MODERNISM on Screen, on Campus, and on Sale

in this issue:

BACHELOR MODERN
Mid-Century Style in American Film

eero saarinen shaping community

SELLING MODERNISM
THREE BROKERS' PERSPECTIVES

Spring/Summer 2008
Have you visited the National Building Museum's web site lately? If not, you are in for a pleasant surprise.

Our site has been thoroughly revamped, making content more readily accessible, registration for programs easier, and information about the Museum's activities more accurate and up to date. The site also boasts a new, elegant design in keeping with the graphic identity we have been developing for our printed publications over the past few years. In the coming months, we will keep adding material to the site—including more and more products from our popular Museum Shop—and will adjust its functionality in response to comments from our many users, so please let us know your thoughts.

The redesign—which was also, in a very real sense, a reconstruction—of the web site was made possible by the generous support of The Home Depot Foundation, the Museum's Sustainability Partner. The $600,000 grant from the foundation helped us not only to enhance our web presence, but also to develop a two-year program series called For the Greener Good, addressing a variety of sustainable design and planning topics, as well as to “green” our own galleries by installing new, more environment-friendly materials.

Of course, creating a user-friendly, attractive, efficient web site requires untold hours of often unheralded work by a team of professionals. In addition to the countless hours of design and development by our internal staff, our interactive agency 4Site has been instrumental in the site’s implementation. Several peer organizations including McGraw-Hill Construction, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Institute of Architects, and the Autism Society of America have also offered their experience and their commitment to sharing resources in the future. These collaborations are immensely helpful to the National Building Museum and we’re grateful to have such generous colleagues.

If you have not already done so, please log on to our “renovated” web site at www.nbm.org soon and begin enjoying the fruits of their labors.

Chase W. Rynd
President and Executive Director
The National Building Museum continues its focus on modernism with the opening of *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* on May 3. This comprehensive exhibition of Saarinen's architecture and furniture reveals him to be one of the most influential designers of the modern era, whose work resonates with many talented young practitioners today.

Inspired by the Saarinen exhibition, this issue of *Blueprints* offers several lenses through which to view the broad cultural significance of modernism from the mid-20th century to the present day.

**Bachelor Modern: Mid-Century Style in American Film**
A look at how Hollywood helped define popular perceptions of modern design during the post-World War II period.

**Eero Saarinen: Shaping Community**
Saarinen may be best remembered for iconic, singular structures such as the Gateway Arch, but one of his most important legacies is his unorthodox approach to the design of educational and corporate campuses.

**Selling Modernism: Three Brokers’ Perspectives**
Americans are famously conservative in their domestic tastes, but this interview with three real estate brokers from Chicago, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco area reveals an enthusiastic subculture of homebuyers eager to go modern.

**Museum News**
- Teddy Cruz Delivers the 2007 L’Enfant Lecture
- Beverly Willis Library Dedicated
- Remembering a Museum Volunteer and a Former Trustee

**Development Notes**
- Donor Profile: Industry Partners Program
- *Corinthians* Celebrate the Holidays
- Thanks to Recent Donors

**Collections Highlight**
Concrete Kress

**Mystery Building**
“World’s Biggest Slinky”

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**A Problem-Solving Substitute for the Classic Flowerpot**
A substitute to the classic flowerpot is here—Storm. Designed by Julie Storm, the Storm flowerpot was created to solve a common problem afflicting many plants: overwatering. The product’s functional design challenges our expectations—and habits—in a simple yet sophisticated way. The aluminum flowerpot and the flower become one with Storm.

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*on the cover: The central space and conversation “pit” of the Irwin Miller residence designed by Eero Saarinen.*
Not long after Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s experimental Farnsworth House (completed in 1951) inspired public debate over the appropriateness of the International Style for residential architecture, United Artists and director Otto Preminger took a gamble on the inappropriateness of The Moon is Blue (1953). Centering upon the 24-hour romance between an architect and the young woman he meets at the Empire State Building, the film largely takes place within the bachelor architect’s apartment. The space reflects essential elements of mid-century modern design: it is bright, sparse, and functional, but it is also casual and comfortable (as evidenced by Maggie McNamara curling up in an Eero Saarinen-designed Womb Chair to sew a loose button, or how easily the Eames “bikini” wire chairs are reconfigured for dining with a convertible coffee table!). The film’s light treatment of sexuality would become a hallmark of similarly styled films—particularly the Doris Day/Rock Hudson vehicles of the late 1950s and early ’60s. Precisely because of its candid discussions of adult themes (and the specific use of forbidden words like “mistress” and “virgin”), it was denied a seal of approval from the Production Code Administration—the equivalent of today’s MPAA rating. One of the first to defy the production code, Preminger released the film independently and it became a runaway success, garnering three Academy Award nominations.

