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Dwell on Design

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Since its inception, in 2000, *Dwell* magazine has appealed to what might best be described as a new-urbanite constituency, defining a residential style for Generation Xers who embrace modernism and green living. The *Dwell on Design* conference and show, held in San Francisco from September 14 to 16, provided an excellent look at the components of this lifestyle.

The conference's triple theme, of modern design, sustainability, and smart growth, sought to connect attendees to "a community of thought leaders offering bold ideas, interesting materials, and new products designed to inspire you to express and enhance the beauty, simplicity, and sustainability of your living space."

The accompanying exhibition showcased programs, products and imagery that support the kind of living readers are offered cover-to-cover in each issue of the magazine.

Presentations

Moderated by the journalist John Hockenbery, the conference sessions included many familiar faces from the worlds of progressive architectural design and community development.

Kathryn McCamant, a pioneer of co-housing, spoke about the need for clustered housing to yield more open space. "The community is the secret ingredient of sustainability," she noted.

Alice Waters, the founder of Berkeley's Chez Panisse restaurant,

presented a slide show of gardens and vegetables that illustrate her advocacy of organic, locally grown food and the need to change the eating habits of American children.

Gwendolyn Wright, a Columbia University architectural history professor known for her appearances on the popular PBS television show "History Detectives," described the longstanding role of the shelter press in disseminating new ideas about housing and public space. There is a continued need "to think beyond the opposition of traditionalism and modernism," she said, adding that it is important to trace the roots of both ways of thinking to understand the ways people really make places for themselves.

The UC Berkeley professor and

landscape architect Walter Hood asked the audience to move beyond single-purpose ways of approaching their environments. He offered instead the ideal of the public realm as an amalgam of multiple perspectives. And he cited the power of blurred boundaries in the design process.

Other presenters included David Bushnell, Andrea Cochran, Frank Harmon, Craig W. Hartman, Michelle Kaufmann, Reed Kroloff, Mark Lakeman, Dan Maginn, Geoff Manaugh, Michael McDonough, Bill Mitchell, Lorcan O’Herlihy, Richard Parker, Gwynne Pugh, Kirsten Ritchie, and Jennifer Roberts.

Products

In each issue, *Dwell* offers readers articles on modern architecture and design, but it also includes passionate essays on icons of modernism and their output, such as Eames chairs, Noguchi tables, and an array of prefab minimalist dwellings. The “design exhibition and community forum” that accompanied the conference thus advertised itself as “a hands-on marketplace created to spotlight and demonstrate top products and services inspired by modern design.” It contained displays of “product design, prefab, green building practices, architectural innovation, landscape design, and more.”

Dwell’s progressive stance emphasizes how environmental responsibility and commitment to green design can inspire innovation and new products. Yet the mixture of serious discourse on design and the promotion of lifestyle patterns and products is a tricky business. For the *Dwell* community, what you wear, what you sleep on, what you eat, and where you live are all consumer choices that imply a need for serious environmental and social awareness.

Among those with booths at the exhibition was YouthBuild U.S.A., based in Somerville, Maryland, a nonprofit organization that works in low-income communities to build affordable housing. But their space was adjacent to such commercial enterprises as Heath Ceramics, Room & Board, and Design Within Reach as well as a slew of sustainable-building material producers and prefabricated housing manufacturers.

A particularly lively discussion at the event was the role of manufactured housing as an alternative to developer- or custom-built houses. Recently, this type has found favor among shelter book publishers and even the mainstream magazine *Sunset*. Another conference speaker, the architect Michelle Kaufmann, a leader in this genre. Her own trademarked Glidehouse is among several designs that attempt to combine high style with low cost and sustainable production. For its part, *Dwell* has teamed with the design firm Empeyrean International to create its own “Dwell Home.”

Precedents

Dwell is not the first magazine to create a publishing niche by building a constituency for a certain style of living and the class consciousness that goes with it. Within the arenas of design, architecture, and the arts, journals have long served as rallying points for popular movements, forums for targeted debate, or mirrors of certain forms of social order.

