

A triumph for classicists

By David Colman

The early 1990s did not seem the moment for a revival in classical architecture. On the contrary, from Manhattan to Berlin, museums, hotels, developers and wealthy individuals were clamoring to sign up Richard Meier, Jean Nouvel and other celebrity modernists, hoping that the style and substance of radical design would lure visitors and buyers in droves. In many cases that strategy worked. Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, has attracted more than 7 million visitors since 1997, and Ian Schrager's boutique hotels changed the industry. So one could understand why the design world might dismiss the earnest and tweedy souls in horn-rimmed glasses who founded the Institute of Classical Architecture in 1992. Who needs Ionic columns when you can have Rem Koolhaas?

What a difference a decade makes. Since 2002 the institute has made sweeping changes to its once-fusty agenda, and the design world is scoffing no longer. The group appointed its first full-time president, Paul Gunther, two years ago; merged with Classical America, another traditional scholarship organization; and has fanned the appetite for traditional architecture. In the last 18 months, its membership has more than doubled, to 1,500, and the group (now called the Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America) has opened five new regional chapters for a total of seven.

Its program of classes, tours and lectures teaching the concepts and practices of traditional architecture — a curriculum largely won from architecture schools — earned last year's largest design grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Its lectures in

New York have drawn speakers like Martha Stewart and crowds as large as 300, even on staid topics like a new translation of Vitruvius.

"Their contribution to the awareness of architecture and design has become enormous in the last few years," said Chase Ryn, the executive director of the National Building Museum in Washington. Even decorators who like their modernism, like Miles Reid and DD Allen, are showing up for the institute's lectures and classes on subjects like ornamental plastering and theories of proportion. It has started regional programs aimed at developers and builders. While the institute was sustained for

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more than a decade by pure classicists like Gil Schafer 3rd, Anne Fairfax and Richard Sammons, their preaching did not find a great audience. Now the institute, which last year finally found a permanent home in a neo-Classical style 1890 building on West 44th Street, has begun up the discourse to include traditional architectural styles, including Georgian and Greek Revival, Arts and Crafts, Gothic Revival and shingle style.

"They're really expanding the definition of what constitutes classicism," said Bunny Williams, the Manhattan decorator and a fellow on the institute's board. Last year the institute gave its Ross Award for excellence in architecture to Merrill & Pastor, a Florida firm, whose work ranges from classical to early modernism.

"The purists on the board are not as-

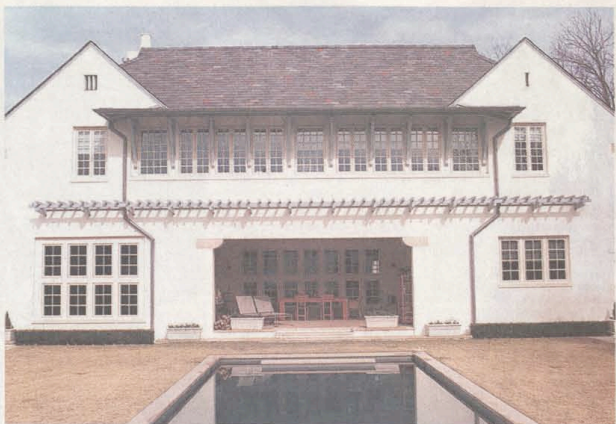
stant," Gunther said. While he deflects praise to the institute itself, he is responsible for much of its recent success, members say. Gunther, a socially well-connected former vice president of the New York Historical Society, has become a kind of Karl Rove for the classicist movement. "He's a huge factor in their success," Williams said.

Ever on the lookout for ways to expand the institute's scope and prestige, Gunther last month announced that in partnership with Habitat for Humanity it would design classically styled affordable homes for use in historic neighborhoods across the country. Prototypes will be built in Savannah, Georgia, Norfolk, Virginia, and Rochester, New York.

"It was a well-thought-out and practical collaboration," said Jeff Speck, the director of design at the National Endowment for the Arts, which contributed \$50,000. "Nothing is more attractive to an NEA panel than seeing artistic means used toward social ends."

Classicist's most zealous fans maintain that it tenets mark it as the great and timeless architecture of democracy, and they exalt it above all other styles. But even nonzealots have come to see its allure. "I'll have people who have lived in really fabulous modern apartments," said an architect. "But then they'll move into an apartment or house that has a lot of classical proportions and details, and they'll say, 'Now, I really feel like a grown-up.'"

Jane Rosenthal, Robert De Niro's partner in the Tribeca Film Center, certainly had enough of contemporary loft living. Last year she and her family left their loft (and its Eames-chair decor) for the Dakota on Central Park West, hiring Peter Pennoyer, one of New York's premier classical architects, for the redo. "I love the new, but I don't ever



David Dowler's traditional house in Dallas, above. Members and staff of the Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America.

like to forget what came before," Rosenthal said. "There's such a sense of history here, and that inspires you to go forward and push boundaries when you can understand that historical context. So you're not trying to be new just for the sake of being new."

But detractors counter that today's traditionalism is more about class than classicism. Instead of recalling the noble aims of the golden age of Mount Vernon and Monticello, classicism today, they say, seems more likely to recall the glory days of Anglo-American aristocracy, a Ralph Lauren version of architecture. One need only look at the limestone-columned, 28,000-square-foot, or 2,600-square-meter, behemoth built in Atlanta by the architect William Harrison to get the point.

It doesn't help that many of the institute's members have a knack for speaking in lofty, unbroken expanses of prose studded with arcane details. Yet traditional styles of house building are on the rise, according to the American Institute of Building Design, an association that represents architects and developers, and there are also new markets for masonry and stoneworking methods and materials once nearly defunct.

In upscale subdivisions across the country, for example, the Palladian window has become a prominent architectural feature, letting plenty of light into double-height living rooms, while still summing up echoes, however murky, of early-19th-century gentility. But paired with an eyebrow window, an

off-kilter gable or two and a rambling ranch floor plan, the traditional look becomes something very different: what might be called neo-hodgepodge.

The institute's successes do not rub everyone in design the right way. Some of the debate has, not surprisingly, taken on political overtones. One institute staff member said that shortly after he started working for it, he received a furious note from a friend accusing him of having become a neoconservative

stooge. He asked not to be identified so as not to reopen a wound. The dialogue does not often get that heated, but tensions do simmer. David Dowler, a portfolio manager, hired the Florida-based Merrill & Pastor Architects to build a house for him and his wife, Marsha, in Highland Park, Texas, a 1920s-era subdivision just outside Dallas. The house, finished in 2002, was far from classical, a clean, angular white stucco structure reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts style. But to members of the Dallas Architectural Forum, a group of architects and architecture fans, which convenes for functions and lectures, Dowler said, "I may be a dissident."

Dowler, who also owns a house in the new urbanist community of Seaside, Florida, said he is not a fan of many modern houses. "They are much better photographed than lived in," he said. "I get mad at architects who overemphasize how something looks rather than how something works as a home."

But others are quick to point out that nostalgia for 18th-century buildings may have more to do with unspoken nostalgia for the 18th century than for the building. "Reverting the classical forms is not the same thing as reviving the culture," said Terence Riley, the chief curator of architecture and design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

"The contemporary city is messy," he added, summing up a century of modernist architectural theory. "I don't know if classical makes a lot of sense, but everyone should study it."

The New York Times



The architect Gil Schafer and the Ionic columns in his New York living room. Classicist's fans call it the architecture of democracy.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVELER UPDATE

ROME Air and rail disruptions follow labor disputes

Alitalia canceled about 140 flights on Thursday and the Italian railroad company warned that strikes would disrupt services on Friday. The ground walkout by Alitalia workers on Thursday was followed by four-personal across the country and by flight attendants based in Rome and Milan over contract renewals, union officials said. Alitalia said it had canceled 67 domestic flights, 66 international flights and 8 intercontinental flights from the Rome and Milan airports. The rail workers are pressing for improved safety after a train crash near Bologna last month. (Reuters, AFP)

ANKARA 27 people quarantined after gas leak at airport

Twenty-seven people were quarantined as a precaution Thursday after a suspected leak from a parcel at the airport, officials and media reports said. A medical team, civil defense experts and firefighters were dispatched to the cargo department of the Turkish Airlines, the national carrier, at Ankara's Esenboga airport.