The National Building Museum’s recent film series, Bachelors, Secretaries & Spies: Mid-Century Style in American Film, was inspired by the exhibitions Marcel Breuer: Design and Architecture (which closed in February) and Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future (opening May 3). Given that film can offer unique insights into design history and trends in popular taste, how do American movies of the 1950s and ’60s reflect or diverge from developments in mid-century modern architecture and design?

During this period in film history, bachelors, working women, and spies or super-villains exist on film as independent figures, detached from—if not in direct opposition to—safe havens of community and family. In contrast to these metropolitan singles, families are shown to live in homes that are traditional in style (Colonial or Victorian), suggesting security and comfort. Nonetheless, the domestic trappings of middle class success are often undermined by themes of anxiety, instability, and financial burden, further fueling the desire for a bachelor existence free of responsibility. The great irony of the mid-century bachelor film is that practically all of the free agents featured find themselves well on their way to marriage and family by the end of the picture.

The high number of films in this broad genre seems to indicate that the public found great pleasure in seeing independent men and women pulled back into “normal” society. What follows is an exploration of how the mid-century modern homes of single men and women in American film reflected changing lifestyles and shifts in architecture and design during the same era.
WHAT DOES “MODERN” MEAN?

In April 1953, Elizabeth Gordon, editor of *House Beautiful*, launched a now infamous attack on modern architecture, embodied by Mies’s Farnsworth House and deemed “The Threat to the Next America.” Gordon wrote that “[t]he much touted all-glass cube of International Style architecture is perhaps the most unlivable type of home for man since he descended from the tree and entered a cave.” The editors of *Architectural Forum* returned fire with a full-page editorial that mused, “Who can really declare that his or her preferences represent ‘free taste’ but yours are part of a conspiracy to subvert the nation?... Major ideas do not gestate favorably in a mob” (May 1953).

As a result of this editorial scuffle, *Architectural Forum* initiated a series of articles “[t]o help sort out the main Design trends so the public as well as architects may understand them” (May 1953). The series began with Eero Saarinen’s look at “The Six Broad Currents in Modern Architecture,” identified as: “Wright and organic unity”; “Wurster, Belluschi and handicraft architecture”; “Aalto and the European individualists”; “LeCorbusier—function and plastic form”; “Gropius—an architecture for the machine age”; “Mies van der Rohe, the form-giver”; and then Nervi and Fuller, as “the engineer-scientists” (July 1953). Saarinen acknowledged that “each seeks in its own way,” but he was nonetheless hopeful about the shared future of modern architecture:

> It is, therefore, logical to assume that with the matur- ing of our civilization and the resulting respect for cultural, nonmaterialistic aims, spiritual qualities will flourish. They will catch up to the physical advances. Our archi- tecture will then have the balance necessary for its flowering and some day will take an important place in history with the Greek, the Gothic and the Renaissance.

Furniture designers in the post-war period shared the same optimism and faith in “better living through better design” that Saarinen expressed. Saarinen himself, along with individuals like Charles and Ray Eames, Harry Bertoia, George Nelson, Edward J. Wormley, Paul McCobb, and even the classically-informed decorator T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, was inspired by new materials and advances in mass production, as well as by the collaborative spirit found in design laboratories like the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

Companies like Herman Miller, Knoll, and Dunbar Furniture Company supported these designers and brought their goods to market. A steady stream of innovative designs could be seen in department stores, magazines, books, and museum exhibitions. The missionary zeal on the part of mid-century “form-givers” and their advocates helped to generate public demand for products and designs that complemented changing lifestyles. By the late 1950s, what was once considered a style had simply become the style. Hollywood, however, had its own ideas about “better living,” and used mid-century designs to send a very different message to American consumers.
STYLISH SINGLES

Looking at films from this time period, one can see that it is almost exclusively single men and women who are associated with mid-century modern design. Dozens of films from the 1950s and ’60s feature independent men and women living in modern environments.

