbs? Because it was safe out there. People thought he would have gotten killed if he landed in Detroit in 1983. It has taken us some time to get over that stigma of the "dangerous inner city."

**ABC:** *Those are some crazy opinions.*

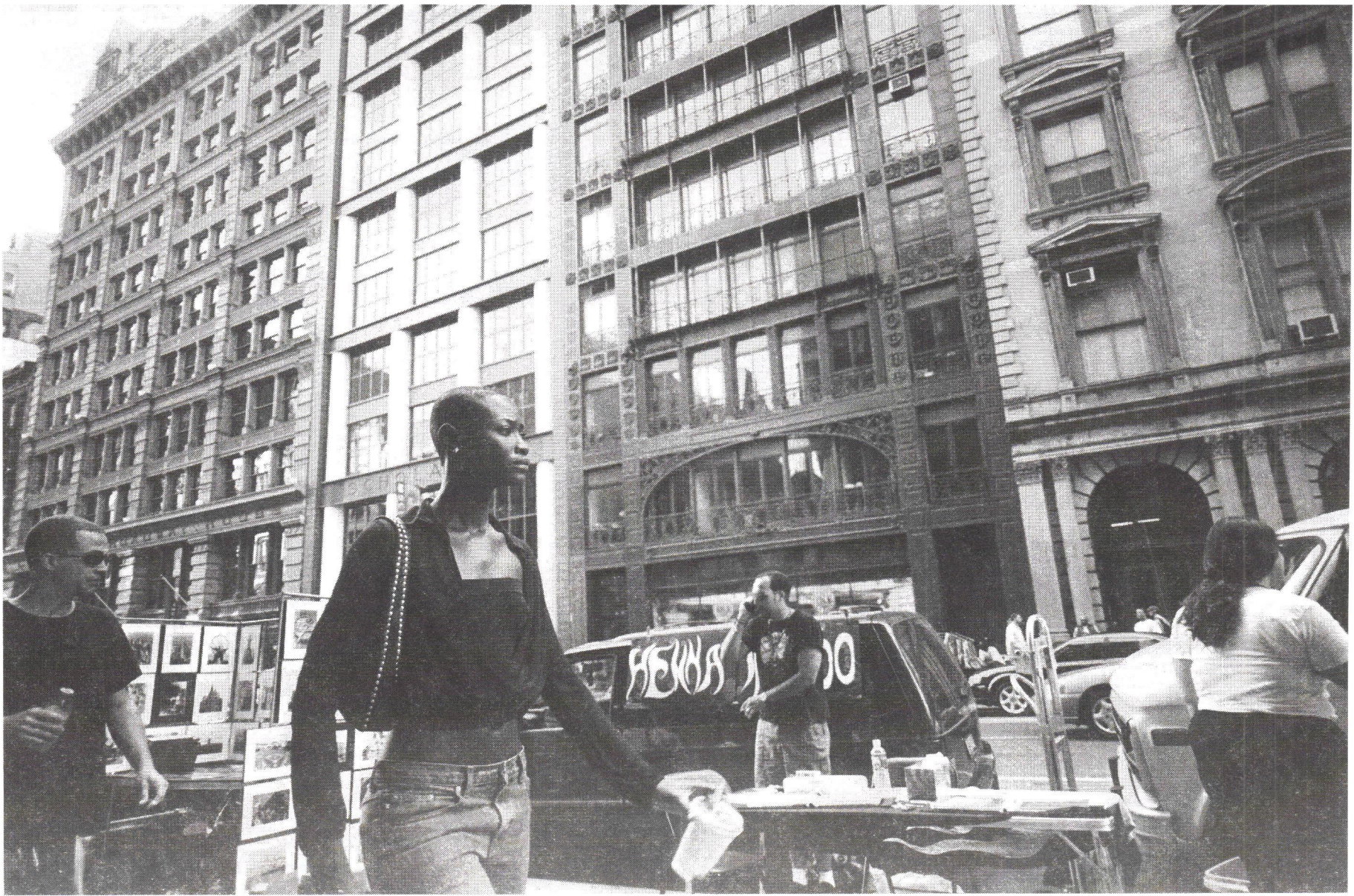
**RL:** Oh God, thank you. That's the biggest compliment that you can give me. If I had one wish, it would be that everyone find an opinion and express it. An educated opinion. Voice your educated opinions and act upon them. Change your mind, and change your city. Listen, I'm a fictional mayor in a fictional town in a fictional article. An imaginary mayor's gotta do what an imaginary mayor has gotta do. If I can't speak the truth, who can?



*action: better city is dedicated to fostering and exploring the ideas that link Seattle and its environment, the connections of its downtown neighborhoods, and the potential for unique public spaces.*

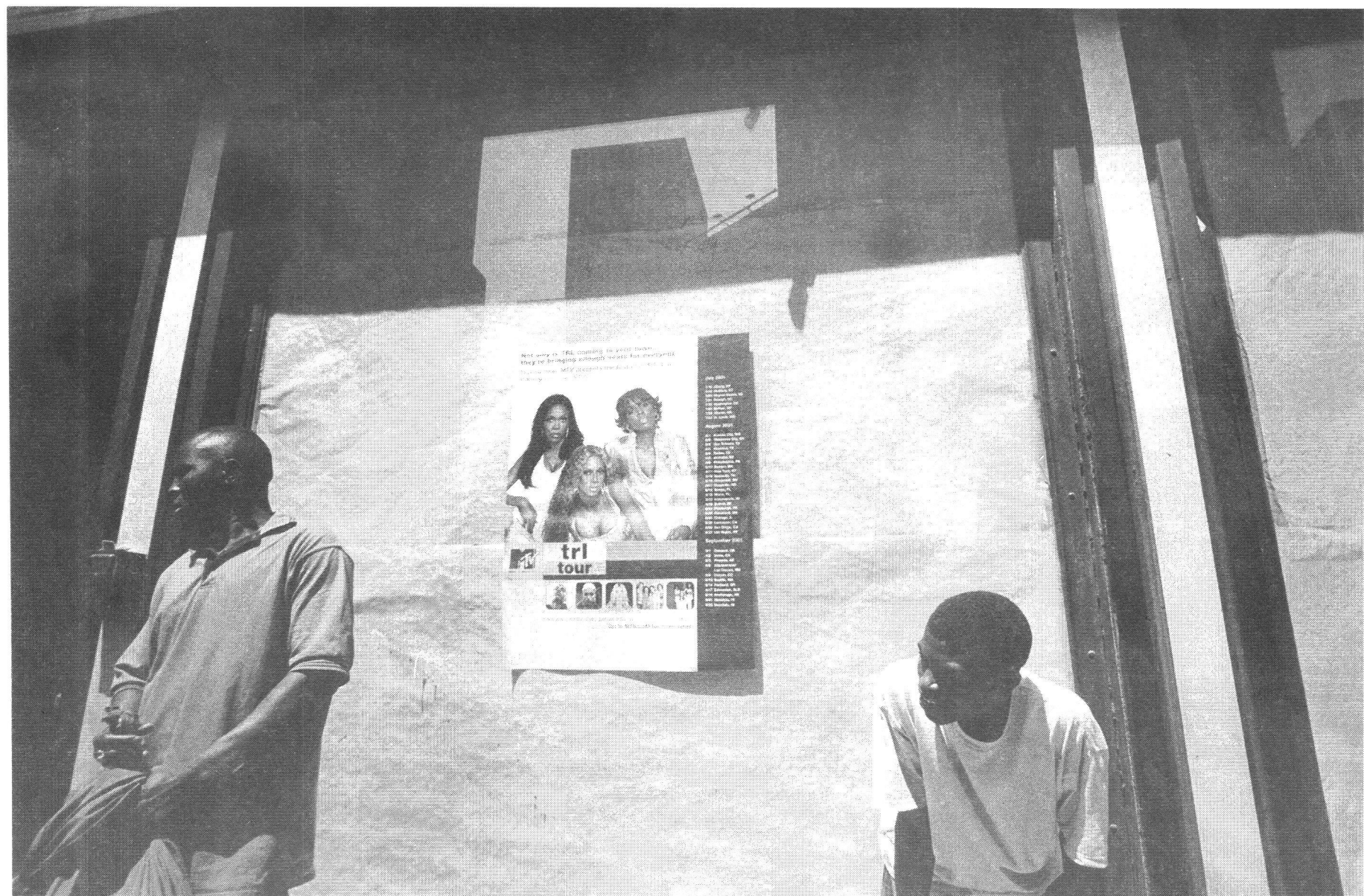
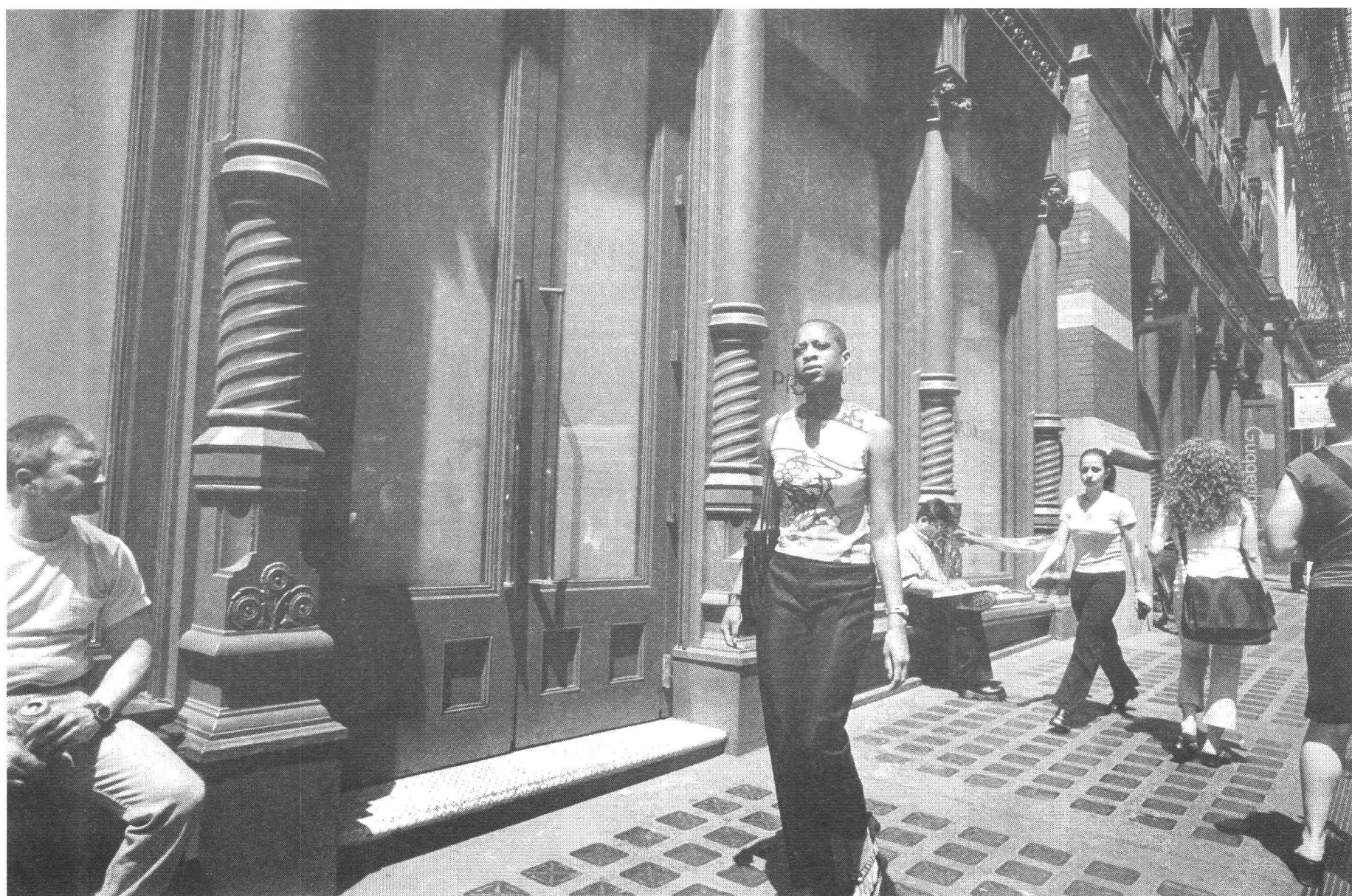