Traveler's forecast

High-low temperatures, in degrees Celsius and degrees Fahrenheit, and expected conditions.

City	Friday	Saturday
Abu Dhabi	23/12 73/55	24/18 81/61
Athens	10/1 50/34	15/1 59/54
Bangkok	30/28 86/82	30/26 86/79
Barcelona	18/9 64/48	20/12 68/54
Beijing	0/11 32/12	3/-10 37/14
Bogota	21/10 36/54	21/10 36/54
Berlin	7/2 45/36	10/1 50/34
Boston	1/4 34/25	3/5 27/23
Brussels	8/5 48/41	12/6 54/41
Buenos Aires	24/19 75/66	26/19 78/66
Calcutta	32/22 54/66	32/22 54/66
Chicago	3/3 47/37	7/3 45/27
Frankfurt	5/7 46/45	10/5 50/41
Geneva	9/3 48/37	10/7 50/41
Helsinki	0/-3 32/27	-2/4 28/25
Hong Kong	18/16 64/61	22/17 72/62
Istanbul	5/1 41/34	6/0 43/32
Jakarta	31/25 89/77	32/25 89/77
Los Angeles	20/15 68/59	22/18 72/62
Madrid	26/20 79/68	27/19 81/64
Mexico	25/11 77/62	25/11 77/62
Moscow	3/19 48/37	3/19 48/37
New Delhi	21/13 83/55	20/12 80/54
New York	31/25 89/77	32/25 89/77
London	10/10 50/34	15/1 59/54
Los Angeles	17/13 63/56	17/12 63/54
London	10/10 50/34	15/1 59/54
Manila	31/25 89/77	32/25 89/77
Mexico City	27/15 81/60	27/18 81/64
Miami	24/12 75/66	24/12 75/66
Moscow	4/-13 21/9	3/-10 37/14
Mumbai	31/25 89/77	32/25 89/77
Nairobi	21/13 83/55	20/12 80/54
New Delhi	21/13 83/55	20/12 80/54

ATHENS Strike halts trains, hindering airport access

Trains halted across Greece on Thursday as workers went on strike for 24 hours, disrupting access to Athens' international airport. The Athens Metro and the capital's suburban rail system both suspended services to the airport, though other metro services in the city operated normally. Bus services to the airport also operated Thursday, but were disrupted by a plan to restructure the Greek Railways Organization, which they fear would lead to job losses. (AP)

FORT WORTH, TEXAS Pillows being removed by American Airlines

American Airlines will remove its pillows from most domestic flights next week. The Fort Worth-based carrier says that pillows would be removed from most flights, beginning Tuesday, in a cost-cutting move expected to save the airline an estimated \$370,000 a year because workers are able to clean cabins faster. American announced in November that it was removing pillows from its MD-80s. Now pillows also will be removed from 737s, 777s, and Airbus A300s on nearly all flights within the continental 49 states, Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico and Central

BLERNADE Villagers were snowed-bound and rear-cladding bulldozers froze solid as a freezing temperatures hit much of the Balkans for the second straight week, killing at least a dozen people. Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania all registered extremely low temperatures, according to local press reports. (Reuters)



A new approach to factory art

By Alison Leigh Cowan

THE NEW HAVEN, Connecticut American factory has been attracting artists since Eli Whitney here more than 200 years ago, awing the populace with his innovative and inspiring artists. Later, Andy Warhol seized on mass-marketed soap cans as a subject and Donald Judd enlisted factory workers to build sculptures.

New cities like New Haven are installing artists in factories and other workplaces to see how technology, be it vintage or cutting-edge, can inform art in the 21st century. Under the auspices of Artspace, a local arts organization, 10 artists were selected last year to be in residence at Connecticut businesses.