One *Dwell* predecessor that came particularly to mind at the conference was *Arts and Architecture*. Published and edited in Los Angeles by John Entenza from 1938 until 1962, it promoted new building methods and a streamlined industrial modernism. In its pages, the photographer Julius

Schulman documented the work of Charles Eames, Craig Ellwood, Pierre Koenig, Richard Neutra, and others in support of a new aesthetic rooted in the California landscape, the promise of a new age and a celebration of materiality and structure.

As a precursor to the present *Dwell* phenomenon, the Case Study houses, which helped define the style of *Arts and Architecture*, aimed to bring low-cost, high-quality design to an emerging middle class. Yet, perhaps predictably, considering the aspirations of the architects involved, designs originally conceived as “worker housing” eventually became the jewel boxes of mid-century modernism in Los Angeles. Last year Pierre Koenig’s Case Study House #21 was purported to have sold at auction for some three million dollars.

With more than 250,000 subscribers, *Dwell* has a commercial reach that is much more robust than that of *Arts and Architecture*. Yet, like its precursor, *Dwell* serves an expository function. As the conference and show demonstrated, its goal is both to sell a lifestyle and move its adherents toward a new mode of living.

Where a previous generation looked for a style that would express the hope of a world free from the crises of two world wars, current devotees of the green revolution may be seeking one that expresses hope for a world free from the crisis of climate change.

Note

For more on the conference, visit www.dwell.com.

Opposite: Among the displays at the *Dwell* conference was a prefab panelized construction system developed by the Oakland, CA, architect Jim Zack. Images courtesy of Zack/DeVito Architects.

Meeting of the Minds

H. Fernando Burga

By the time you, the reader, finish this *Places* dispatch, about two thousand people will have migrated from the countryside to the city. Weekly, about 1.4 million people around the globe make this arduous transition. The emergence of metropolitan areas as home to a majority of the world's population framed the agenda for the Meeting of the Minds conference in Oakland, California, September 11–13.

The event, sponsored by the University of California at Berkeley's College of Environmental Design, in partnership with Berkeley's Global Metropolitan Studies Initiative and the statewide UC Transportation Center, brought together experts from academia, the nonprofit sector, and business to discuss challenges to metropolitan areas and explore sustainable strategies for transportation, land use, and urban design. Toyota USA, Inc., provided major funding, while the Urban Age Institute provided assistance in conference management.

The conference's point of departure was that the growth of metropolitan areas worldwide is affecting nature, the built environment, and society in profound ways. Providing a high quality of life in the world's metropolises will be one of the most important challenges of the twenty-first century, and is especially urgent in light of global warming.

The event sought to set in motion an exchange among experts in architecture, urban design, city and regional planning, public policy, vehicle design, traffic engineering, and related fields. And it sought to show that academics and practitioners from different disciplines share many common problems, and could benefit from each other's ideas and proposals.

(E)Merging Thoughts

The support from Toyota was particularly noteworthy for a conference like this. Mobility and access are a big part of the metropolitan challenge, and the company is intent on staying abreast of evolving notions about the shape a character of cities to come.

The company was represented at the event by Irving Miller and Bill Reinert. Miller explained how high the stakes are: "We...will go from the current 250 million vehicles on the globe to three-quarters of a billion in the next twenty years." For companies like Toyota, this transformation to a motorized world calls for a new vision of the relationships among manufacturers, cities, and other sectors of the economy to produce "sustainable mobility"—a new approach that embraces technological innovation, reduces CO₂ emissions, and effectively manages the other social, economic and environmental challenges brought about by urbanization around the world.

Echoing these thoughts, Dean Harrison Fraker of Berkeley's CED spoke of the need for new types of vehicles that better fit urban conditions, especially in China, India, and other emerging economies where high densities and limited road space are the rule. "The central questions which dominate this conversation are: What will cities look like in the future? How will vehicles fit into the vision of the future?"

According to Fraker, the innovative frame of mind must expand to include new designs for buildings, districts and regions as well as technological innovations in vehicles, fuels, and their use. He also called for new "public-private partnerships which reward efficiency, technological innovation and social innovation." Places like CED are the incubators for new

ideas, places where new paradigms are invented and the links between theory and practice are forged.