New York: City as Mise en Scène MICHAEL BURNS





The city is a discourse, and this discourse is actually a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it. —Roland Barthes



Michael Burns is photographer living in Seattle. His award winning work has been exhibited internationally over the past thirty years. Michael is currently working on a series of streetscapes.



# ON ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM

Dear Editor,

It is with alarm that we have recently learned that, for reasons yet to be fully explained, both Sheri Olson and Mark Hinshaw have been dropped from their roles writing about architecture and urban design for our two major dailies. Ironically, this comes at a time when Seattle faces an unprecedented number of challenges and opportunities in the development of our built environment. As we momentarily bask in the glow of such newly completed icons as the Seattle Central Library, Civic Center and Experience Music Project, we also face critical long-term issues including the uncertain future of Seattle's waterfront, a crisis of vision for a public transportation network, and outdated land use code and design standards for private development, all of which have led to unflattering comparisons of our downtown with those of Vancouver and Portland.

How do we expect to achieve a better-designed built environment without frequent published opinion and public discourse about the good, the bad and the ugly of what's around us and what's on the drawing board? We at ARCADE do not wish to become the sole local publisher of architectural opinion and believe that the community loses out when architecture and design are not examined in the mass media. A better-informed and educated public makes better decisions about public projects and is able to exert more dramatic influence on private ones. These topics are now more than ever worthy of wide-reaching daily, or at least weekly, news coverage. We need multiple voices, we need them frequently, and they need to speak more loudly than ever.

Board of Trustees and Editorial Committee  
ARCADE / Architecture and Design in the Northwest  
30 June 2004

The subject of this issue's Opinion section was precipitated by recent events at Seattle's two daily newspapers: *The Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. After more than 12 years as their invited architecture and urban design feature writer, local architect Mark Hinshaw was asked to stop submitting articles for publication in *The Times*. The reason given was that the paper was moving in a new direction that included using "staff" writers to cover architecture and urban design. Sheri Olson, freelance architecture critic to the *P-I*, was threatened with a lawsuit by a disgruntled architect whose building she reviewed last April (*Seattle P-I*, 04.12.04, "On Architecture: Mediocre apartment-retail building misses an opportunity to be a star"). Because the *P-I* was unwilling to stand behind Sheri and the opinion they published, she opted to stop writing for that paper.

During this pivotal time in Seattle's development, it is unconscionable that our largest daily papers do not provide the public with critical and informed opinion on the built environment. We just opened a jewel of a public library and the world is taking notice. Yet other large projects that change the city forever escape careful and critical review from start to finish. Even now we continue to violate our urbanizing neighborhoods with cheap, atrociously and irresponsibly designed multi-family housing and mixed-use development at key locations.

For this section, we've solicited opinions from a number of informed individuals: David Dillon architecture critic for the *Dallas Morning News* since 1983, author of ten books and several plans, and contributing editor to *Architectural Record* and *Landscape Architecture*; Randy Gragg, journalist on architecture, urban design and urban history for *The Oregonian*, Portland's daily newspaper; Mark Hinshaw, Director of LMN Architects, former feature writer for *The Seattle Times* and frequent contributor to *Landscape Architecture Magazine*; Reed Kroloff, Dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane University and former Editor-in-Chief of *Architecture* magazine; Mitchell Schwarzer, Professor of Architectural History and Chair of the Department of Visual Studies at California College of the Arts; and Michael Sorkin, principal of the Michael Sorkin Studio and director of the graduate program in urban design at the City College of New York. Sorkin is a contributing editor for *Architectural Record* and was, for ten years, architecture critic for the *Village Voice*. The section will be introduced by Suzanne Stephens, writer, critic, and special correspondent to *Architectural Record* and professor of architectural criticism at Barnard College.

We strongly urge you to send us your opinion on the Seattle situation specifically, and on the state of architectural criticism generally. Please write the editor at [kelly@arcadejournal.com](mailto:kelly@arcadejournal.com). Letters and comments will appear in our December issue.

ARCADE



# The Precarious State of Architectural Criticism in the Popular Press

SUZANNE STEPHENS

We all love to rue the sad state of architectural criticism in the United States. As dire as the situation is, it probably isn't much different than it was a hundred or so years ago. (But that's another story.) The position of architectural criticism has never been particularly strong, owing to factors embedded in the cultural and commercial context. Several essays in the following pages explain quite succinctly that context with regard to the current situation. Other essays aptly address the nature of evaluative criteria and the methodological approaches that architectural critics employ to influence the making of the built landscape. No essay, however, fully comes to grips with the one aspect of architecture that continues to irk and excite: beauty. But more about that later.

Mitchell Schwarzer's summation of the difference between the way in which architecture is treated in newspapers and magazines versus art forms such as film, paintings and sculpture, books or live performances, swiftly cuts to the core of the problem. Since the latter group appears in multiple editions, it has a greater audience of buyers: newspaper and magazine reviews serve as a guide to the public's purchasing either the object or a ticket to the performance. In turn, the reviews are better supported by advertising than the one-off architectural work. As a solution, Schwarzer suggests inserting architectural coverage into other sections of the newspaper, such as real estate, house and garden, and travel sections. The idea sounds tempting, but criticism of the arts has a longer tradition in newspapers—dating back to the early appearance of newspapers, first in Europe in the 18th century, and then America in the early 19th century. The relatively newer journalistic topics of real estate, travel, and houses and gardens, are even more service-oriented than films and books, and lack the tradition of being a reviewed art form. Because of the implicit role of such service or feature writing — to inform, or tell a story (with a happy ending) — the resistance from editors and advertisers to experiment with a critique of the subject could be overwhelming.

Reed Kroloff's point that the vapidness of architectural criticism owes much to architecture's weak position within the arts or the building trades is well taken. The profession's own anxieties about architecture's status encourage its ambivalence regarding the need for criticism, especially the negative type. Architects naturally love spicy dissections of their colleagues' work, but hate it when those critiques are directed toward their own buildings.

Interestingly, Randy Gragg attributes the former architecture critic of the *New York Times*, Herbert Muschamp, with having had enormous power, particularly with regard to decisions about the planning of the World Trade Center site. Did the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation really initiate the Innovative Design Study competition, in August 2002, which Daniel Libeskind ultimately won, because, as Gragg asserts, it got wind that the *New York Times* was going to come out with its own proposal a month later, fashioned by an all-star team? If so, the LMDC must have been shocked to finally discover that the *Times* team had concentrated much more on sites along West Street than making decisions about the planning of the World Trade Center site. Most observers would have said that the genesis for LMDC's Innovative Design Study owed most to the Town Meeting held July 20, 2002, particularly since the public participants had been so clear about their denunciation of LMDC's earlier efforts.

Reed Kroloff suggests that the critic's lack of formal training in many instances would account for a namby-pamby business among architecture and design writers. Formal training helps, to be sure, but many writers trained as architects are just as reluctant to go out on a limb with criticism. Criticism requires spunk, and a penetrating, tell-it-like-it-is commitment to the harsh truth. More than that, writing

criticism is a lot harder and more time-consuming than journalism. Journalism offers enlightenment and entertainment, delivered with stylistic flourishes and often a story-telling narrative. It requires solid reporting, a clear structure, and the apt phrase. But, criticism (no surprise) demands deeper, harder thinking and the willingness to never stop asking why—which you the critic must answer, not an interviewed source. Many journalists are notoriously gregarious—the reason why they are good at interviewing, and getting and telling the story. Writing criticism means spending even more time alone. Even after your piece comes out and you find you have lost your recent new best friend...