The artists, who received \$2,500 stipends instead of paychecks, were urged to soak up their hosts' histories, processes and products, and to create art that reflected the experience.

The results are on view in an exhibition that runs through April 2 at Artspace's headquarters. Called "Factory," the show features artists who drew an eclectic crowd of politicians, businessmen and artists to its opening reception last month. "I'm excited to see an artist who took up residency at a company that makes coin-operated binoculars for sight-seers, accompanied employees on their S.A.m. repair runs to tourist sites, sifting through foreign coins and slugs found in the machines, he searched for patterns. (Which currencies were the most popular? Which ones traveled the farthest?) He also videotaped people as they fantasized about what they would most like to see with the binoculars.

The organizers are excited about the work and materials and scales they never have the opportunity to try," Outman said. Using decorative adhesives that the C. Cowles & Co. makes for cars, the artist Ezra Parzybok "hot-wired" an olive truck that was about to be discarded from the waiting room. Flames now spout out from its back, and chrome strips evoking highway interchanges loop around its cushion.

The organizers borrowed the show's concept from a similar display in Troy, New York, in 2001. Denise Markonish, Artspace's curator, wanted to relocate it with industries that were peculiar to Connecticut: gunmakers, quarries and old-line businesses that catered to the horse-and-carriage trade but now were ported for the automobile.



Michael Outman with a light weight binocular unit he created for Tower Optical.

Markonish and Helen Kauder, Artspace's executive director, asked artists to spend three weeks or more on their assignments, more time than was required of the artists in Troy. "We hoped we'd become part of the enterprise, going to meetings, and that people would know why they were there," said Kauder, a former investment banker who has run Artspace since 1998.

In the end, Markonish identified 13 willing companies in the New Haven area, from giant manufacturers like the U.S. Surgical plant in North Haven, to tiny publicly traded Tyco International, to tiny outfits like Tower Optical in Norwalk, a family-owned, eight-person operation. She then prepared summaries of each company's operations and asked the artists to rank them in order of preference. In a couple of cases, she noted "shop skills a plus" or warned that welding experience would be handy.

The most popular choice proved to be Tospoli USA, a young company on the Quinnipiac River that makes lightweight carbon racing shells for crew enthusiasts. Chaka Booker, a New York artist whose recycled rubber-tire creations were exhibited at the Whitney Biennial in New York in 2000, was eager to compare the malleability of carbon to that of rubber, her usual medium. The material was not easy to work with, she said, "but it has very good possibilities." For the show, she created 12 shells, each hanging from a ceiling of molded black carbon encased in a peeling coat of resin. The pieces echo earlier works by Booker in which worn industrial materials evoke scarred flesh.

Jane Philbrick, a sound artist from Redding, had her heart set on the Honeywell Fire Systems Group, an alarm company, so she put it down as her "first, second and third choice."

"I really wanted this," she said, from inside her art installation, a room lined with control panels, sensors and strobes. In the center was a box that read "Fire Open Then Pull Down Hook." "When someone pulled the hook, it would ensue — sirens, siren drums, flashing lights. Philbrick confessed that she had set the volume high enough to "feel the vibrations in your mouth."

"I like it really loud," she said, adding that when she tested it at home, her teenage son begged for mercy. Early on, she said, she decided to mimic the endless repetition she saw in the factory. It took 82 control panels, and 430 boxy red strobes alternating with 312 round white smoke detectors, to achieve the look she wanted. Company engineers were incredulous, she said. "Are you hoping to blind your viewers and leave them wriggling on the floor like fish?" she said they asked. She compromised, activating the equipment sequentially to minimize the sensory assault. The materials alone cost the company \$400,000, said Mark

Philbrick is resident. And that was on top of her experience at Tower Optical that she has yet to vacate the premises. The owners have taken his fascination in stride, and are wearing the caps he had printed that say "Turn to Clear Vision." "Sometimes you're so close to a product," said Bonnie Rising, whose grandfather founded the company in 1931, but Outman "made us think outside the box." Or in this case, inside the box. His latest suggestion is that the company build a see-through prototype to expose the binocular's inner workings.

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