Steven Chu of Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory also discussed the prospects for new fuels, an important direction for research and development in view of the finite supply of oil as well as the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the next two decades. According to Chu, new fuels could reduce emissions by a substantial amount, but are unlikely to suffice to meet Kyoto or California standards in the time available.

Ways of Thinking: Alternative Approaches, Scales, and Designs

Elizabeth Deakin, director of the UC Transportation Center and co-director of Berkeley's interdisciplinary Global Metropolitan Studies Initiative, noted that currently there are several alternative visions of the road ahead. "Business as usual" will likely result in increased congestion, pollution, and global warming. An alternative vision emphasizes new vehicles powered by new fuels, with high tech highway operations and management to keep the traffic flowing. A contrasting vision focuses on coordinated land use-transportation planning to facilitate transit, walking, and biking, with the private automobile playing a smaller role.

In Deakin's assessment, the major challenge for the next decade will be to find the best path forward: "What is at stake is the character of cities; how we redesign and rethink the connections between engineering, land use, urban design and policy will help determine the livability of our metropolitan regions and the future of the world's environment, economy, and social relationships."

Robert Cervero, Chair of the Dept. of City and Regional Planning

at Berkeley, analyzed the city at different scales: the region, the district, and the neighborhood. For Cervero, the goal of planning is to achieve land uses at the neighborhood and district levels which provide choice, a healthy environment, social interaction, and economic opportunity, and then use transportation investments to link these neighborhoods and districts, to create a sustainable region. Cervero showed how rail transit or bus rapid transit can complement sustainable neighborhoods and districts.

Urban designers and Berkeley faculty members Elizabeth Macdonald and Allan Jacobs brought the role of creative design into the conversation. Their presentations showed how design excellence coupled with creative city planning and progressive political leadership have made such places as Curitiba, Brazil, and Vancouver, Canada, excellent places to live. These successful cities have defined urbanism broadly, integrating built form, transportation, social equity, and ecological function.

As Jacobs noted, the establishment of regional transportation corridors—as in Curitiba’s “structurals” or Copenhagen’s finger plan—can shape city and regional development while at the same time offering healthy local communities.

Macdonald pointed out that street design goes two ways: “Just as the design of the car influences the design of the street, the design of the street should influence the design of the car.” She argued for more flexibility in both street design and in vehicle design, “inventing new combinations which offer possibilities beyond accepted mandates and conventions.”

Other speakers included innovative technology experts Susan Shaheen, Robin Chase, and Pravin Varaiya; developing countries experts



Nancy Kete, Lee Schipper, Tim Campbell, and Aaron Golub; and urban development/design consultants Martin Tillman, Peter Crowley and Paul Farmer. California Attorney General Jerry Brown gave a dinner talk, and Executive Director Jose Luis Moscovich of the San Francisco County Transportation Authority was a luncheon speaker.

Innovative use of vehicles, whether in the car sharing programs discussed by Shaheen or the dynamic ridesharing projects being designed by Chase, offers new ways of providing mobility. In addition, many cities are pursuing demand-management strategies, from the constellation of measures reviewed by Tillman to the transit investments and road-pricing experiments discussed by Moscovich.

At the same time, Varaiya pointed out, engineers are developing new approaches to vehicle control and highway operations that could make the motor vehicle and its use safer and more efficient. And Brown promised



to insist that California land use plans meet global warming mandates.

Thinking Ahead

The Meeting of the Minds conference exhibited several examples of best practices and suggested possible solutions to both present and future urban challenges. It is hoped such interdisciplinary encounters between academics, practitioners, and industry will create the basis for ongoing dialogue.

The last word arising from the conference reinforces this notion. If today we witness the effects of globalization on cities halfway across the world, in our lifetimes we will feel the effects of climate change in our own backyards. The Meeting of the Minds Conference sought to demonstrate that it is not too late to influence this process of change—thoughts can translate into actions.

Above: Relative transportation impacts. Photos courtesy of Martin Tillman.