Sorkin does come up with commendable advice regarding the critic's approach, and clarifies the evaluative criteria by which a critic should assess the building, such as its environmental safety, the needs of the users, whether or not public good is being served by the building, and how it fits into the urban whole. With such an approach the critic should be armed with the intellectual and moral artillery to go out and disseminate solid architectural criticism to the real world. But success depends on whether it is read by the public.

True, the public loves reading morality tales—for example, about overreaching ambition and greed that lead to downfall of powerful titans who have prayed on the weak. But architecture's morality tales may not always be so dramatic. The architectural equivalent to Enron doesn't happen every day or on the scale of big business or politics. Architecture would have more readers if it did.

Ironically the one ingredient of architecture that makes it so unique is the thing that Sorkin and Mark Hinshaw trust least. And it is the hardest thing to write about for the lay public, or even within the architectural community. Sorkin calls it style, but in a back-door way, he seems to be referring to aesthetics, or the desire for beauty: that which delights the eye (and the mind). Architecture that is a pleasure to walk through, owing to the uplifting, awe-inspiring use of space, form, and light, the craft of construction, the elegance of its details, and the nature of materials, separates it from the rest of the built world. A play on any of these elements, along with unpredictable effect of new forms, allows architecture to offer an experience not usually found in the man-built landscape. Yet aesthetics and beauty are still viewed with suspicion, even in this oft-acknowledged "visual" culture. They are relegated to matters of style, not only by Sorkin, but by those suspicious of the seduction of beauty and its appropriation by the commodity-oriented culture. In the 19th century some critics linked art to luxury and to moral decadence. Certain things never change. But writers in recent years (Dave Hickey, Denis Donoghue, Elaine Scarry) have been reanalyzing beauty. Although they write about it from within the disciplines of art, literature and philosophy, rather than architecture, the implications are the same: beauty as a value deserves a place along with its long-time companions, truth and goodness.

Explaining why a work of architecture should or should not be called beautiful is difficult, because evaluation of a building involves the interplay of subjective emotions and objective underlying standards. Beauty can't be created according to rules or a formula. Yet on the other hand, underlying principles guide and condition it so that a *sensus communis* can give some form of objectivity to "taste." This is an arduous task for a critic. After he or she has come to terms with the work of architecture, then the assessments have to be presented in a clear, straightforward, "interesting" way. The critic can't bore the reader or mystify him or her. The critic has to keep the debate open, and keep devising fresh approaches and evaluations as new forms of beauty emerge.

Suzanne Stephens, special correspondent to *Architectural Record*, has been teaching a seminar on architectural criticism at Barnard College since 1982. A long-time writer for both professional and general-audience publications, she wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on American architectural criticism between 1850 and 1915.



## Advice to Critics

MICHAEL SORKIN

### Always Visit the Building

A photograph is not worth a thousand words, although many millions have been generated from them. There simply is no replacement for prowling the premises. Use all your senses. Be intrusive. Open doors and windows. Climb to the roof. Circumnavigate. Look at the thing from nearby and from afar. Knock on the walls. See what people are doing.

### Style Is Seldom the Issue

Style is what architects and editors generally prefer you to write about. Not that expression is unimportant, simply that it often conceals more than it expresses. Architecture is utility made beautiful. Connoisseurship risks buggering flies, valuing things based on narrower and narrower criteria. God may reside in the details but people tend to live in the house: wallpaper will not put the wall back in plumb or block the sound of the neighbor's arguing. Indeed, Halliburton headquarters (or Saddam's palazzi) may be gorgeous but that isn't exactly the point. Don't get caught defending the indefensible by too much fascination with form.

### Credit Effects, Not Intentions

Architects always tell a good story. And, certainly, one should listen with care and take note of any worthwhile ideas. But the recent history of theorizing and criticism of architecture is overloaded with the authority of intent. Architects read philosophy and attempt to make form from it. Not a problem — inspiration comes from wherever you find it. But sources confer no special authority: no amount of special pleading on behalf of a fantasy of philosophical immanence that can overtake the greater importance of how a building behaves. Strangeness can be a virtue and is often a leading characteristic of the new. A critic, however, should arrive on the scene with a quiver full of her own values and take her best shot, not be a conduit for someone else's delusions.

### Think Globally, Think Locally

Architecture is deeply implicated in the world's environmental crisis. It consumes more energy, uses more materials, and radiates more heat than anything else we do. To fail to note this particular effect of building is to abrogate one's critical duties. A good way to think about this is in terms of a building's "ecological footprint." How much of the earth's resources does it consume and to what end? How many degrees does it heat the air around it? How much energy is required to produce all that titanium? How much of the jungle disappears to line those elevator cabs with mahogany?

### Safety First

As physicians are counseled first to do no harm, so too must architects. The primary legal responsibility of builders — codified from Hammurabi down — is to assure the safety of those who use or encounter their buildings. This should be taken in the broadest possible sense. Buildings can kill in fires and earthquakes, but also in the cancerous off-gassing of toxic materials, in construction accidents, in the preparation of materials on far-off sites, and in the depressing effects of excluded sun and recirculated air. The effluent and heat produced by building and its operation have risky potential far away and have a duty to those at risk downstream. These issues are not trivial but central for critics and they should equip themselves to inventory such effects.

### Who Profits?

In our beloved capitalist system, buildings are generally not to be acts of charity. Private engorgement is what produces most of our built environment and profit is not known for its generosity. A critic is obliged to name as many names as possible of the real shapers of any work of architecture. These includes the bureaucrats who conceive and institutionalize degrading workplace relations, those who endanger the quality of the public realm by outright hostility or miserliness, those who do not understand the inevitable civic dimension of building, and those for whom all larger issues of the commonweal recede before matters of the bottom line. Numbers are important. The critic has a duty to cut through the mystification that conflates economical and cheap. Architecture must look beyond the depreciation cycle to understand its true worth. Real criticism is too important to be put in the real estate section.

### Consult the User

By user, of course, I mean in the first instance those who most regularly inhabit the building. Their opinions count and should be counted. Which is not to say that their taste should trump the critic's. However, inhabitant happiness is primary and their unhappiness highly significant. How is this to be assessed? To begin, people are to be given some credit for understanding the terms of their own comfort, convenience, and taste. Our consumption system, though, is founded on the provision of illusory choice; a million brands of soap, all the same. The suburbs, for example, may not be the unmediated expression of user desire. They are, rather, the collusion of many interests — many of them suspect. Our preferences are produced, not "natural," and a critic should make the case for real choices. I, for one, do not believe that obesity, diabetes, automotive pollution, highway mayhem, alienating commuting, isolation, segregation, and sprawl, represent the freely considered and chosen wishes of the people. This, rather, is the "wisdom" of the market.

### History Is Not Bunk

All building engages its context. Our architecture and settlement patterns represents a history of social compacts — entered with varying degrees of complicity — that physicalize human relations. Such compacts demand respect. There is, however, history and there is history. I remember a panel discussion ages ago where the virtues of the Lincoln Memorial were being extolled and classical architecture identified — in standard-issue Jeffersonian style — with democracy itself. An African American architect demurred. Those Corinthian columns reminded him not of freedom but the big house on the plantation. History is written by its victors who generally prefer to see its progress as positivistic and singular. But culture writes many histories all at once, and the critic must be acute in unraveling whose history is being served, and whose is being suppressed.

### It's The City Stupid

Critics should be careful about imputing too much meaning to the object of architecture. Since we love it, we tend to exaggerate its consequence as a repository of social and philosophical codes, and its power to set agendas for human interactions. This devolves frequently into angel-counting irrelevance. While our building practice does tend to ossify living and gender relations, and to reproduce the structures of class, the big picture can only be observed by looking at the big picture. To understand America (or India or Russia or Ancient Rome) it is critical that small patterns be tested against large and vice versa. Our convention (after Alberti) is to understand the city as a big house but this is wrong. Scaling up, more meanings are absorbed and more perspectives available. Just as our own personalities are formed in interaction, so architecture is forged in the crucible of collectivity.



### Defend the Public Realm

The most important single task for architectural criticism is to rise in defense of public space. Threatened by the repressive sameness of global culture, contracted by breakneck privatization, devalued by contempt for public institutions, and victimized by the loss of habits of sociability, the physical arena of collective interaction — the streets, squares, parks, and plazas of the city are — in their free accessibility — the guarantors of democracy. Particularly now, as we are brow-beaten with the threat of terrorism into the surrender of more and more of our rights, the freedom of the city and the freedom of assembly — enshrined in the First Amendment — are in desperate need of all the friends they can find.

### Keep Your Teeth Sharpened

Courtesy is an important value, but a critic should prefer to be fair. But judiciousness should never trump candor, however, and a critic often needs to shout very loudly to be heard over the din of interests that surround the building process. The rapier will always defeat the noodle and almost always produce a better prose style.

### Play Your Favorites

This can, of course, get out of hand: a critic should not be a publicist or a slut. The point is that unbiased criticism isn't: the critic is out there to describe and defend a set of values in which s/he believes. If there are designers, builders, politicians, activists, or manufacturers who well embody these same values, they deserve special treatment. They also deserve to have their feet held to the fire if they falter in advancing them.

Michael Sorkin is principal of the Michael Sorkin Studio and director of the graduate program in urban design at the City College of New York. Author of over a dozen books on architecture and urbanism, Sorkin is also contributing editor for *Architectural Record* and was, for ten years, architecture critic for the *Village Voice*.

## The Possibilities and Failures of Architectural Criticism

RANDY GRAGG

It's hard to come up with a better summation of the possibilities and failures of architectural criticism than the recent performance of Herbert Muschamp writing about Ground Zero.

Outraged by the rush of the Lower Manhattan Development Authority and developer Larry Silverstein to master plan the area and replace the fallen World Trade Center with symbolically empty capitalist-realist buildings, Muschamp came out swinging, jabbing their schemes and then delivering the roundhouse punch: presenting two dozen alternative ideas by more than a dozen of the world's greatest architects in the *New York Times Magazine*.

