Metropolitan Memories

When Aaron Betsky was first writing for this magazine in the '80s, New York City was a magnet for wealth, and architecture bowed the line. Decades later, as he notes, the Upper East Side faction that first made that area safe for people who match their dogs with their fur coats is still going strong. To read about their efforts to stymie the Whitney Museum expansion go to www.friends-ues.org/winter2004newsletter.htm. The late founder of the Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District, Halina Rosenthal is still quoted on their press releases comparing some townhouses in jeopardy to a "corps de ballet," saying "we will oppose this dismantling of the Upper East Side Historic District as we would the dismantling of the tout ensemble of Swan Lake." If only Ms. Rosenthal had been around in 2002, she might have put her obviously formidable energy toward saving Richard Meier's Bronx Developmental Center. To see that building properly mourned go to www.architecturesink.com/tirade/meier.htm.

Toward a New Suburbanism

We did some growing up in the D.C. suburbs around 1982, and we assure you--it wasn’t pretty. Therefore, Joel Kotkin’s heartening piece on the future of the 'burbs comes as a pleasant surprise. Seems culture may be on the rise in the land of "little boxes." Right in our old stomping ground the Music Center at Strathmore, www.strathmore.org, is bringing a world-class symphony orchestra to the wasteland. The Orange County Performing Arts Center, www.ocpac.org, is providing much needed succor to the O.C. (assuming they have time for the performing arts, what with all that shopping and tanning). And let’s not forget the food! According to a January 1999 article in the Atlantic Monthly, California’s sprawl-infested San Gabriel Valley is home to "the best Chinese food outside China." (At the attractive URL www.sangabrielvalleymenus.com claims that listings for Chinese restaurants are "coming soon." Here’s hoping.) Now, if only the likes of Anaheim, www.anahiem.net, continue to thrive and grow in diversity, we may just have a suburban revolution on our hands.

"Type 1987?" Revisited

According to Karrie Jacobs, little has really changed in the world of type since Paula Scher and Roger Black went to the mat over ITC Garamond in 1987. For opinions on the subject from new practitioners try advancedtypography.blogspot.com, the blog run by typography students at North Kentucky University. Typographica, with its annual lists of favorite fonts, can be found at www.typographic.net; and Emigre’s FAQ, which may just delineate the position of the old-school typographers versus that of the new, is at www.emigre.com/FAQ.php. Last, but not least, Michael Bierut’s 2004 anti-Garamond rant lives on at www.designobserver.com/archives/000205.html. Plus it½a change...?

Smart City 2020

Carlo Ratti’s SENSEable City Laboratory, senseable.mit.edu, recently held an exhibition, ending March 29, at MIT’s Wolk Gallery. The show, Digital_Minimal, featured such projects as iSPOTS—a documentation of the school’s 3,000 Wi-Fi nodes—and MG_Flat, a morphing interior-design system shown at the 2004 Venice Architecture Biennale. Ratti has an architectural firm with offices in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Turin, Italy: www.carloratti.com. The House_n research group, led by Kent Larson and based out of MIT, accepts volunteers to live for one or two weeks in its sensor-studded PlaceLab condo. If you’re interested in becoming a participant, e-mail homestudy@mit.edu, or visit the Web site for information on upcoming studies: architecture.mit.edu/house_n/studies.html. For a full array of urban and student projects go to cities.media.mit.edu.

Black Like Me

Reed Kroloff, formerly editor in chief of Architecture magazine, has been dean of the Tulane University School of Architecture since 2004. After Hurricane Katrina and the bungled federal, state, and local responses destroyed much of New Orleans, Kroloff was named chair of the Urban Design Sub-committee of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, which was formed by Mayor Ray Nagin to plan the city’s recovery. You can read the commission’s reports on its Web site, www.bringneworleansback.org.

Portland Building

As the Portland Building gets a green roof, thus, arguably, joining the twenty-first century, the architecture world is getting another chance to consider just how much, or little, it likes Michael Graves’s purple Po-Mo box. During this period of reflection, it might be worth taking a glance at an article in Willamette Week’s own 25th anniversary retrospective at www.wweek.com/html/25-arch.html. While the piece does describe the building as a "noble failure," it also decries the "conservative and anti-intellectual subtext" inherent in criticism of it. If your taste runs more to public art than hot-topic architecture, the Smithsonian Institution’s wonderful research site, www.siris.si.edu, has background on the building’s mammoth hammered-copper sculpture (the country’s second-largest such work after the Statue of Liberty). Go to "search art inventories" and enter "Portlandia" under "title browse."
Starck Phenomenon

Whether they admit it or not, there must be countless young designers out there who chose their careers in emulation of Philippe Starck. To see why go to www.starck.com; the eccentric Renaissance man’s official site has a catalog of his overwhelming output, including his "non-products" for Good Goods. If you’re looking for a less biased forum on Starck, the Centre Pompidou, www.centrepmopidou.fr/education, has reams of articles, product info, and details about past exhibits (tap on "tous les dossiers..." under "Ressources"); non-Francophones can click on "English" on the top right). Or, of course, there’s our own Philip Nobel’s 1998 article about him, viewable sans password at www.metropolismag.com/html/content_1098/09g8str.htm. Best of all, though, is the perspective one gains by visiting www.virginigualactic.com. This is the site for the spaceport--yes, spaceport--Starck has conceived for Richard Branson. From flyswatters to flying in outer space...it may be every designer’s secret dream.

Restaurant Florent

Here at Reference, we heart Florent. How could any New Yorker not love a man who’s spent the last 20-odd years championing various human rights, sticking up for his neighborhood, and feeding that neighborhood some of the best fries in town? Forget about Pastis--Florent made the Meatpacking District, without once compromising his integrity or flair. For news stories about the restaurant, plus a gallery of MrCo’s distinctive imagery, go to www.restaurantflorent.com; or try www.papotage.com, the address of an online zine from Florent and co. that boasts rants and memories from the likes of reigning drag queen Lady Bunny. To learn more about the restaurateur’s causes visit www.compassionandchoices.org, where one can get active around end-of-life issues; or go to www.fireboat.org, which has info on the efforts to save the John J. Harvey, a fireboat used to put out fires on September 11.

Spy Magazine

Last April Tom Scocca of the New York Observer cobbled together a masthead for the secretly edited New Yorker--a nicety that the magazine has declined to print in all of its 81-year history, although it now maintains a list of contributors at www.newyorker.com/main/contributors/?contribs_af. Scocca’s stunt was much appreciated, but Spy beat him to the punch by about 18 years. In fact, much of what passes for fresh media commentary these days was either pressed by Spy (such as the now-defunct Radar) or torn directly from its pages (Gawker’s pronunciation guides). This fall Miramax Books will publish Spy: The Funny Years, an anthology edited by Kurt Andersen, E. Graydon Carter, and George Kalogerakis, and designed by Alexander Isley. (Meanwhile, the Canadian writer Joe Clark keeps a sampling of the magazine’s pieces at www.fawny.org/spy.) Andersen’s weekly Studio 360 radio show can be heard nationwide; a full list of stations is at www.npr.org/studio360.

O XO Good Grips Peeler

In her 1985 book, Disguised: A True Story, Patricia Moore, who helped develop Good Grips, wrote about her experiences dressing up as a woman in her mid-eighties. Once a week for more than three years Moore--a 26-year-old-old-school designer when she began her experiment--transformed herself with latex and makeup, and experienced firsthand the daily indignities of life as an elderly person. The book is out of print but easily available used through www.amazon.com or www.abebooks.com. While OXO’s ergonomic Good Grips line is a highpoint of simple, useful design, its Web site raises surfeit to an absurd art form. Among the facts available at www.oxo.com/oxo/about.htm: only three of OXO’s 41 employees are left-handed; the company’s turkey baster can also clean dryer lint; and its offices in Chelsea have the annoying habit of being either too hot or too cold.

Aeron Chair

Whether you love it, hate it, or simply can’t afford it, Herman Miller’s Aeron chair, www.hermanmiller.com/aeron, is securely established in our collective workplace unconscious. (We have four in the Metropolis office.) Some picky sitters, however, have complained that the chair’s breathable Pellicle fabric also makes a painfully deep impression on their khaki-clad thighs. Dack Ragus skewered the Aeron in four spectacular shorts from 2002 that dramatize its perceived design flaws, from a sandpaper-like seat to a lumbar support that “feels like someone’s goddamn elbow”: www.dack.com/misc/aeron.html. While OXO’s ergonomic Good Grips line is a highpoint of simple, useful design, its Web site raises surfeit to an absurd art form. Among the facts available at www.oxo.com/oxo/about.htm: only three of OXO’s 41 employees are left-handed; the company’s turkey baster can also clean dryer lint; and its offices in Chelsea have the annoying habit of being either too hot or too cold.

S,M,L,XL

One of the paintings featured in the Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau tome is a panel from Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. The full fresco can be found at the Vatican Museums’ Web site, in the critic vs [StartNew_ EN.html], by clicking on "Vatican Museums Online," “Sistine Chapel,” and “Ceiling.” In 1985 Mau, the graphic designer of S,M,L,XL, founded his Toronto-based design studio: www.brucemaudesign.com. The company has collaborated with clients as diverse as Frank Gehry and the New York Jets.

Guggenheim Bilbao

It's shiny, it's billowy, and it made otherwise sane critics use terrible similes like "artichoke." It's Guggenheim Bilbao, and nearly a decade of architecture has had to bow down before it. No wonder everyone from here to Cincinnati wanted one—a big, showy, brand-name cultural building, that is. For a sampling of such projects, try www.newmuseum.org (look under "now" for SANAA’s "new, New Museum"), www.moma.org/about/index.asp?view=54 (for Foster’s MFA expansion), and www.denverartmuseum.org (for Libeskind’s "outside the box" building). Of course, when it comes to the Bilbao museum itself, there’s no dearth of coverage. For basic information and background www.guggenheim-bilbao.es is a good start. Turning from the architecture to the region that gave it a home, www.euskadi.net, the Basque region’s online presence, can be viewed in English and is one-stop shopping for the area’s history, politics, and culture (including a "Basque poetry portal").
In the early 1990s, **David Siegel** ran a Palo Alto-based company that transformed the **Macintosh**'s plain putty with customized paint jobs. Having made his mark as a pioneer of Web design—he authored three books on the subject—Siegel, now based in New York City, moved on to the somewhat related field of guided chocolate tastings. To sign up call 888-333-5775, or visit **Wow Cacao!** at [www.wowcacao.com](http://www.wowcacao.com).

**Looking at the City**

If you're unsure of where to go when visiting **Khan el-Khalili**, the Egyptian bazaar **Metropolis** photographer **Paul Warchol** shot in 1991, [www.warcholphotography.com](http://www.warcholphotography.com), you might heed the advice of **Judy Miller**, Cairo bureau chief of the **New York Times** from 1983 to 1986. She guided tourists toward Feshawi, “a splendid ancient coffeehouse,” for its Turkish coffee and the nearby Street of Tentmakers for handmade pillow covers, wall hangings, and tote bags. Let’s hope her sources are of better quality than **Ahmed Chalabi** and **Scooter Libby**. Longtime contributor **Kristine Larsen**’s Web site, [www.kristinelarsen.com](http://www.kristinelarsen.com), includes 20 paired sets of extraordinary photographs that depict the blocks around the **World Trade Center** before and after 9/11. Even in capturing the most quotidian of activities—smoking, waiting for the bus, crossing the street—the images shock the viewer into seeing the gap in the skyline as if for the first time.

**Passion Plays**

While the form-over-function values of the ’70s-era **Cooper Union** still linger, since September 11 the curriculum has taken a turn toward the practical according to a 2002 article in **Prism**, the American Society for Engineering Education journal: [www.prismmagazine.org/april02/change.cfm](http://www.prismmagazine.org/april02/change.cfm). Just days after the towers fell, Cooper students were asked to construct models of the **World Trade Center basement** that were immediately put into use by engineers excavating the site. For more about Cooper Union go to [www.cooper.edu](http://www.cooper.edu).

What do you think? Click [here](http://www.cooper.edu) to send us your feedback.