The most common feature of these adult-themed comedies and dramas is the bachelor pad; a space that offered men an escape, a lair of their own, and an opportunity to inhabit a distinctly male domestic environment. Regarding this last point, Frank Sinatra’s highly-decorated but very male nightclub of a “pad” in *Come Blow Your Horn* (1963)—including bar, TV den, lounge seating, and visible loft bedroom—makes *The Moon is Blue* set look like a modernist motel room. In *Boys’ Night Out* (1962) a group of friends work together to create, and share, one perfect “lair,” while almost all of the locations in *Ocean’s Eleven* (1960) could be considered bachelor pads, especially Mr. Acebos’ Japanese-modern home (with a Mondrian twist). Other examples would include Sinatra’s subdued Asian-inflected apartment in *The Tender Trap* (1955) and Bob Hope’s tract home (“It’s not pink, it’s California Coral!”) with freestanding red fireplace, in *Bachelor in Paradise* (1961). The most disturbing example would be John Frankenheimer’s film *Seconds* (1966), which takes the bachelor movie into *Twilight Zone* territory. Rock Hudson, in a role very much against type, abandons his family and undergoes radical cosmetic surgery so that he might be “reborn” as a bachelor artist in Malibu. Appearing repeatedly in films of the ’50s, and especially the ’60s, the bachelor pad or beachfront hideaway would seem the ultimate fantasy of personal freedom for a large population of veterans, “organization men,” and male breadwinners in American society.

For female characters the theme of freedom or the lack thereof, is also ever-present in 1950s and ’60s film. Yet in the same films that show men living and working in modern style, most women are portrayed as wives living in ruffle-curtained suburbia (*The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, 1956), in posh luxury (*Desk Set*, 1957), or sharing a shabby flat with other working girls (*The Best of Everything*, 1959). When women are shown living alongside the likes of Knoll or Herman Miller designs, their non-traditional surroundings are justified by their being performers or artists.

In *Torch Song* (1953), Joan Crawford’s apartment is the jaw-dropping domain of the ultimate Broadway queen, the design of which is echoed in the set for Judy Garland’s luxurious living room in George Cukor’s 1954 version of *A Star is Born*. Barbara Bel Geddes’ cheery artist’s studio in *Vertigo* (1958) is all Eames-ian artistic clutter and comfort. The same year brought audiences Kim Novak’s earth-toned Danish Modern den/office in *Bell, Book and Candle* (1958). Sometimes a woman was unhappy with her modern surroundings, as in *The Girl Next Door* (1953) where a stage star discovers that her new home is not the dreamed-for cottage but a glass-walled oddity, complete with giant chimney-less hearth and Calder mobile (“Frankenstein slept here!”). But it is the exuberant *Pillow Talk* (1959) that encapsulates the variety of mid-century modern styles available to both men and women at the end of the decade—from Tony Randall’s sleekly modular office, to Hudson’s wood-paneled but electronically-controlled bachelor pad, to Doris Day’s pastel paradise of an apartment.
MID-CENTURY MODERN MADNESS

By the end of the 1950s, architects mirrored Hollywood in their search for a way to reconcile the state of their art (the “material” and “spiritual” aims of Saarinen) to the popular taste and needs of the American public. In 1958, Architectural Forum presented another series of essays on the state of modern architecture. Douglas Haskell’s contribution, “Architecture and popular taste” (August 1958), noticed that a growing number of architects were “shifting away from the adaptation of design to machine production toward the highly psychological task of adapting design to an era of popular mass consumption.” He described three areas in which popular taste was having an impact on modern architecture, namely, the desire for more decoration or romantic expression; a need for drama or symbolic form; and an inclination towards the improvisational and abstract over the linear and clearly-defined.

By 1959, there was a definite increase of decorative elements in mid-century modern film designs—a trend that sadly coincided with a rapid decline in mature representations of male-female relationships. The transformation of style and subject matter is particularly telling when comparing two successful Day/Hudson films, Pillow Talk (1959) and Lover Come Back (1961).

Style-wise, the first film is more closely aligned with the trim aesthetic of The Moon is Blue (1953), albeit with a spiral staircase similar to the one found in the Eames’s Case Study house (1949). The main level of Hudson’s bachelor pad is small, with a wall-hung cabinet reminiscent of those designed by Bauhaus master Marcel Breuer, pickled wall paneling, and a tasteful display of framed and lit modern art (in addition to the discreet control panel that dims the lights and locks the doors). In Lover Come Back, Hudson lives in a sprawling penthouse filled with orange and black surfaces that gleam like a Chinese cabinet of curiosities. Filling the screen are a biomorphic couch, curvy wetbar, built-in hi-fi, court jester wall-hangings, Japanese prints and padded headboard—all of which are far more decorated and dramatic than sets in the earlier film.

