

Covering the Issues

Cityscapes... *Fast Company* (May 2010) offers multiple visions for the urban future. In the print magazine, the annual “Fast Cities 2010” list highlights progressive ideas already in place — a smart power grid in Boulder, innovative neighborhood redevelopment funding in Savannah, artist housing in Boston. Online, Greg Lindsay reports from the 18th annual Congress for the New Urbanism convention where the US Department of Housing and Urban Development announced that it will rate projects for “location efficiency” (such as residential density and public-transit access) and the new LEED-ND principles when it makes its \$3 billion funding decisions this year; HUD aims to influence the entire housing market. In “Save the Cities, Save the World,” Lindsay reports on urban designer Peter Calthorpe’s similar ambition. Calthorpe is developing software that “quantifies the savings in CO₂ and dollars” when development follows denser urban patterns. The analysis will inform debate over California’s proposed legislation to reduce emission levels (a model for national policy), while it makes an economic case for urban planning as part of the solution to climate change. Finally, in “New Urbanism for the Apocalypse,” Lindsay describes New Urbanism founder Andrés Duany’s spin on the urban-agriculture idea: “agrarian urbanism.” Imagine a golf-course community jettisoned to the early 19th century: instead of 18 holes, developers would simply finance greens of a different sort.

Furnishing ideas... In “Herman Miller’s Design for Growth” (*Strategy + Business*, Summer 2010), Bill Birchard presents an in-depth look at the innovative management practices of this office-furniture giant. Calling it “participatory management,” Herman Miller gives business workshops to employees at all

levels, issues bonuses for team effectiveness, and leads ongoing research on the future of the workplace, as it develops new products — like LED walls — that strive to address practical problems rather than fitting into pre-established product categories. From Charles and Ray Eames to Boston’s Sheila Kennedy, Herman Miller has long collaborated directly with architects and designers. In designing furniture, it has also designed a company.

Consider the spider... Spiders make silk that is ounce-for-ounce stronger than steel without blast furnaces. What if, instead of traditional “heat, beat, and treat” ways of making things, we were to take cues from the natural world? “Nature is the Model Factory,” argues Michael Freedman in *Newsweek* (online, May 28, 2010). He chronicles current architectural and material science research: self-cleaning properties of lotus leaves are being studied for exterior paints; airflow in a new non-air-conditioned building in Africa is modeled after termite mounds; forest canopies and tree roots are being analyzed to inspire roofs and foundation systems, respectively. It’s a wild and wonderful world.

Polling data... “What is the most important piece of architecture built since 1980?” *Vanity Fair* (August 2010) asked 90 leading architects, educators, and critics. Their runaway winner? The Guggenheim Bilbao by Frank Gehry. One respondent likens the influence of this single work to Le Corbusier’s 1923 manifesto, *Towards a New Architecture*. Matt Tyrnauer examines this reaction and others in “Architecture in the Age of Gehry.” Equally interesting is the lack of consensus on the other “important” works, revealing the rather complex legacy of Modernism. Slideshows of all 21 “modern marvels” are published online, along with Gehry’s other works and the



complete results of who voted for what. Architecture in the age of *American Idol*.

The importance of being glam... Wellesley professor Alice T. Friedman tackles Eero Saarinen, popularity, and the importance of image in “Modern Architecture for the ‘American Century’” (*Places Journal*, posted June 22, 2010). While seeking a unique form for every project, Saarinen explored new technologies and materials, emphasizing “circulation, framing, and sensual experiences.” His clients loved it. The critics were mixed. In this excerpt from her new book, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture*, Friedman offers a thorough re-evaluation of Saarinen’s work and the mid-century criticism it received, and in doing so, discusses the role of American architecture in an era led by corporations. ■

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