Not since Ada Louise Huxtable rallied the public against the rise of the Pan Am Building in Midtown Manhattan had a *Times* critic so fully thrown the Gray Lady's full weight behind an architectural decision. Further persuaded by the dissatisfaction voiced by the families of the dead, the development authority ultimately restarted the entire design process with an international design competition. It was a massive success, at least in terms of rallying the public behind more ambitious architecture. Tens of thousands packed the competition's presentations, filed past its exhibits and voted on its Web site. What emerged was a far more inspired scheme, if not the best one. And if one person can be singled out for the most credit, it would surely have to be Muschamp.

The only problem is, he didn't follow up.

Daniel Libeskind's poetic winning master plan has been tortured by all the usual monsters of reality, from infrastructure demands to technical feasibility to developer efficiencies. His scheme never received any real political muscle from Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Libeskind's own lack of practical and political experience didn't help. Muschamp lauded Libeskind's competition entry, then turned against it to support Rafael Viñoly's entry, and, finally, when Libeskind won, abandoned the entire process. After that, the *Times* returned to mere journalistic observation with no critical scrutiny whatsoever. Gradually, then speedily, Libeskind's master plan has deteriorated into a scheme differing little from the original pushed by the development authority and Silverstein.

Muschamp is now leaving the *Times*. Good riddance, says I. During his 12-year tenure at the paper, he wrote lots of thought-provoking phrases about architecture. But his only effective *advocacy* beyond promoting a few of his favored stars was waged during the Ground Zero debate in a battle he failed to finish.

Muschamp's laziness and malfeasance aside, the scenario is hardly unique. Of any architecture critic, those who work for newspapers arguably have the greatest potential power to rally the public behind or against architectural decisions. Critics flex their muscles all the time, but rarely do they trigger much change. The reasons are many. Most works of criticism are appraisals published only *after* their subjects are built. With most criticism written about individual and often specialized buildings rather than the infrastructure and urban design that the public interacts with every day, its readership is either fleeting or small or, most often, both. And even for that handful of critics who address the more common urban development projects — in *advance* of their being built — there is seldom a tandem public political forum for readers to apply pressure for change.

The problem is systemic. Most newspaper critics write for the arts pages, their work appearing next to reviews of theater, music and visual art with which architecture has almost nothing in common (Goethe and every architect who's described himself an artist notwithstanding). Though buildings certainly have aesthetic contours, they are built from economics, politics and ego. Most newspapers in America are shy about mixing the news from those realms with opinion except on the editorial pages. Hence, the handful of newspaper architecture critics — fewer than 50 in the country — labor in a kind of limbo: They are able to push the arts pages only so far toward the powers that define architecture, and the news pages only so far towards a judgement of aesthetics that, in the end, might really matter. As much as the *New York Times* established the precedent of architecture criticism with Huxtable's extraordinary work in the 1960s, the paper has steadily lowered that early high standard of newsmanship, technical savviness and fearlessness, first with the tweedy, albeit well-written, work of Paul Goldberger and then the obscure intellectual palpitations of Muschamp.

Don't get me wrong. I have enormous respect for many of my colleagues around the country — to name a few, Blair Kamen at the *Chicago Tribune*, David Dillon at the *Dallas Morning News* and John King of the *San Francisco Chronicle* (the latter being the only laborer in the field to label himself an "urban design writer"). But none of them measures up to my heroes: Huxtable at the *Times*, Allan Temko at the *S.F. Chronicle* and, in his heyday at the *Village Voice*, Michael Sorkin. Each wrote blistering criticism aimed at buildings and architects, but also at the political and economic powers behind them. (Temko's incisive and often hilariously funny work sometimes even appeared on the *Chronicle's* front page! Reading Sorkin, I often wondered how he avoided being buried in a bag of lyme in a New Jersey landfill.) Sadly, for now, that kind of newspapering *and* political dialogue has fallen out of fashion when it comes to architecture.

In my own writing on Portland, I've been both blessed and cursed. Like a headstrong kid determined to get his way, I wore down my editors at *The Oregonian*,



who were reticent to back a full-time architecture beat. But I think I may have created a recipe worth considering for establishing relevant architecture coverage, at least by newspapers and cities with none. I've attempted to apply the lessons of Huxtable and Temko but adapted it to Portland's polite culture, attempting to sow seeds of architectural concern into the city's extraordinarily well-developed culture of political participation. In over 12 years of part-time and full-time writing on architecture, I've written only a handful of reviews of finished buildings and have instead focused on projects before the city's design commission. I've written numerous articles on the city's distinctive urban features, identifying opportunities and pushing for unique architectural expressions. I've won some battles, for instance, tossing the first rock in what eventually grew into a public stoning of a proposal for a 12-story parking garage on a piece of land long designated to be a public park. My relentless harping on the need for the best possible design solution for Portland's soon-to-be-built aerial tram resulted in the city's first international design competition in 20 years.

But those successes diminish against the sad reality that Portland currently has none of the political or economic clout and, more importantly, *none* of the ego to build any great architecture. Arguably only one significant work of architecture has been built in Portland during my tenure—the Wieden + Kennedy Headquarters by Allied Works. And I can safely say I played no role in its creation whatsoever. For all my harping about the urgent need for great design, opportunity after opportunity has been squandered. Politicians and developers still aren't hiring great architects. For the most part, they aren't even supporting good ones to do their best work.

My solace? I have the best job I can imagine as a journalist in a city like Portland. I get to write about things that will shape the city for decades. It's fun, it's hard, it's an incredible responsibility and, in all earnestness, it's an honor. From the number of readers I hear from each week, there is clearly a profound hunger for a better world of buildings than those which architects, developers and politicians are delivering. Few people understand how their world is being built, much less how they can participate in shaping it. Hopefully someday an opportunity will come to mobilize this constituency behind something great, or at least the possibility of it.

That's why Muschamp's performance was so deeply aggravating. He had his chance — and ours — to play that role. He began, but then he quit.

Randy Gragg writes on architecture, urban design and urban history for *The Oregonian*, Portland's daily newspaper. He has written on design for a wide array of magazines including: *Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, *Metropolis*, *American Heritage*, *Harper's* and the *New York Times Magazine*.

## A Conversation with David Dillon

*The following is an excerpt from a conversation between ARCADE and David Dillon on the subject of the current state of architectural criticism.*

One role of a critic is to act as an intermediary between the profession and the public, translating the ideas of one into the language of the other. The public cares intensely about the built environment, and is hungry for information on design. Critics can ask the tough questions that others, for various reasons, cannot. They create a forum for discussion of design, which is essential to any growing city. Architecture is, after all, the most public of the arts and ought to be the focus of public discussion.

I've been supported by the *Dallas Morning News*. I'm not limited in what I write, and feel that I have advocates at the top. I've been threatened with lawsuits

a number of times, and the paper has always stood behind me. Unless an opinion is intentionally inaccurate or malicious, it's probably protected by the First Amendment. It's essential that a critic raise the bar of public discourse. It's important to have support from the top, but a journalist can't be afraid to express strong opinion just because it might be controversial. They have to get their facts right, they shouldn't take the cheap shot, but critics are paid to make judgments, not please or appease their audience. If you want to be liked, don't be a critic. You have to make the hard calls.

There's a lot of good design and art in Seattle, such as McCaw Hall, Steven Holl's Chapel at the University of Seattle, Koolhaas's new Seattle Central Library. This is serious work that deserves to be talked about. Architecture in Seattle is news, not esoteric mumbo-jumbo. The city's lack of informed architecture criticism in its papers, or strong voices for the built environment, is not so different from Dallas in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The city was being rebuilt overnight, and nobody was saying anything about it. Seattle shouldn't be reading about its cultural life only in the *New York Times* or the *Dallas Morning News*. There should be challenging local analysis — responsible journalism — of the local culture, which includes architecture. Seattle should be proud of what it is doing and willing to examine everything — the good, the bad and the ugly.

There are maybe a dozen newspapers in the country that have a dedicated architecture beat. Many others use their arts writer to cover architecture. I don't see the ranks growing but this may be a result of the economy. Architectural criticism shouldn't be labeled elitist; it's basic stuff, and should be accorded the same status as education, business and political affairs.

A city is diminished without strong public opinions. If no one's willing to step up to the plate and make the tough calls, then everything turns to mush. Architectural journalism is both news and opinion. It presents an image of the city.

David Dillon has been the architecture critic for the *Dallas Morning News* since 1983. He has written ten books, the new plan for Washington DC, *Extending the Legacy*, and the new plan for the White House and President's Park. He is a contributing editor to both *Architectural Record* and *Landscape Architecture*.

## All the Architecture That's Fit to Print

MITCHELL SCHWARZER

We often lament the dearth of newspaper criticism on architecture. Out of hundreds of dailies in America less than fifteen have an architecture critic on staff. The papers that employ an architecture critic don't even run many articles. For the American public who read newspapers architecture is a word and world rarely encountered. Of course, architecture is feted and fussed over in professional and academic journals. But the ranks of these journals have shrunk in recent years, and they have never held crossover appeal for the general public.

The reason for the paucity of newspaper architectural reviews is that the format has little to do with the immediate decisions of readers. Architecture simply doesn't fit the marketplace style of the daily paper. A comparison with coverage of the other arts exposes this situation.

An unlimited number of copies can be made of a work of literature, music or film. Books, cds or dvds are meant to be sold. Newspaper reviews help sell them, or discourage their sales. In addition to describing a work, book, music, or film, reviews recommend consumer action. We don't go to all the movies we read about nor do we buy all the books that we peruse in the book review section of the paper



But in reading these reviews we are attentive to the possibility of a purchase.

In the other visual arts, newspaper reviews are also directed toward some action on the part of the reader. Most paintings or sculptures are written about as part of a larger exhibition, not as solo works. A gallery is showing the work of an artist. Or a museum is mounting a thematic or monographic exhibition. In either case, a consumer purchase lurks as an option. One might go to the gallery and buy one of the works in question. Or one might purchase a ticket to the museum. The possibilities for procuring reproductions of the works also count as strong incentives for the reader / consumer.

Newspaper reviews for these arts are accompanied by advertisements. Large parts of the book review section consist of ads for books, put out by presses. The film section similarly lists theater showtimes and locations. Ditto with music. Visual arts reviews are usually accompanied by gallery announcements. The menu becomes richer when we add the extraordinary synergy between restaurant reviews, restaurant ads, and other food-related stuff.

What about architecture? Where is the consumer-oriented coverage of new building? Where are the related advertisements? What would the ads even consist of?

Paradoxically, the most expensive of the arts to realize in finished form, architecture is the most invisible in the newspaper.

An explanation must start with architecture's essential attributes. Buildings are fixed in place and singular in number. They can't be easily moved and possess little exchange value as mobile commodities; the price of a building has almost nothing to do with its artistic value and all to do with its location and spatial dimensions. What's more, buildings can't be reproduced as multiples; it's hard to collect buildings unless one buys them. While architects use reviews of their buildings to court wealthy clients, the average newspaper reader is not about to commission a bathroom remodel by Frank Gehry. Buildings also can't take on a life in performance and ticket sales. Nor do many museums or galleries put on exhibitions of architecture. The list of architecture curators at American museums is even smaller than the list of newspaper critics.

Architectural reviews present readers with a building that's not for sale, that can't be reproduced, and that can't be moved: a building wedded to its place in the landscape; a building alone, as it were, without a ticket booth or store.

But what about other sections of the paper? Aren't buildings regularly featured in the home/garden, real estate, and travel sections? Should these formats be considered a form of architectural criticism?

The home/garden section of the paper has blossomed in recent decades. Architecture finds a place here, but not as a removed aesthetic object. Instead, buildings become part of the flow of consumption and action. We read less about architects' intentions and more about clients' desires. Readers become vicarious designers. It's not as if noteworthy buildings are entirely absent. It's just that they become the "celebrity" models for individual dreams and decisions.

Newspaper readers look to the real estate section for advice on buying and selling buildings. Again, the commentary here has less to do with aesthetic matters than with economic evaluation – location, square footage, zoning, condition, etc. Amid the facts and figures, though, real estate sections contain a great deal of architectural and urban information. While sales blurbs stretch the truth in order to entice buyers, columnists provide valuable write-ups on historic building types, the history of city districts or the plans for future developments.

Important buildings and monuments are frequently mentioned in the travel section. Yet only occasionally do new buildings stand out as the sole magnets for tourists. Usually when new buildings or bridges are highlighted, they are coupled with older buildings and urban environments, not to mention shops, restaurants, attractions, and lodging. Architecture again becomes part of a larger context, a lure, among others, for readers to become tourists.

In the home / garden, real estate, and travel sections, buildings are coupled with matters of consumption, lifestyle and entertainment. But where does that orientation leave commentary on signature architects and their new buildings? Must deeper architectural matters take a back seat to commodity-driven decisions?

There is a valuable role for architectural criticism of a deeper sort in the daily paper. For the small number of enlightened newspapers that securely employ architectural critics the issues discussed in this essay might not be pressing. Yet for the far larger number of dailies that feature practically no aesthetic coverage of architecture something needs to be done.

As I hope my discussion of the other newspaper formats of architectural coverage shows, the focused architectural review has a great deal to gain from these sections' emphasis on individuality and context. Architectural reviews need to be more marketable to the average newspaper reader. They need to connect more to personal purchasing decisions. And they need to connect more to personal lifestyle interests. Architectural reviews might expand their commentary on the larger urban or suburban context and even offer suggestions for further touring and reading. They might make more references to how a new building offers inspiration for individual design initiatives, including matters like home or landscape design. They might develop a rating system for buildings, as a way to categorize the endless stretches of the built environment and make them enticing to readers. Lastly, they might develop a series featuring the ten best local skyscrapers, houses, commercial strips, freeways or parks.

By engaging the architectural review with the motivations of a reader, newspapers might also be able to attract related advertisements. The architectural review might then enjoy the more secure status of other arts' reviews. Some writers may worry that approaching the newspaper reader as a consumer will detract from architectural analysis. But for all those papers that have no architectural critique, isn't it worth experimenting with new formats? In the final analysis, shouldn't communicating architecture to a larger public be our goal?

Mitchell Schwarzer is Professor of Architectural History and Chair of the Department of Visual Studies at California College of the Arts. He is the author of the recent book *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media* (2004), as well as numerous writings on architectural theory, urbanism, and landscape.

## A Conversation with Reed Kroloff

*The following is an excerpt from a conversation between ARCADE and Reed Kroloff on the subject of the current state of architectural criticism.*

It is unconscionable that Seattle does not have a properly trained architecture critic actively writing. Architecture is playing a considerable role in shaping that city. To think that the papers would consider diminishing dialogue is a breach of responsibility. The AIA should be arguing passionately and bringing to bear the weight of influential members to rectify this situation — marshalling the support of anyone who will listen.

But the state of architecture criticism in Seattle draws a line under the fact that architectural criticism in general in this country is virtually non-existent. There are people writing, but few of them are formally trained in the subject. Arts writers end up writing about architecture. As a result, much of what is written amounts to little more than description.

Critics are in a difficult position too, as there is a lot of money at stake here: project costs, developers profits, architects incomes, and importantly, newspaper advertising dollars. The amount of money that is spent on building dwarfs what



Hollywood spends on movies; Newspapers are wary about irritating advertisers in the building industry, even though they seem to have no problem doing exactly that in the entertainment business. Other reviewers — movies, TV, theater — feel no compunction about speaking candidly about their subjects. Perhaps their advertisers don't get up in arms.

The largest part of the problem is that very few people really understand or value architecture. It's only recently become something of a fashion item, and that's primarily because the media is fascinated with star architects, not how architecture knits a city together. It's problematic that we can't get the public to understand the value of design. The Europeans are generally more enlightened on this subject. There's more design education, closer proximity in cities, historical understanding, etc.

The profession of architecture itself has an ambivalent relationship to criticism. Architects claim they want criticism and dialogue, but few are willing to accept anything that can be construed as negative. This is true for a number of reasons. Architects correctly see their position in the economy as precarious and thus believe that negative press threatens it. Secondly, many of them have egos that can't tolerate forthright discussion of their work. That's too bad, and flies in the face of their training, which is based on critical analysis. Another chilling influence on all of this is the American Institute of Architects (AIA). They will try to put an end to anything they perceive as being harmful to the profession; that includes any press that might be considered negative. Although local chapters are often better about this than the national office, they often find themselves in a difficult position: trapped between a desire to extend the public conversation about architecture and members who are unwilling to see anything negative about their work (and at times any one else's work) in the press.

The question of opinion only becomes an issue when it's negative; How much negative criticism the profession is willing to tolerate. I'm not naïve enough to believe that criticism has no effect on business. It can. However, unless a firm or architect is regularly viewed poorly, which is unlikely in that very few buildings or architects are ever discussed in the media, it's utter nonsense to suggest that a single negative review is going to destroy a career. On the other hand, the critic is not always in the right. Some who have won awards are third rate writers who are not careful about what they say. A story must be balanced. If you simply beat the architect about the head, you're motives will be questioned.

Reed Kroloff is the Dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane University, and former Editor-in-Chief of *Architecture* magazine.

## The End of an Era

MARK HINSHAW

First of all, let me say that I do not consider myself an "architectural critic" in the typical sense of the term. In my writing, I've always been more fascinated with design as a social art than a visual art. For the most part, I have talked about the extent to which buildings and spaces have contributed to their context, building community, and broadening choices. Although I appreciate, and often comment on, aspects of composition and proportion, these are of less interest to me.

Furthermore, I prefer to talk about changes and trends in patterns of development rather than singular buildings. Certainly, at times, my writing has focused upon individual structures, but usually because they signal — to me at least — a significant addition to the urban setting as a whole. I prefer to discuss how design and the design professions can offer exemplary additions to town centers, neighborhoods, streets and blocks.

For the most part I prefer to highlight good examples of design rather than lay into bad ones. The world is filled with awful buildings and mind-numbing places. To find examples of those is relatively easy. Of far more value, I believe, is to bring attention to efforts to produce thoughtful design.

Finally, although I know that designers read my articles, the audience for my writing in the mainstream press has been the general public. I have viewed my role not as an arbiter of architecture as a "high" art form, but as a translator of the changes and choices occurring in the region. And I have been very touched over the years by comments from readers expressing appreciation for my presentation of various projects.

Most readers, however, may not have noticed that my recent pieces for the *Sunday Times* have been limited, with regard to both frequency and subject matter. The regular monthly appearance was reduced a couple of years ago to six or seven times a year at irregular intervals. More seriously, I was limited to the subject of housing, as this fit into the section titled Home / Real Estate. Although I could occasionally stretch this to include neighborhoods, my proposals to cover public buildings and other structures of significance — as I did for a decade — were met with silence.

But I have had a great run with *The Seattle Times* — spanning more than 12 years. I've covered an amazing period in the history of the Puget Sound. Seattle and its surrounding communities have learned to become real cities, with density, diversity and dynamic centers.

It has been an endlessly fascinating phenomenon to observe and comment on, this evolution from a place that seemed to be on the verge of endless sprawl fifteen years ago but which is now going in a dramatically different direction. And we are a better region not just because of public policies but because we have such an incredible pool of design talent. I have thoroughly enjoyed finding commendable examples of good work and giving due credit to the designers responsible.

But all good things must come to an end. Recently, *The Times* informed me that I should no longer submit any articles. Apparently the management is considering other options, including having an in-house writer address the subject. I hope this is more promising than it sounds, as I hold little hope that regular staff journalists will understand anything more than superficial aspects of design. So my stint at the paper appears to be over.