While the general plot of both films is nearly identical, not only is Lover Come Back more outlandish visually, but the manner and the lengths to which Hudson’s character misleads Day make the film more unsettling. In Pillow Talk, Hudson finds it difficult to let go of his false identity as his affection for Day grows, but in Lover Come Back, the fact that Day is a rival advertising executive would seem to justify Hudson’s drawn out and malicious manipulation of her professional and private life. By the time the baroque designs of In Like Flint (1967) appear, along with similar 1960s bachelor and spy films, women have become just another modern convenience found in the bachelor pad.

Seeing how plotlines of the virginal 1950s evolved into the '60s sex farce, it is no wonder that the veneer of Grecian glamour applied by Hollywood became increasingly suggestive of Roman decadence.

In the architectural world, meanwhile, a more mature expression of classical ideals was taking form. By 1959, Eero Saarinen's Miller House (completed 1957) had become a superstar of modern residential design and decoration—though in a very different way than Mies's Farnsworth House had earlier in the decade. *Architectural Forum* deemed the home a "contemporary Palladian villa" in September 1958, followed shortly thereafter by the February 1959 *Better Homes & Gardens* issue, which featured the home on the cover as its third "Hallmark House." The home's "pinwheel arrangement" of rooms, around a central space with a luxurious conversation "pit" and playful round fireplace, is supported by elegant white columns and bathed with light from a perimeter of skylights. This vision of white marble is brightened throughout by the colorful interior design work of Alexander Girard. Here, the "spiritual" element of architecture that Saarinen looked forward to in 1953 had clearly caught up with his own "material" advances.

While Hollywood was busy taking modern design to "mod" extremes, playing fast and loose with an eclectic mix of neoclassical forms and extravagant textures and colors, architects like Saarinen were recognizing the need for architecture to express modernist ideals in an individualized fashion. Although 1950s and '60s films appropriated mid-century modern design and used it in ways that the designers and architects could never have envisioned, they nonetheless provide a unique lens through which to view how popular taste challenged and reinforced the norms of a culture struggling with Cold War anxiety and rapid social change. In the end, Hollywood's one-sided love affair with mid-century modernism helped create a long-lasting association between a particular moment in design history and an ongoing stereotype of the swinging single.
by Reed Haslach

Reed Haslach is an assistant curator at the National Building Museum. She is currently working with curator Susan Piedmont-Palladino on the upcoming exhibition Green Community.


The mid-20th century coincided with the zenith of “high modernism” in architecture, marked by pure, abstract, and often monumental forms, especially in public and institutional buildings. While much of Eero Saarinen’s (1910–61) work fits into that mold, modernism alone is not an adequate lens through which to understand his oeuvre. Saarinen designed several major complexes of buildings that ran counter to modernist orthodoxy—subtly in some cases but quite dramatically in others. His unusual approach to designing groups of buildings, though often criticized at this time, derived logically from his early experiences in two creative communities in extraordinary architectural settings.

This article considers three of Eero Saarinen’s campus-based projects—the General Motors Technical Center (1948–56), Concordia Senior College (1953–58), and Stiles and Morse colleges at Yale University (1958–62). These projects stand as evidence of Saarinen’s career-long efforts to achieve a balance between community and individuality, and reveal a keen desire to develop and explore architectural forms and campus plans that not only reflected but enhanced and even actively shaped the identities of their communities.
Formative Experiences

Saarinen was raised at his family’s villa, Hvitträsk, in Finland, and later at Cranbrook Academy, an educational enclave in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, near Detroit. Though remotely located, Hvitträsk was a center for the artistic pursuits of Saarinen’s parents, Eliel and Loja—an architect and a textile artist, respectively—and their invited friends and collaborators. The family intentionally mixed their work and domestic lives, based on their belief in cooperative communities as ideal and necessary environments for artistic growth and development.

