

aia VT

architecture in the green mountains



3.03

calendar

march 11:

Furniture Design and Techniques. ClearLake Furniture, 322 Route 100 North, Ludlow, VT. 5:00pm

march (TBA):

IDP - Intern Development Program; What it is, How it really works and What reality is for Internship.

march 27-28:

"Designing For The Ages". Sheraton Conference Center, South Burlington.

job bank

E.H. Danson Associates Architects

has an immediate opening for an entry level to intermediate level design/drafting person. Applicants will need CAD skills and experience in construction documents. Company offers competitive salary and benefit package. Letters of interest and resumes can be mailed or e-mailed to the following address:

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aiaVT welcomes

William Brothers, Assoc. AIA, Williston
Gregory Masefield, Assoc. AIA, Middlebury
Dominagus Palilling, Assoc. AIA, Middlebury
Kirsten Seibert, Professional Affiliate, Waitsfield
Steven Silver, AIA, Manchester Village

What we must look for, in place of prototypes which are collective interpretations of individual living patterns, are prototypes which make individual interpretations of the collective patterns possible; in other words, we must make houses alike in a particular way, such that everyone can bring into being his own interpretation of the collective pattern...

Herman Hertzberger, 1963

what the emperor wore to the awards banquet

donald maurice kreis

Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist. Together let us conceive and create the new building of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will rise one day toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.

Proclamation of the Weimar Bauhaus, 1919

tion – the deftly executed resurrection of a historic industrial building in Manchester, a set of truly welcoming interstate highway rest stops near Burlington, and, as always, much in the way of well-executed residential design that testifies quite eloquently to what money can buy in the early 21st Century. **But was there excellence, as advertised?**

Before one who is a mere critic, and neither trained in architecture nor experienced in the profession, can approach such a question, a firmly stated disclaimer is a necessity. You don't have to be an architect to understand that in our era, the completion of any architect-designed building is a victory of sorts. We are consigned to times in which tax-cutting fervor has decimated the public realm, land-use regulations inhibit innovation and public taste runs toward gaudy McMansions. Every project entered in either state's competition is, in this sense, **a triumph of the human spirit over the forces of entropy, mediocrity and evil.** Thanks to all, for so much honest and good work.

Nor does the non-architect do a disservice to his friends in the profession by reporting to them on the extent to which the emperor was, at best, semi-clothed during the awards banquets in question. It is all the more so because no less a personage than Edward Frenette, the Cambridge-based architect who co-chairs the Design Committee of the Boston Society of Architects, issued a polite but firm call in the latest issue of ArchitectureBoston for reform of the chapter-based AIA awards process.

Had Frenette focused on the recent Vermont and New Hampshire programs, here are some questions he might have asked:

Did the New York architects who juried the Vermont awards help the cause of architectural progress in the Green Mountain State by arbitrarily deciding (as confirmed by one of the jurors) that at least one project singled out for recognition should invoke or reflect the New Yorkers' preconceived notions of traditional Vermont building forms? (This had much to do with honoring the I-89 rest stops, which were designed to resemble barns.)

Were the Vermont architects who juried the New Hampshire competition bedazzled by a very effective rehabilitation of a historic waterfront building in Manchester that they ignored the architects' arguably awkward attempt to mimic the Industrial Revolution aesthetic of the original buildings in the part of the project that comprised new construction?

Is it responsible, year after year, for both awards programs to heap honors on high-end residential projects that are obviously second-homes or retirement homes that were designed with little or no effort to limit square footage or energy consumption?

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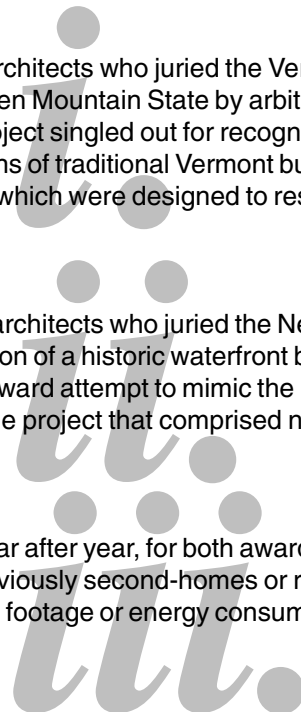
There was so much of excellence to feast upon this winter at the annual awards ceremonies of both the Vermont and New Hampshire chapters of the AIA!

That's right – **the food was terrific**, at both banquets. And you can count on this assessment, since it is based not on reviewing photographs of the food that was served, but on the actual consumption of it, in situ.

As for the awards themselves – well, that's a more complicated question. There was certainly good architecture amidst the projects singled out for recognition

The idea of modern architecture includes the link between the phenomenon of architecture and that of the general economic system.

CIAM, 1928



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AIA Vermont reserves the right to edit articles for available space and determine appropriate content prior to inclusion. Submissions must be received by the 5th of the month prior to publication.

Do the official juror comments, comprised of platitudes like "elegant solution to a very challenging problem," offer any meaningful commentary about what separated the excellent from the merely acceptable or the pleasingly competent?

What accounts for the fact that in both states, the public and the media largely ignored the design awards, at a time when most educated people who read newspapers are capable of discussing at some length whether they preferred the Daniel Liebeskind vision for the World Trade Center or that of Shigeru Ban, Rafael Vinoly and the rest of the THINK team?

Is it essentially impossible for a great project such as the renovation of the historic public library in Woodstock (passed over two years ago) to win recognition for excellence when the project's chief virtues would be invisible to jurors whose sole scrutiny of the design involves looking at photographs?

As suggested by Frenette, and the fellow members of the BSA Design quoted in his article, certain

reforms in the awards process are in order, however they might shake up the comfortable universe of awards banquets. The most obvious is to require some **actual interaction with a work itself**, as opposed to its photographs, before the project can be honored for excellence. It would obviously be impractical to expect jurors to visit every competition entry, but it borders on the irresponsible to heap laurels upon a project that no juror or even a representative of a juror has actually visited.

A second and equally pressing reform would involve **opening up the jurying process**. As MIT professor Wellington Reiter told the BSA, "Can you imagine how different the process of preparing a submission would be if you had to get a statement from the client – or from a neighbor?" At very least, it is time to have at least one non-architect on every awards jury. The region is awash in art professors, retired politicians or executives (with experience as clients of big public commissions), newspaper editors, affordable housing advocates, engineers, sculptors, historic preservationists and others with considerable background in the business of living and/or working in buildings. They are unlikely to be content with assessments like "nicely crafted as an object. Well done within the Vermont re-interpretive vernacular."

By scenographically simulating the profiles of classical and vernacular and thereby reducing the architectonics of construction to pure parody,

Populism tends to undermine the society's capacity for continuing with a significant culture of built form.

Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture: a critical history, 1980

I am taking the limited view, I admit, but the limited view, which architects have tended to belittle, is as important as the visionary view, which they have tended to glorify but have not brought about.

Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, 1966

Lastly, as Maine goes, so should go its northern New England neighbors. The Maine awards program happens only once every two years – and, as a result, Maine perpetuates the illusion that its architects (at least the ones honored with awards) are doing more interesting work than their counterparts in Vermont and New Hampshire.

Biannual awards programs would also have the salutary effect of opening up every other annual banquet of the two chapters to something truly intriguing. Who wouldn't pay \$45 to hear Rafael Vinoly give an insider's look at the THINK team – especially if the food is as good as it was at this winter's dinners in Montpelier and Manchester?

The old clichés involving both banality and mess will still be the context of our new architecture, and our new architecture significantly will be the context for them.

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