Unfortunately for the readers of daily newspapers, my departure, coincides with two other events. *The Times* recently terminated the "Home of the Month" program, despite 50 years of history with it. And Sheri Olsen has discontinued her writing for the *Post-Intelligencer* (for entirely different reasons than my own). This certainly leaves a huge hole in the coverage of design in the mainstream press.

I suppose we can continue to count on *The Weekly* or *The Stranger* for an occasional acerbic article on some prominent public building. And ARCADE provides a valuable forum for those keenly interested in design issues. But a broader explanation of the role of architecture in our community and our society will be absent.

To me, this represents a huge loss to the region. The irony is that just when we are witnessing a wide-spread and growing interest in good design, as seen in arenas such as civic buildings and neighborhood design review, the subject has dropped off the radar screen of the big daily newspapers.

I continue to write frequent pieces for *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, as does Sheri for *Architectural Record*. So, from a professional perspective the Seattle design community has advocates. But it is tragic that the general public will have few opportunities for understanding the important role of design in everyday life.

Mark Hinshaw FAIA FAICP is the Director of LMN Architects. In addition to writing for *The Seattle Times*, he has written for *Architecture*, *Places*, and *Planning Magazine*, and he now writes frequently for *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. He also authored the book *Citistate Seattle: Shaping a Modern Metropolis*.



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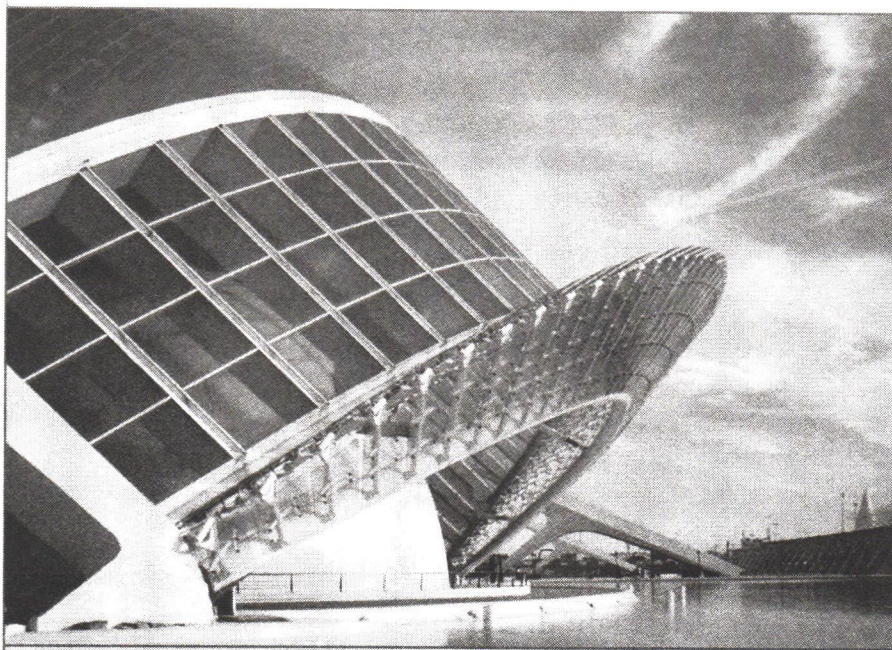
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: The Architect's Studio



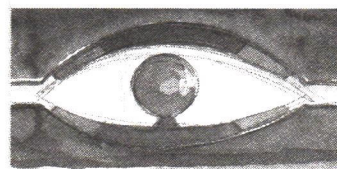
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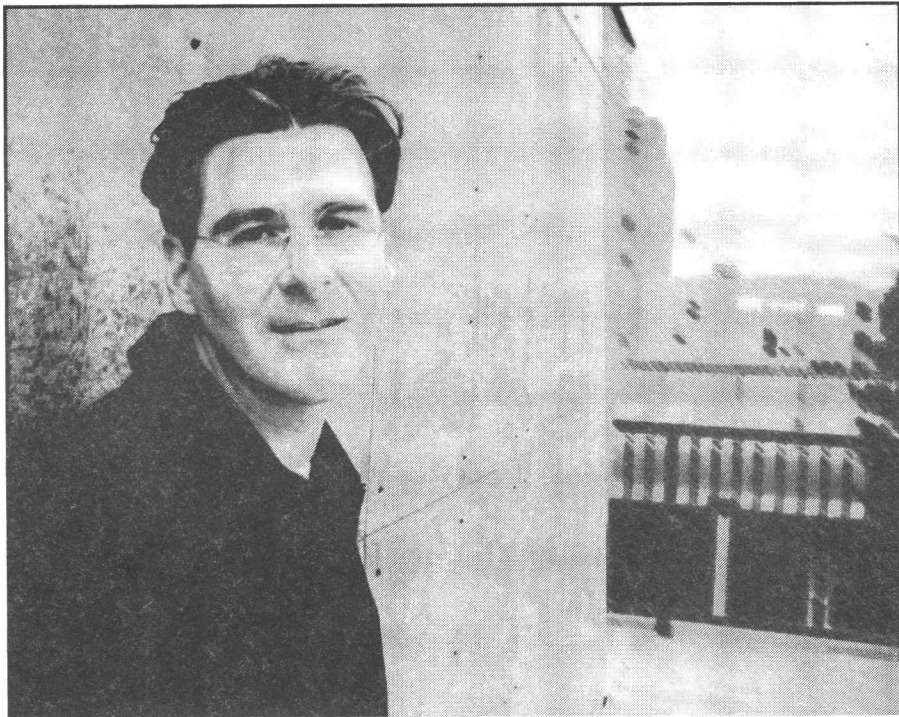
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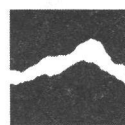
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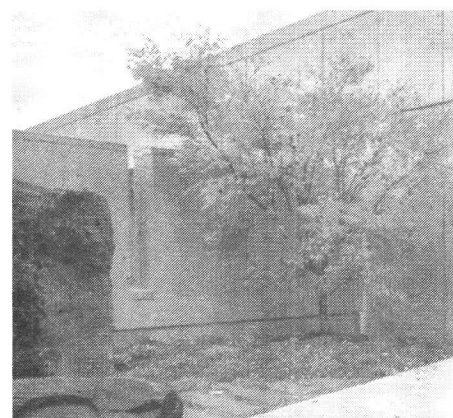
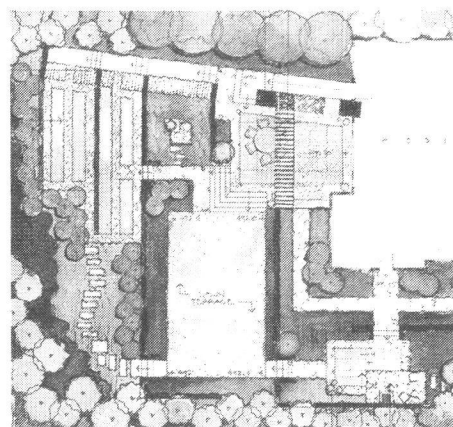


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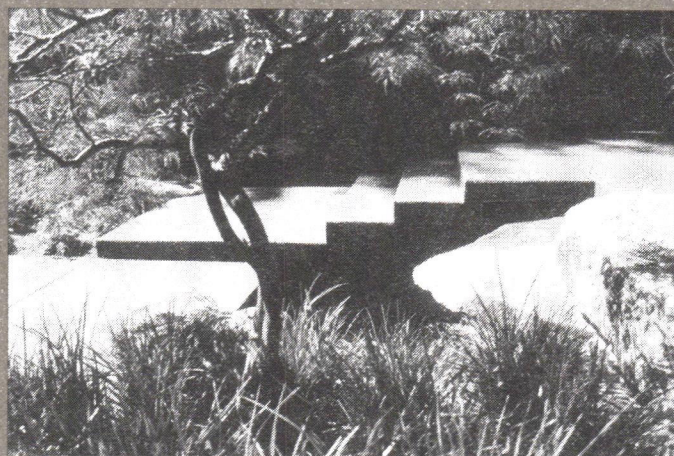
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# The Architect of Vancouverism Arthur Erickson at 80

TREVOR BODDY

Arthur Erickson's recent 80th birthday was a cause for civic celebration in Vancouver, but the architect's most important legacy for his city may not be made of concrete and glass. Yes, City Council has proclaimed a day to honor the designer born here in 1924, and yes, several hundred friends, fellow architects and former clients from around the world convened at his serene University of British Columbia (UBC) Museum of Anthropology for a private birthday dinner. But this is the least of it.

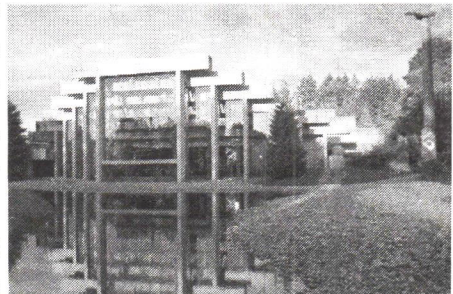
Arthur Erickson's most important local legacy may be how he changed the way Vancouverites think of themselves, and about their place in the world. By his words and by his example he has constantly pushed the maturation of our world-view, and the effects of these efforts may be felt for centuries. Ever since he started teaching architecture and designing houses a half century ago, Erickson has argued consistently for a high density, compact city—a place of diversity and of standards, where only the best will do.

When this city was still a rough-hewn village at the edge of the rain forest, Erickson used good humor, better buildings and biting words to declare that Vancouver needed to prepare for the global metropolitan mantle that would be thrust upon us, like it or not. He steamed technocrats and befuddled politicians when he declared that Vancouver should be planning for a metropolis of ten million at a time when only one million lived here. "I've upped it to 15 million" said the architect with a laugh, in a recent interview in his idyllic Point Grey garden.