The Saarinens relocated to the United States in the early 1920s. In 1925, Detroit newspaper magnate George Booth commissioned Eliel to help design and develop a multi-faceted arts educational institution that would have a mission of “self-education under good leadership.” Eliel Saarinen’s original plan for the Cranbrook campus was notable for its delicate balance between informality and overriding order. While the design included several prominent axes and dramatic sculptural focal points, it also offered unexpected vistas, hidden courtyards, and modestly scaled arcades connecting the buildings. These subtle design details enhanced the tight-knit and intensely creative community of Cranbrook where, in an atmosphere similar to that at Hvitträsk, students explored a variety of artistic media in collaboration with fellow students and resident master craftsmen. Cranbrook’s spirit permeated all aspects of its design—from the campus plan to the individual buildings and residences to furniture, which accounted for Eero’s first commission.

After studying architecture at Yale University from 1930 to 1934 and working in Finland for a short time, Eero Saarinen returned to Cranbrook in 1936 to teach and go into practice with his father. The Saarinens designed several campus-based projects together and, though sometimes one’s hand appears more prominently than the other’s, these early works demonstrate a high degree of collaboration. Given his early experiences in the communities of Hvitträsk and Cranbrook, Eero learned to appreciate the symbiotic relationship between individuals and their communities, and came to believe that the interests of both must be carefully considered in the design process. Furthermore, his campus designs demonstrated his belief that good architectural design should not only reflect, but also actively enhance the interests of both entities.
An Industrial Versailles

General Motors commissioned the Saarinens to design its corporate research campus in 1944 as “another Cranbrook,” Eero would later recall. When the commission was resurrected in 1948, as the company was gearing up for a post-war production boom, primary project responsibility was transferred to Eero due to Eliel’s poor health. While the earliest plan for the Technical Center featured several major components designed by Eliel—such as a large, asymmetrical pool and a tall water tower—that were retained in subsequent schemes, the design of the GM Technical Center campus clearly reflects a transition from father to son, marking the beginning of the younger Saarinen’s mature career.

Eero worked closely with GM to understand the company’s needs and identity to find what he called “an appropriate architectural expression.” The resulting campus, dedicated in 1956, was a study in steel, brick, and glass on a vast site comprising more than 320 acres. Eero designed, in his words, a “constellation of buildings”—one group of interconnected structures for each of the five GM departments—“clustered” around the central pool. He developed new materials and technologies in cooperation with GM—such as brightly colored glazed brick, prefabricated panel walls, and neoprene gasket weather seals (like those used in automobile windshields) for the glass and metal panels—that would convey their corporate ideals of modernity and efficient mass-production. He strove for a sense of unity, arranging buildings into a “controlled rhythm of high and low,” using color “to help bind the project together.”

The GM complex is often compared to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s campus for the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. But sleek and modern though it may appear, the GM Technical Center—dubbed “a Versailles of Industry” by Life magazine—seems to owe a substantial debt to the picturesque precedent of Eliel’s Cranbrook campus plan. The project demonstrates Saarinen’s interest in maintaining a sense of individual identity within the unified whole of the campus through focal elements such as the structurally exuberant central staircases in four of the five buildings, and the dramatic sculptural counterpoint provided by the Styling Dome. As at Cranbrook, Saarinen even extended his attention to the campus’s furniture, which he designed in collaboration with Knoll, and a sculptural screen in the campus restaurant by Cranbrook alumnus Harry Bertoia. These elements underscore the importance of individual details in the creation of, in Saarinen’s words, a “unified, beautiful, and human environment.”
Project records show that Saarinen was intimately involved in the Concordia project, signifying his particular interest to create a community that was a place of both learning and living, similar to what he had enjoyed at Cranbrook. In a memo to his staff, he envisioned the college “as a very closely knit group of buildings” and gave extensive thought to how spaces would be utilized, from the way professors conducted their classes to the routes by which students would move about the campus. For example, while the school administrators originally wanted the students to be housed in three large dormitories of 150 students each, Saarinen proposed smaller houses for 36 students each, arranged in clusters, remembering later, “We hoped that this intimate housing would encourage real student responsibility for the group within each house.”

Concordia reflects not only the influence of Saarinen’s years at Cranbrook, but also that of his father. Eliel Saarinen taught his son to design for the “next largest context—a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, environment in a city plan.” In the case of Concordia, with its featureless site, Eero looked to the community’s identity for inspiration. While the project’s individual buildings are considered by many to be among his least inspiring, through thoughtful groupings of buildings, sensitive landscape design, and careful arrangement of private and communal spaces, Saarinen successfully imbued the campus with a sense of place that reflected and enhanced its communal character.

