

Today's News - Wednesday, December 23, 2009

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the final newsletter for 2009...we're taking a holiday break (along with the rest of the world), and will return Monday, January 4, 2010(!). We wish everyone a Happy, Happy Holiday season and (fingers crossed) a Much Merrier New Year!

- If not a city, what is CityCenter? A "handsome, varied, occasionally ingenious, occasionally even beautiful piece of very expensive, very dense urban planning" - and a lesson in "the value of fine art, decoration and architecture, careful planning, and sustainable design."
- Cleveland hopes to learn a lesson from the High Line (one of its designers included).
- Campbell is cautiously optimistic about plans to expand Boston's convention center: it better be more than be a bigger, "deadly, single-purpose monolith."
- More details on Gehry's theatrical Times Square debut (alas, no images until next year).
- Moore on the "Great Tower Craze of the Noughties": the strangest part is that almost no towers were actually built, meaning "skyscrapers played little part in London's great boom and bust."
- Olcayto considers the decade in Scottish architecture: the best buildings "revive a weird and wonderful tradition," but also raise issues in the broader picture.
- A bevy of British notables talk about the top news stories in a "turbulent year in the world of architecture."
- Anderton sits down with a merry band of mavens to revisit "design in the Oughts (or the Noughties)."
- Martin Filler muses on fame as a "fickle mistress" that can "morph into a fearsome burden, the 'how-do-I-top-myself?' syndrome that frequently shadows exceptional success."
- Pearman ponders the same, reviewing an "utterly fascinating" new book explores the pre-fame projects of some of today's starchitects.
- A website puts the spotlight in pioneering women in North Carolina architecture and design who "braved prejudice and often ridicule to pursue their careers."
- With wrecking balls heading its way (to just reduce its size), there's a growing call to save a Basil Spence-designed nuclear power plant in Wales that is a "triumph of modernist architecture - we should be celebrating it, not bringing in the bulldozers."
- FLW's Beth Shalom synagogue's new visitor center offers an intriguing look at the "extraordinary collaboration" between the architect and the rabbi, and "eloquently unearths the human underpinnings of one of Wright's greatest architectural achievements."
- Wanted (and long over-due): a consultant to document California's portion of the Route 66, "a step toward preservation of the cultural touchstone."
- 'Tis the season of good will: celebrating its 5th anniversary, the AIAS Freedom by Design program reaches out to "people that architects weren't serving but for whom modest design improvements could make huge differences in everyday life"; and the recently-launched DesignNYC matches designers with non-profits in need - with hopes to create an open platform "so other cities can do it on their own."
- Weekend diversions:
- Ouroussoff says Yale's "What We Learned: The Yale Las Vegas Studio and the Work of Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates" is a "must-see" for those who want to "recapture the euphoric sense of discovery that came out of those early trips, as well as get a refresher course on their conclusions, which still have things to teach us."
- Denver Art Museum's "Embrace!" presents "an inventive mixture of artists" that contends with "Libeskind's frequently unwieldy spaces" (but might leave some viewers thinking the money would have been better spent on tweaking the space itself).
- A Dutch exhibition of photography from China and the Netherlands examines the dark side of development.
- At MIT, and architect and an artist put on "a thoughtful show" that invites interaction and play; "instead, we can only look and ponder."
- 'Tis the season, take 2: Wigglesworth's "Tree-Cycle" in London crosses Christmas with a bicycle: it's sustainable, amusing - and for a good cause.

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If Not a City, Then What? Will CityCenter save Las Vegas? It is not a "community"...not a "city"...What it is is a handsome, varied, occasionally ingenious, occasionally even beautiful piece of very expensive, very dense urban planning...its greatest contribution may be what it has to teach...about the value of fine art, decoration and architecture, careful planning, and sustainable design. By David Littlejohn -- Daniel Libeskind; David Rockwell; Norman Foster; Cesar Pelli; Rafael Viñoly; Helmut Jahn; Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF); Gensler - Wall Street Journal

NYC High Line Designers Turn Their Eyes to Downtown Cleveland: How do you revitalize a downtown area that's become a ghost town? With a stunning new park...thanks to a series of brilliant redesigns proposed by James Corner Field Operations... [images, links] - Fast Company

Expanded convention center must do more than get bigger: Any addition should be thought of not as a deadly, single-purpose monolith, a vast pile of hotels and meeting rooms, but rather as a mixed-use neighborhood in which lots of different things happen, as they do in San Francisco and Philadelphia. By Robert Campbell -- Rafael Viñoly (2004) - Boston Globe

Frank Gehry Takes the Stage: Gift from city raises curtain on theater in new \$800 million Times Square tower...making his debut in the neighborhood with a performing arts complex for the Signature Theatre Company in the base of the new building. -- Arquitectonica; Ishmael Levy - The Architect's Newspaper

Tall stories by London's tower builders: The strangest thing about the Great Tower Craze of the Noughties is that almost no towers got built...sites of would-be skyscrapers...are dead zones...more constructive ways of beautifying our city has gurgled down the plughole. For what purpose?...the evidence is that tower proposals are bad for London's economy and environment, and it's up to developers to prove otherwise. By Rowan Moore - Evening Standard (UK)

The uncanny Scots: A decade in architecture: The best Scottish buildings of the last decade revive a weird and wonderful tradition...Before setting down the top trumps, however, let's consider the broader picture of the past 10 years... By Rory Olcayto -- SMC; RMJM; Frank Gehry; Zaha Hadid; Sutherland Hussey Architects; Graeme Massie; PagePark; Nicoll Russell; gm + ad; EMBT; NORD; David Chipperfield; Reiach and Hall; Oliver Chapman; Malcolm Fraser [images] - The Architects' Journal (UK)

2009: The architectural year in headlines: From students in Scotland to princes in Chelsea, 2009 was a turbulent year in the world of architecture. David Chipperfield, Piers Gough/CZVG, Ruth Reed/RIBA, Paul Finch and others talk about the news that mattered most to them -- Peter Heath/Atkins; Peter Buchan/Ryder Architecture; Gordon Murray/gm + ad Architects; Jack Pringle; Simon Allford/AHMM; Richard Rogers/Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners; Lee Bennett/Sheppard Robson; Paul Rodgers/RMJM; Teva Hesse/C.F. Møller; Alex Ely/mæ; etc. - The Architects' Journal (UK)

Dn/Frances Anderton: From Hummers to Hybrids: Design in the Oughts (or the Noughties) Revisited: Dan Neil and the everyday object that trumps Twitter; Dakota Smith/Curbed LA explains how the ugliest LA structure made it onto a Best Buildings list; Sammy Hoi/Otis College of Art and Design with an update on the state of LA's "creative economy"; and Alissa Walker picks some design and architecture books that capture the moment; etc. [links] - KCRW (Los Angeles)

Fame: A Fickle Mistress: For architects on the edge, early success can be a sword that cuts both ways...Early adulation can morph into a fearsome burden, the "how-do-I-top-myself?" syndrome that frequently shadows exceptional success. By Martin Filler -- Charles Gwathmey; Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull and Whitaker; Edward Larrabee Barnes; Arthur Erickson; Louis Sullivan; Charles Rennie Mackintosh, C.F.A. Voysey, and the Greene & Greene; J.J.P. Oud; Frank Gehry - Architectural Record

I Love Your Early Work: What do the first, pre-fame projects of today's headline architects tell us about them? Was their success, or career path, predictable? "First works: Emerging architectural experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s" is utterly fascinating. By Hugh Pearman -- Tschumi; Foster; Rogers; Herzog & de Meuron; Koolhaas; Venturi, Price, Michael

Webb/Archigram; Siza; Rossi; Moneo; Piano; Ito; Libeskind; Hadid- RIBA Journal (UK)

Triangle Modernist Houses.com Spotlights "Pioneering Women of NC Architecture": George Smart...has uncovered stories from early women designers and architects as they braved prejudice and often ridicule to pursue their careers. -- Mary Olive Johnson; Constance Grottola Mitchell; Anne Kathleen Tennent; Dorothy Morton Abernethy; Margaret King Hunter; Georgian Pope Yeatman [link]- News & Observer (North Carolina)

Pulling down Snowdonia's power station would be a nuclear waste: Trawsfynydd-designed energy plant, is a triumph of modernist architecture -- we should be celebrating it, not bringing in the bulldozers...Spence...had the foresight to set himself a guiding question...inspired by...Sir John Soane: "Will it make a beautiful ruin?" Unless we act now, we'll never know. -- Basil Spence (1968) [image]- Guardian (UK)

The Rabbi and Frank Lloyd Wright: Beth Sholom synagogue...celebrated its 50th anniversary by inaugurating a visitor center and public tours...offer an intriguing look at...the extraordinary collaboration between Cohen and Wright...eloquently unearths the human underpinnings of one of Wright's greatest architectural achievements. -- Picture Projects; Venturi, Scott Brown; Andrea Mason Design [images]- Wall Street Journal

Route 66 -- immortalized, but mortal: National Park Service provides funding to document California's portion of the Mother Road as a step toward preservation of the cultural touchstone...California Preservation Foundation plans to hire a consultant to document the state's portion of the Route 66 corridor. By Martha Groves [slide shows]- Los Angeles Times

Utilitas, Truly: Freedom by Design, a program run by the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), assists those who stand to benefit the most from modest improvements in their surroundings...now has 57 chapters at schools in 35 states, plus one in Toronto... -- Brad Buchanan/Buchanan Yonushewski Group [images]- Architect Magazine

DesignNYC Matches Designers With Non-Profits in Need: ...hopes to have 10 action-oriented prototypes for 10 programs...within the next two to four months..."We'd love to put it out there with this white label so other cities can do it on their own." -- Michelle Mullineaux/ESI Design; Wendy Goodman; Paola Antonelli; Steven Heller; Clay Shirky [images. links]- Fast Company

The Lessons of Las Vegas Still Hold Surprises: "What We Learned: The Yale Las Vegas Studio and the Work of Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates" at the Yale School of Architecture Gallery...a must-see for those who want to recapture momentarily the euphoric sense of discovery that came out of those early trips, as well as get a refresher course on their conclusions, which still have things to teach us. By Nicolai Ouroussoff [slide show]- New York Times

Artists Contend with Libeskind: "Embrace!"...an inventive mixture of artists, who have responded...with predominantly strong works, the best of which tweak or explore Libeskind's frequently unwieldy spaces...viewers unwilling to follow the exhibition's command may be left wondering about the point of it all...when it couldn't have cost much more to undertake a few modest renovations. [slide show]- Artinfo

Chinese Exhibition Examines Dark Side of Development: "We Are the World (WATW): Photography from China and the Netherlands" at Three Shadows Contemporary Photography Art Centre in Edam, Holland...is less bleak than alarming...an exploration of urban development and consumer culture. [images, links]- Artinfo

Blocking out dissolution: Structures and video evoke and court collapse, of things, of political systems..."Tobias Putrih & MOS: Without Out" at MIT...a thoughtful show...that has so much to do with play ought to enable viewers to partake in that spirit...Instead, we can only look and ponder. - Boston Globe

Tree-cycling: Sarah Wigglesworth Architects' sustainable Christmas tree: What do you get if you cross Christmas with a bicycle? A 'Tree-Cycle' sustainable Christmas tree made out of recycled bicycle parts...for Bermondsey Square, London, SE1...bike wheels will be returned to Re-Cycle and will be used to recondition bikes for distribution to Africa. [images]- The Architects' Journal (UK)

Book Review: How to Make Versions of the Past Present: "Robert A.M. Stern Buildings and Projects 2004-2009": Stern might just be "the squarest of the hip, and the hippest of the squares." That might also imply that he is one of the sanest and happiest people in the profession. For that and more, this book warrants our appreciative attention. By Norman Weinstein- ArchNewsNow

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