Erickson alienated more than a few potential private sector clients, at the same time goading several generations of city planners and politicians with this straight talk, always balancing the visionary "make a city worthy of this setting," and with the pragmatic "deal with these urban issues before they deal with us." Erickson's wishes for his hometown have been half won—the part about a high density, compact and diverse city—but the second half of his challenge, dealing with high design standards, making a place "where only the best will do," remains just as elusive a half century on. Our civic guardians have densified downtown by the numbers, but flounder at the more subjective tasks of promoting fine design or improving the public realm. "It's still jerry-built," he says, a rare flash of bitterness in his clear blue eyes.

With this in mind, my birthday gift to Arthur Erickson is a writerly one: a name, a word, a label. *ARCADE* readers who follow this column will have read in the past few months about the global spread of ideas associated with this city: compact, high density urban living in consort with nature—the very issues with which the architect is long associated. This movement of principles, this international migration of ideas now needs a name. This philosophy of city-building can only be called "Vancouverism," but it is Arthur Erickson's name that should be remembered every time the neologism is uttered. Here is the story of how Arthur Erickson's Vancouverism was invented. Between his WWII service in India and Southeast Asia with British Intelligence, and his year-long transit of the Mediterranean basin after studying at McGill, Erickson had been exposed to a wide variety of cities, both contemporary and ancient.

Through the 1950s "I got fired from all the top architects offices in Vancouver" as he puts it, exaggerating only a little, then designed a few influential houses. By the end of that decade Erickson was teaching architecture at UBC and grew increasingly interested in urban issues. "For the Community Arts Council, Geoff Massey and I studied how downtown's streets were organized. We tried to augment them in a liveable way, and proposed a language of landscape types." Several other studies followed—none implemented—but all adding to their growing arguments for a walkable, dense downtown.





Time and again, new arrivals to Vancouver have been the sponsors of visionary urban schemes too bold for us locals, who, according to Erickson, “would rather go sailing.” In the late 1950s the architect was engaged by an Irish promoter “who wanted to buy up a huge hunk of the West End when there was no building taller than six stories. We produced a scheme for the length of English Bay that had towers soaring 80 and 100 stories, each with their own terraces.” Back in Dublin, the promoter found his potential investors balking: “People here and there thought the idea was crazy.”

A few years later, Erickson designed an early high rise apartment tower for the West End, this time for an Egyptian developer he had met on his post-graduation tour. One of the finest demonstrations of Erickson’s Vancouverism is the office tower that followed this, headquarters for then Canadian-owned MacMillan Bloedel. “We had done a study of Burrard and Georgia Streets, and we wanted the tower to defer to one of our two potential grand boulevards,” says the architect. With its sliding tower planes defining the urban “room” of Georgia Street—forms that are rendered in deeply-modelled and textured surfaces—the former Mac-Blo Building shames every tower that has been constructed in the 35 years since along this boulevard of broken dreams.

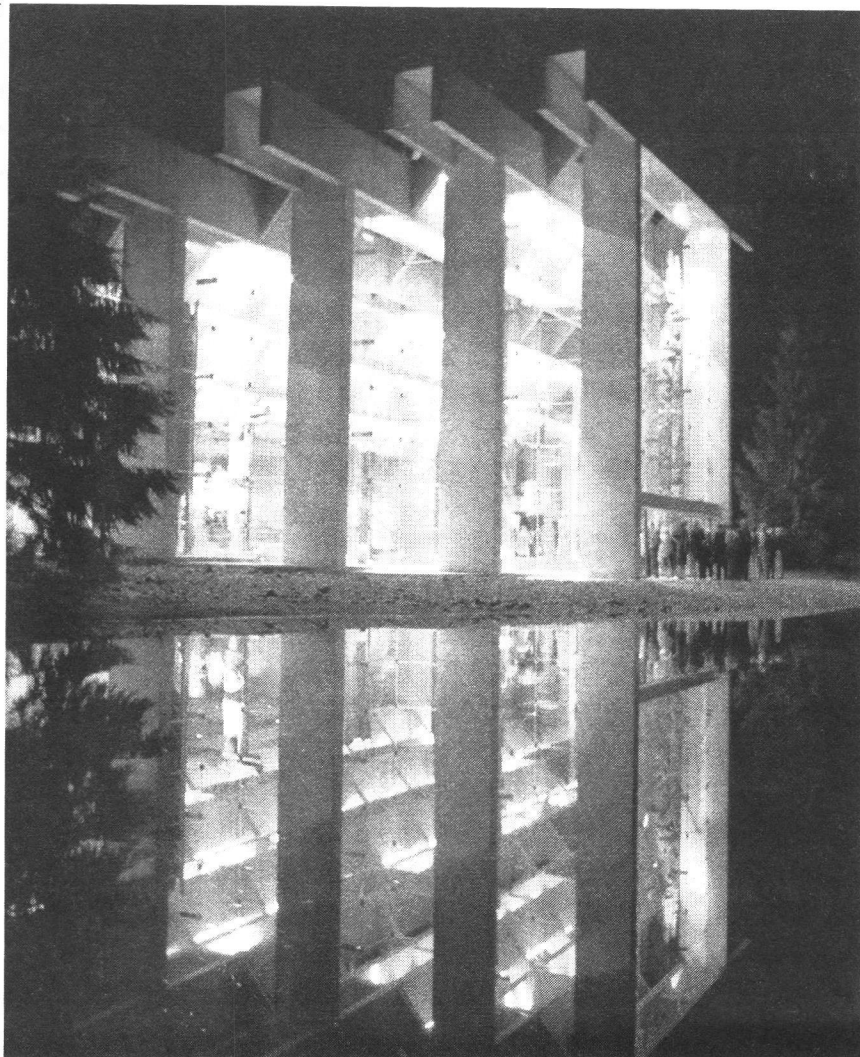
How crazy were Erickson’s ideas of the 1950s and 60s? Go to Spanish Banks and look back at the curving line of towers flanking English Bay and False Creek, then compare this reality to Erickson’s sketch, which appears in his first book. The real city is a little more randomized than the sinuously curving dance of mega-towers Erickson had envisioned, but the architect’s high-density prediction has been realized. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that Erickson is now designing the last waterfront tower ever to rise between the Cambie and Granville bridges. In model photographs and computer renderings, the tower demonstrates a sinuous twist of its floors and columns as it rises. This is Erickson’s subtle visual inflection, I am sure, back to his unbuilt scheme of 40 years ago. Let’s get it right this time—it is my critical judgement that this tower needs to be taller to complete its form, serving as the landmark False Creek demands, a late-arriving architectural leader for a squad of followers. Will our planners and politicians have sight enough for this?

The other major project on his drafting boards is a museum for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Centennial Museum (RCMP) in Regina, intended as a major tourist draw for a troubled city. Erickson and local associate Joe Pettick are trying to convince the national constabulary that the site they have picked for the museum is inadequate, and that the planned showpiece should be moved to an adjacent plot. Of course, Arthur Erickson is right—but will the RCMP have sight enough for this?

“Most downtowns are so much larger than Vancouver’s—we are really an island in the sea—so we can go so much taller,” says Erickson. Increasingly conscious of his role in history, he concludes: “I am glad Larry Beasley [director of current planning] now realizes that a number of us were saying this long before he arrived.”

More than any other individual, that irascible, erudite, knight-errant who is Arthur Erickson is the author of Vancouverism, an idea that will shape the world much more than “The New Urbanism,” its over-hyped cousin in the marketplace of city-building. We should all be thankful that we share this jerry-built island with a mind and spirit like his.

*Vancouver Sun architecture critic Trevor Boddy writes about the rise of “Vancouverism” in the current issue of the American architecture magazine Places, and welcomes feedback at [trevboddy@hotmail.com](mailto:trevboddy@hotmail.com). This article first appeared in the Vancouver Sun.*



## The Octogenarian Oracle: Arthur Erickson Opinionizes on Vancouver and Vancouverites

### On our shared obsessions:

The ethos of Vancouverites has never changed. They are pathetic about their urban environment—people here are too easily distracted elsewhere, to the mountains, out to sea.”

### On his compulsion for quality:

Quality in architecture has to do with technique and detail—the craft of connection. It is missing from most Vancouver buildings, especially downtown. This could be the Florence of North America—I want it to be the best—but Vancouverites too often scorn urban life.”

### On the future of Robson Square:

“I am appalled that UBC sacrificed the Robson Square Theatre, recently cutting it up into little classrooms for business programs that could have gone anywhere. We should be making this the intellectual hub for the city, not converting the Provincial offices south of Robson into an awkward shopping mall, as some propose. Public uses and spaces are important—this is a public building!”

### On expansion plans for the Vancouver Art Gallery:

“Kathleen Bartels does not feel comfortable in the current building, so my idea is that they should leave their historical collections there—it remains the best address in town—but move contemporary and temporary exhibitions to a renovated Post Office at Georgia and Homer.”

### On architectural developments at Simon Fraser University after his original conception:

“SFU has commissioned some awful individual buildings—such as the Engineering Building, with its clutter of

chimneys—but it pains me more to see the violation of our overall plan with the current housing and commercial development on Burnaby Mountain—it is dreadful.”

### On why he has remained here, despite the above:

“This is the best place to live in the world, with the mountains, the ocean...you see, my criticism is often self-criticism! But Vancouverites have yet to discover the power of architecture to make what we have even better.”

### On the value of controversy:

“Some people—especially clients—have thought me too controversial, but only by truth does anyone learn.”



# I Will Never Dream About Sheri Olson Again

RON VAN DER VEEN

For liability purposes, and to save ARCADE's butt from disgruntled architects, the following comments may not necessarily reflect the sentiments of the magazine. They may not even reflect the writer's sentiments – 'cause he don' wanna get his ass sued.

To better understand what you are about to read, I suggest you grab the last issue of *ARCADE* and jump to "Side Yard" (22.4, p. 44). There you will learn about my secret phobia of Sheri Olson, the architecture critic for the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. This dread turns into an obsessive dream that is only relieved by a phone call from Mark Hinshaw, the architecture writer for the *Seattle Times*. I was rather pleased with the story, and later learned that Sheri and Mark enjoyed it as well.

Well, it looks like I don't get to dream about Sheri anymore, or Mark for that matter. Word has hit the streets that both will no longer be writing for their respective newspapers; and just when they were on my radar screen for biting social commentary disguised as light-hearted humor. I was just getting warmed up on them. For a minute there I started wondering if my article was the reason they were no longer writing. Much to my disappointment I have come to learn that "Side Yard" did not influence their demise. I guess I still have a ways to go.

Say what you want about those two, but they were the only writers for our local papers focusing on the built environment in a city that is urbanizing at a blistering pace. It's my understanding that the *Times* needed more room for garden articles. I guess they feel ardently that even in this city, that is being transformed as we sip on our favorite Starbucks lattes, it's more important to write about organic peas than what kind of Seattle we're creating. I made fun of Mark's more lighthearted approach to architecture critique in my dream article, but he had an important role in illuminating high-quality contributions to the urban fabric of the city. Now I feel kind of guilty that I kicked proverbial sand in his face.

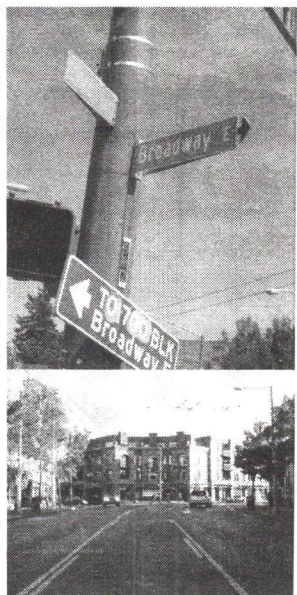
You think that was bad, let me tell you about Sheri. According to the *grapevine*, a local firm who didn't like a scathing critique she wrote of its design threatened to sue her. The *P-I* couldn't legally back her up so she quit. I can't name the firm because they might go after yours truly and then I'd never write for "Side Yard" again! I can give you a few hints though. Does Capitol Hill ring a bell? I don't think Sheri wrote anything about the project that most of us wouldn't say after a few beers. The firm's argument seems to be that the final design was a result of pressure from the neighborhood design review board. How low has Seattle architecture gotten that a firm would actually blame a neighborhood design review board for ending up with a lousy project and then threatening legal action against a journalist for exposing its flaws. Ridiculous!

Architects shouldn't sue writers for saying their buildings are ugly, especially when they really are. And is there anything more pitiable than hiding behind the neighborhood design board as an excuse for a mediocre building? I'm still pondering which part of this story is more disturbing: the state of urban design in Seattle, the neighborhood design review process, the architecture firm, or a world of ravenous liability lawyers?

This project is in one of the most serious urban locations in Seattle. Why did we end up with what we got? I guarantee this never would have happened in Portland. The design review would have done enough ass whoopin' on the project that the article might never have needed to be written and the helpless journalist sued. My advice to the firm that threatened Sheri: *Do better work next time!*

We need serious urban projects in Seattle, not fluffy tart stuff that passes the neighborhood design review. This process ain't giving us the great urban city we were hoping for. We also need serious architecture assessment in the city. My God, we all went through architecture school. We should be used to a bit of constructive criticism. I never threatened to sue my professor for ripping me in a crit.

I know they were nightmares, but I kind of miss my old Sheri Olson dreams. They really kept me on edge and motivated me to do better work. Sheri warned us not to do bad work and Mark pointed to the good stuff. I have all this really funny material left to lampoon them with in "Side Yard" that will go to waste. At least I'll sleep better now. *Ron is an architect in Seattle working for an unspecified firm that may or may not share his sentiments regarding this article. Sue him, not the firm if he pisses anyone off. Please be advised that he has no substantial assets. For comments please write Ron at Ronv@mithun.com.*





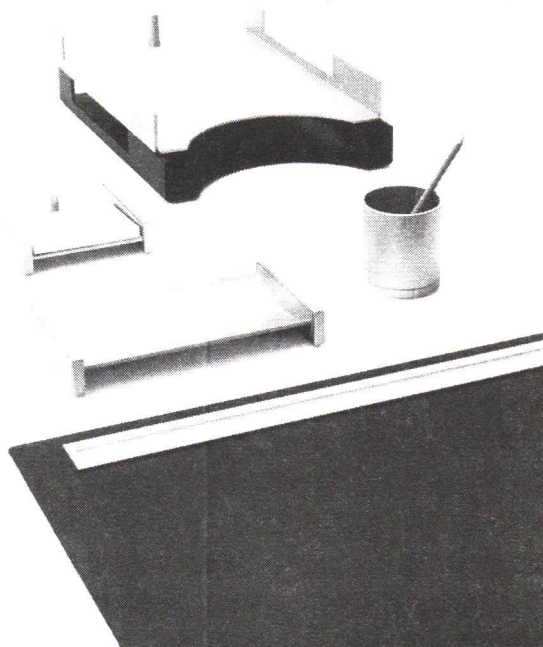
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Carsten Höller and Rosemarie Trockel, "Atma & Shobha," 1997.  
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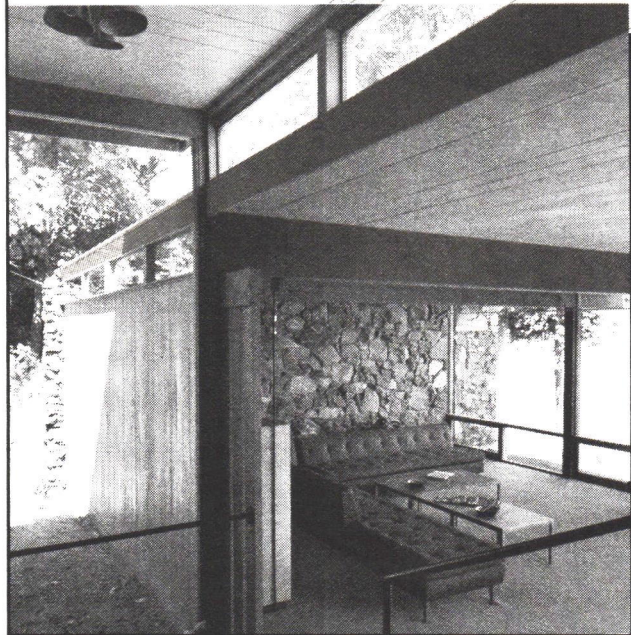
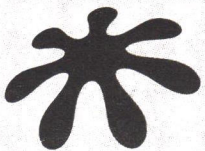


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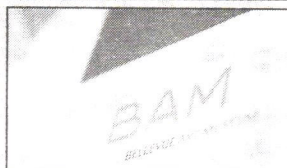
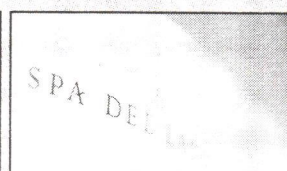
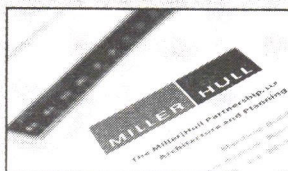
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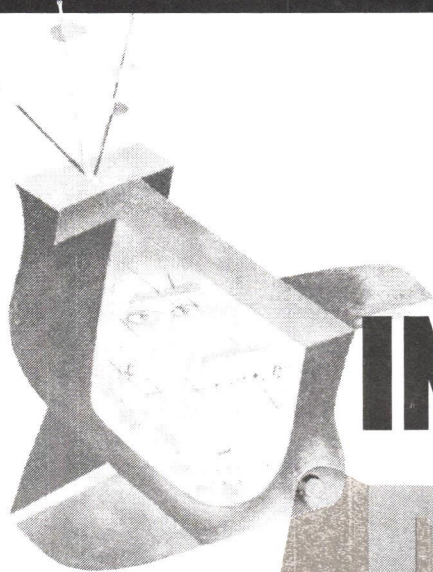
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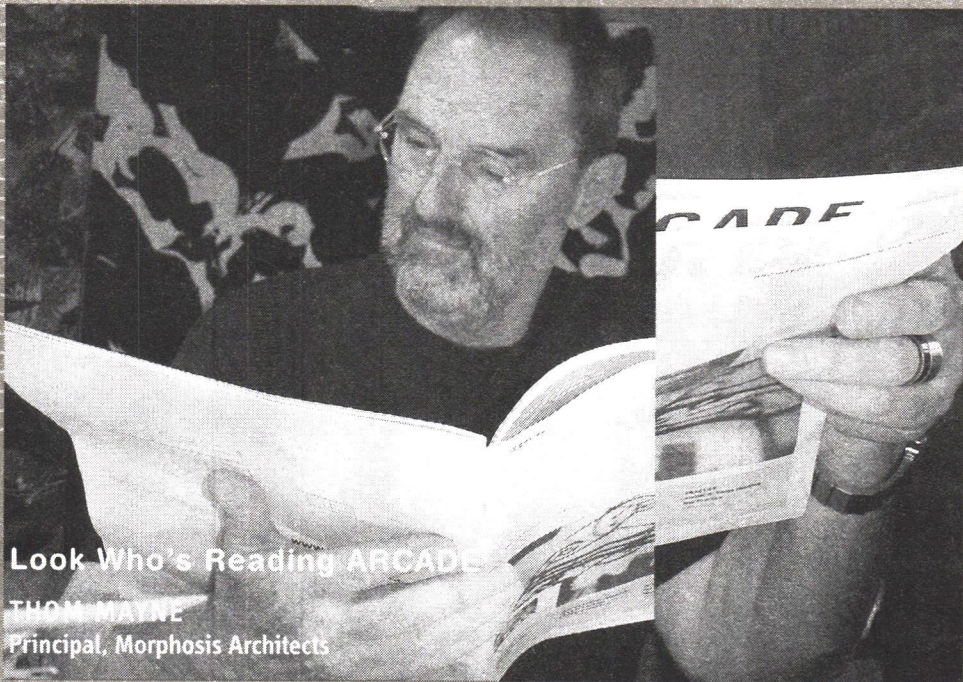
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