**Architectural Concord**

In 1953, a few years into the GM project, Saarinen was commissioned to design an entire campus for a new Lutheran college in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Concordia Senior College was originally a two-year school intended to prepare students for seminary graduate study. The 191-acre site was flat and visually unremarkable, so the primary burden of establishing both an identity and sense of community would have to be borne by the architecture and planning. In 1958, Saarinen noted, “The solution seemed to lie in the village-concept: a group of buildings that would have a quiet, unified environment into which the students could withdraw to find a complete, balanced life and yet one which was related to the outside world.” The final design was inspired by a Scandinavian village and was visually unified by the use of pitched roofs throughout, consistent orientation of building axes, and a common materials palette, including diamond-pattern brick walls and black roof tiles. As at GM, Saarinen included a man-made lake, in which the central chapel would be reflected, as a focal point in the plan.
**Medieval Modernism?**

One of Saarinen’s last projects was the design of two residential colleges, Ezra Stiles and Morse, at Yale University. More than mere dormitories, the Yale residential colleges provide sub-communities within the vast university setting. Students study, eat, and socialize together in their colleges, each of which is headed by a faculty “master.” Yale’s college system, with its intimacy reminiscent of Cranbrook, resonated with Saarinen and he desired to create buildings that expressed and reinforced its goals. As at Concordia, the Stiles and Morse colleges reflect Saarinen’s thoughts about particular uses, the individuality of student residents, and appropriate shared spaces.

With the Yale administration’s directive that the majority of rooms in these new colleges be singles, Saarinen resolved that the colleges’ rooms should be as distinct from one another as possible—“as random as those in an old inn rather than as standardized as those in a modern motel.” He created an array of room shapes, sizes, and locations, considering even the views from room windows, with an intention to create diverse experiences for students within the college community. At the same time, Saarinen did not forget the greater context of the campus community, in keeping with the examples of his father and Cranbrook. He carefully considered Yale’s existing courtyards and predominant stone construction. In response, he created a new construction technique for exterior walls—a hybrid of traditional stone bearing walls and modern, poured-in-place concrete—intended to yield buildings that closely complemented their masonry neighbors.

Most interesting of all, it appears that Saarinen’s process of designing the buildings was itself a reflection of his interest in the relationship between the individual and its community, and the ability of architecture to both reflect that relationship and actively enhance it. Saarinen shaped the overall building footprints of Stiles and Morse by clustering individual rooms and community gathering spaces into almost cellular structures, the whole buildings assuming forms that were literally the sum of their parts. The finished complex was a curious one—not fully modern but obviously non-traditional. For Saarinen, the project was a logical extension of his ongoing and evolving interest in the relationships between the parts and the whole in campus plans, and a fascinating expression of architectural convictions heavily influenced by the environments of his youth.

Although Eero Saarinen may be best remembered for his spectacular Gateway Arch in St. Louis and for the TWA Terminal at Idlewild (now John F. Kennedy International) Airport, his campus-based work may constitute a more important legacy, and may be the most revealing lens by which to judge his design philosophy. During his brief career, cut short by a brain tumor when he was only 51, Saarinen explored an astonishingly wide range of ideas regarding architectural form and materials. Yet despite his seemingly constant experimentation, Saarinen never wavered from his fundamental belief in the potential of architecture to give communities concrete form and to inspire the creative and intellectual lives of their members.

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*above:* The poured concrete and stone aggregate walls of the Ezra Stiles and Morse Colleges at Yale University.
© Balthazar Korab Ltd.

*below left:* Floor plans of Ezra Stiles and Morse Colleges at Yale University.
Eero Saarinen Collection. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Germany’s famed Bauhaus, the school that became virtually synonymous with modern design in the 1920s and early ’30s, was established with the goal of bringing together craftspeople, fine artists, and industrialists to create objects that were beautiful, functional, and widely available. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius unabashedly argued that good design was a commodity with demonstrable value—at the outset, in fact, he envisioned selling objects made by Bauhaus “apprentices” in order to raise revenue for the school. Nevertheless, during the school’s existence, Bauhaus products—especially works of architecture—were generally regarded as exceptions rather than norms, accessible to wealthy elites rather than the masses.

After World War II, however, modernism quickly became predominant in both the corporate and residential realms. In the United States, in particular, where new technologies, growing affluence, and suburbanization led to dramatic changes in domestic life, clean-lined, open-plan houses became increasingly popular. Yet modernism never firmly took hold in America, and to this day, most homeowners in this country continue to show a strong preference for houses and apartments in “traditional” architectural styles.

Given this context, the marketplace for modern houses and apartments has remained a relatively small subset of the American real estate industry. Even so, there are many homeowners who eagerly seek modern living environments. Recently, Blueprints invited three brokers who specialize in modernist properties to discuss the actual and perceived economic value of modern design in the hard-nosed world of real estate.
Martin Moeller: How did each of you come to be in the business of selling modern houses?

Renee Adelmann: I’ve always been a big fan of modern design and I love selling real estate. Luckily I live in an area that is extremely fertile with modern—especially mid-century—homes. Modern architecture is big in Marin County and San Francisco, I think mainly because of the views—there tend to be lots of windows in modern houses.

Vikas Wadhwa: My interest in real estate was piqued around 2000 with the Internet boom and all the modern design blogs on the web, and through Dwell magazine. In 2004-05, I was looking for a home for myself in Chicago and had a really tough time finding something unique and modern until I came across a unit in a Mies van der Rohe-designed high-rise that I completely fell in love with. It had been very gracefully renovated by Gary Lee Partners. At that point, I realized that there must be people out there like me looking for good, unique design, but it’s hard to find.

Brian Linder: Having become a general contractor and a licensed architect, for me, becoming a real estate broker was a logical extension of my vision of the architect as master builder. This wasn’t so much a career change as an extension of my desire to be in charge of the whole process.

I have often thought that architects have become almost like graphic designers—they are not out on the job site, and sometimes they don’t really understand the building process. Similarly, builders and contractors often don’t understand design; and neither of [them] really controls the financial process. So I got my broker’s license in 1999 and teamed up with a firm that had been marketing architecture as art in a real estate context for 30 years, and later went out on my own. As I tell people now, I’m practicing architecture by selling it.

Moeller: What are some interesting properties with which you have been involved?

Linder: We frequently discover things in the Multiple Listing Service that are jewels, but are being described as having “motivated sellers,” or saying “just make an offer,” but when you look at it, you say, “Wait, that’s architecture!” Sometimes you find out that it’s got a real-name architect associated with it. We’re always discovering [cases in which] people just don’t know what they have. On the sales side, when we market a property, we emphasize the extra value of good design and how we will promote it to the right people. I call it “the 2%”—that’s the percentage of buyers who really understand what architecture is.

Wadhwa: The interesting thing about Chicago is that in down-town, we have a lot of high-rises built in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. In some of these high-rises people have done fabulous renovations that are not what you’d expect from the exterior of the building. In that respect, Chicago has spectacular properties that you wouldn’t know about just from walking by… I love taking clients to see these completely surprising places.
Adelmann: I recently had clients who were the founder of the Art Deco society and his wife. They had tried to sell their house in Mill Valley at the peak of the market, and had not had any luck, so he contacted me. The house was 100% Art Deco—all the fixtures were expensive, vintage pieces. But he said the agent he’d had before just wasn’t getting it right. Everyone was walking through the house thinking of what they wanted to redo! So then I listed it and marketed it to the appropriate crowd, working with the mailing list from the Art Deco society plus my own list. We held an open house and got an offer on the first day for way above asking price. The person who bought it ended up changing nothing about the house, and that’s exactly the sort of person we hoped would buy it.

A lot of my clients have carefully preserved their homes—like original houses by mid-century modernist home-builder Joseph Eichler—and when they sell, they don’t want to sell to someone who is going to undo all that hard work.

Moeller: What advice would you give to architects who are eager to create what one might call “marketable modernism”?

Adelmann: I know a lot of architects create homes that are very specifically designed for their clients but not necessarily with an eye toward future owners. A lot of houses are built for couples or single people, and they don’t really reflect the demands of families. Architects could take some cues from mid-century modern houses, many of which were very friendly to entertaining and family living.

Wadhwa: What are we starting to see more in Chicago is architects focusing on creating a better indoor-outdoor relationship, even in multifamily housing. There are projects now where you see the inner space flowing out onto the deck with the same type of materials, creating one cohesive living area. In Chicago we get pretty rough winters, but when the weather gets nice, people do enjoy outdoor space and it’s great to see it now becoming an extension of the indoor space.

Linder: When people walk into a home and there is only concrete, glass, or steel, their reaction is often, “I could never live here—this is too much like a museum.” But if the environment is softened with wood, cork, or other natural materials it can make it much more appealing.

Another important thing is to establish a connection to the site and to the outdoors. I think that among the current generation of modernists, there is a real emphasis on the sculptural form of the building first, at the expense of any connection to lifestyles or people. I was once the superintendent on site for a project in Bel Air designed by Hugh Newell Jacobsen for the son of the founder of Architectural Digest. It was a magnificent house with lots of French limestone and doors that were original works of art. I asked Jacobsen at one point: “You have used lots of historical references, yet the house is clearly modern. How would you describe the style of this house?” His response was wonderful. He said, “Style—what a vulgar word. My homes are about people and entertaining and how they live.”

Moeller: What special challenges do you face in marketing modern houses and apartments compared to their traditional counterparts?

Adelmann: The main challenge is trying to hunt down the right buyer. If I’m selling a 100% original home, it’s very important for me to find someone who will respect the integrity of the home. I hate it when I have an open house and people walk through and say, “Oh my gosh, this has to be totally remodeled.” Luckily, no one who has bought a home of architectural integrity through me has gone on to change much about the house.

Linder: I feel like I’m on a bit of a personal mission. On our web site, we have a photo gallery devoted to architects’ work that has nothing to do with the commercial element of our business. It’s just that we want to impact our world in such a way that we nudge that percentage [of people who really understand architecture] forward from 2% to 3%. If, in my lifetime, I could influence the built environment by just one percentage point, I’d be thrilled.
I also want architects to understand that their work product has value and that translates to money for people who own their homes. I want architects to have the confidence to say [to clients], "Yes, this may cost more, but your home is going to be worth more when you sell it because it was well designed."

Wadhwa: In terms of challenges, when dealing with modern, unique, or just different properties, it’s not always easy to find comparable properties to assess the value. It’s difficult to tell your seller, “This is the value of your residence, and we should market it at this price,” without having a large amount of specific data behind your assessment of the property’s value. It’s more of an art than a science.

Linder: That’s true, but I am encouraged by how that situation is changing. I now have several architectural appraisers who, though they charge a higher-than-normal fee, are able to compare properties outside of the normal sphere. They can point to other Richard Neutra houses that have sold, for instance, or they can compare similar architectural types in a given area and make a broader assessment of value. We are also seeing that banks are more responsive to the idea that good design carries a price premium.

Moeller: Is there a growing interest in green design among your clients?

Linder: It used to be that green design was limited to the Birkenstock-wearing, hippie crowd. There was no marriage between good design and green design. Now we are seeing a number of young architects interested in bringing those two things together. On the other hand, I am seeing a lot of hype surrounding green design—touting a green element because of marketing appeal, not necessarily because it really has anything to do with sustainability.

Wadhwa: I agree with Brian. There are some projects that are marketing themselves as green projects, but when you look as little bit closer you start to realize it’s just a marketing ploy. That being said, the City of Chicago, in some cases, is now requiring developers to use green technology and other green elements. Developers haven’t embraced it fully on the residential side, because being green is more expensive up front, but everyone is going to have to learn to address this.

Renee Adelmann is co-founder of Marin Modern Real Estate, a brokerage specializing in modern houses and apartments in Marin County and San Francisco. A California native, she spent time as a young adult in Finland, where she developed a love of modernism.

Brian Linder, AIA, is a licensed architect, contractor, and Realtor whose real estate practice, The Value of Architecture (TVOA), operates out of the Beverly Hills office of Keller Williams Realty. TVOA has affiliates in cities across the country.

Vikas (Vik) Wadhwa is the founder of the realty agency Modern Chicago Homes. He holds an undergraduate degree in economics, and worked as an investment banker with Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers before going into real estate.
From the Global Border to the Border Neighborhood
2007 L’Enfant Lecture on Urban Planning and Design

by Scott Kratz, Vice President for Education

On November 1, 2007, more than 350 people gathered in Chicago’s historic Preston Bradley Hall to listen to California architect Teddy Cruz deliver the third annual L’Enfant Lecture on Urban Planning and Design. Co-sponsored by the National Building Museum and the American Planning Association, this program hosts leading figures in planning, architecture, urban design, governance, and other fields for a discussion of critical issues in city and regional planning in the United States. Taking cues from emerging immigrant neighborhoods across the country, Cruz imagined a new planning model in which informality and resourcefulness generate sustainable, affordable communities. In his thought-provoking talk, Cruz illustrated how the nonconformist and entrepreneurial spirit he finds in Latin American neighborhoods can help all Americans envision a “life without gates.”

Inspired by the location of his San Diego office, which sits near the busiest border crossing in the world, