

Today's News - Friday, August 20, 2010

- Historic preservation might take a big hit if Putin actually "liquidates" Russia's cultural protection agency (could a towering plan in St. Petersburg have anything to do with it?) as other ministries of culture "plan to slash the number of legally protected places by 90%...a trend that will cost Russia much of its remarkable architectural landscape."
- Q&A with Albert Speer: "architects are not social engineers."
- Brussat ponders recent Der Spiegel essay (see ANN, Aug. 13): does Germany lead America "in understanding the taint of modern architecture, its disdain for beauty and humanism, and the wisdom of traditional design"?
- Three big guns unveil their big visions for the West Kowloon Cultural District today (link to great presentation).
- Rudolph's Orange County, NY, government building closer to the wrecking ball: its Brutalist design "may have impressed critics" in 1970, but has been seen "as an eyesore" ever since.
- Rome goes in search of a corporate sponsor to pay for Coliseum refurbishment (ad space included, of course).
- NYC DOT invites San Francisco architect to devise the city's first pop-up café, "the agency's latest move to reclaim road space for public use."
- Testing of air-cleaning paving slabs (read roads) in Germany and the Netherlands are "showing promising results."
- Not such promising results in current AIA Architecture Billings Index, though "project inquiries are in positive territory."
- Weekend diversions:
- Boston's Kennedy Greenway gets into the swing of things with a gigantic hammock.
- Musings from "that other Biennial" in California: it "includes a well thought out spectrum of designers from the practical to the extraordinary."
- "The Surreal House" at London's Barbican "is a pleasure: a thoughtful and well-curated display" in otherwise "unremarkable galleries" that have been "skillfully transformed" into "inky, mysterious black boxes" by Carmody Groarke.
- Loos on the loose in Brno.
- "Iannis Xenakis: Composer, Architect, Visionary" at Montreal's CCA is an "eye-opening (and ear-opening) architectural experience."
- Rawsthorn cheers "Hidden Heroes: The Genius of Everyday Things" at the Vitra Design Museum: its "modesty is particularly appealing at a time when we've become bored by the brashness of what's been called 'Design-with-a-capital-D.'"
- Filler delves deep into books and exhibitions re: the "misrepresented or misunderstood...brief, brave, glorious, doomed life of the Bauhaus."
- Merrick cheers the provocative "Architecture and Beauty": if "the avoidance of debate about architectural beauty continues, the ability of architects to absorb cultural evidence and react to it in fertile ways will be lobotomized" (watch out, you "so-called blobmeisters, a.k.a. the Lack of Joy Division").
- McKibben's "Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet" - this "engaging and persuasive book will add greatly to the sense of urgency" (but perhaps a bit too pessimistic?).
- "The Necessary Revolution" traces the "collective learning process" that resulted in LEED, which became "something tangible, something that, however imperfect, people could touch and use."

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To Support Gazprom, Putin 'Liquidates' Russia's Cultural Protection Agency: ...reflects his desire to promote business development at any cost...Russian ministries of culture and regional development plan to slash the number of legally protected places by 90%...a trend that will cost Russia much of its remarkable architectural landscape.- Eurasia Review

Interview with Architect Albert Speer: "Calamity of Postwar Construction Came from Rejecting History": Modern architecture was connected to the idea of creating better human beings through better building...But we've since learned that architects are not social engineers." [slide shows]- Der Spiegel (Germany)

Hope and change, perhaps, in Germany: Der Spiegel essay suggests that Germany leads America in understanding the taint of modern architecture, its disdain for beauty and humanism, and the wisdom of traditional design. By David Brussat [images]- Providence Journal (Rhode Island)

A blueprint of dreams for West Kowloon Cultural District: Today...three world-class master planning teams will unveil their conceptual plans for WKCD...Examination of their plans will reveal how influential public opinions have been in developing these plans. -- Foster + Partners; Rocco Design Architects; Koolhaas/Office For Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) [link to images]- news.gov.hk (Hong Kong)

County Executive unveils his vision for new county building: ...plans to raze the 40-year-old county government center and replace it with two buildings..."brutalist" design, resembling a stack of concrete blocks, may have impressed critics then, but it has been widely regarded as an eyesore since the building opened in 1970. -- Paul Rudolph- Times Herald-Record (Middletown, NY)

Cash-Strapped Italy to Sell Colosseum Ad Space for Restoration: Rome's search for a corporate sponsor willing to pay 25 million euros (\$33 million) to refurbish the Colosseum..."We hope this method can be used for other large restoration projects."- Bloomberg News

Sidewalk Sipping with Sadik-Khan at NYC Pop-Up Cafe: ...NYC Department of Transportation unveiled its first "pop-up cafe" in Lower Manhattan...as the agency's latest move to reclaim road space for public use...No purchase necessary; lounging is encouraged. -- Riyad Ghannam/RG Architecture [images]- The Architect's Newspaper

Air-cleaning paving slabs assessed in Germany: ...in the Netherlands...NOx levels were found to be 25 to 45% lower than above regular concrete on the same road. Now, a similar study is underway in Germany, and is already showing promising results.- Gizmag (Australia)

Construction sector a long way from recovery, but some see slightly encouraging signs: AIA Architecture Billings Index...shows "a continued decline in demand for design services"...Project inquiries are in positive territory...However, that interest hasn't yet graduated to signed contracts and groundbreakings. One possible driver for the increased inquiries: people are taking time to shop around.- Finance and Commerce (Minneapolis)

They've been swayed: Huge hammock rocks: The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway just got a lot more comfortable...33-foot-long hammock, a two-week art installation unveiled this week that may become a permanent fixture... -- Hansy Better Barraza/Studio Luz; The Awesome Foundation [image]- Boston Globe

Thoughts From That Other Biennial, in California: The California Design Biennial at the Pasadena Museum of California Art includes a well thought out spectrum of designers from the practical to the extraordinary. -- Frances Anderton; Safdie Rabines Architects; Toby Long Design; AC Martin; Michael Maltzan; Fat Fringe/Layer/Materials & Applications [images, links]- The Architect's Newspaper

Surrealism and the house: dream homes should stay as fantasies: Why surrealism's dream houses are doomed to fail..."The Surreal House" is a pleasure: a thoughtful and well-curated display...Carmody Groarke have skillfully transformed the Barbican's unremarkable galleries into inky, mysterious black boxes. -- Salvador Dali; Koolhaas/OMA; Diller Scofidio + Renfro; Ushida Findlay; Frederick Kiesler; Le Corbusier; Bernard Tschumi [images]- Architectural Review (UK)

"Traces of Adolf Loos" opens in Brno: ...maps the life and work of renowned Czech-born Austrian architect with a special emphasis on his projects in south Moravia - [Prague Daily Monitor](#)

Xenakis: Math Music: "Iannis Xenakis: Composer, Architect, Visionary"...Was he an architect or a composer? The Canadian Center for Architecture's eye-opening (and ear-opening) architectural experience reaffirms [him] as a pioneer in both, as well as a first-rate engineer and co-designer of many of Le Corbusier's buildings. [images, videos] - [Architizer](#)

A Compendium of Everyday Genius: At the Vitra Design Museum in Germany, "Hidden Heroes: The Genius of Everyday Things" highlights a collection of inventions that inhabit and inform our daily lives...brilliance hiding in plain sight...The modesty of the [show] is particularly appealing at a time when we've become bored by the brashness of what's been called "Design-with-a-capital-D." By Alice Rawsthorn - [New York Times](#)

The Powerhouse of the New: Few developments central to the history of art have been so misrepresented or misunderstood as the brief, brave, glorious, doomed life of the Bauhaus...it was certainly time for a long-overdue reassessment of this persistently stereotyped and often maligned powerhouse of modern culture. By Martin Filler - [New York Review of Books](#)

In the line of beauty: Architects and the sublime: "Architecture and Beauty: Conversations with Architects about a Troubled Relationship"...will ignite a long overdue debate on the not so beautiful truths of contemporary architecture...if the avoidance of debate about architectural beauty and the parallel question of humane design continues, the ability of architects to absorb cultural evidence and react to it in fertile ways will be lobotomised. By Jay Merrick -- Will Alsop; Thom Mayne; Hernan Alonso Diaz; Wolf Prix; Lebbeus Woods; Juhani Pallasmaa; Francis Terry; Gaetano Pesce; Peter Cook - [Independent \(UK\)](#)

Climate: What You Need to Know: "Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet" by Bill McKibben...tells a powerful story with great clarity, deep conviction, and lively prose...engaging and persuasive book will add greatly to the sense of urgency...But it risks undermining confidence that we can find a way forward...he is too pessimistic about the ability of the world to respond. By Nicholas Stern - [New York Review of Books](#)

See the building as a whole system: "The Necessary Revolution" by Peter Senge...when LEED took shape, it catalysed a collective learning process, whose power surprised everyone...It became "something tangible, something that, however imperfect, people could touch and use"...Recommended addition to 'green' shelves. -- Bob Berkebile - [The Hindu \(India\)](#)

INSIGHT: Save What's Left: Architects as Stewards of Our Planet: We need to develop a new design culture of responsibility, one that seeks in every instance to do as little damage as possible to natural systems. By Peter Gisolfi, AIA, ASLA, LEED AP - [ArchNewsNow](#)



[Arata Isozaki & Associates: CAFA Art Museum \(China Central Academy of Fine Arts\), Beijing, China](#)

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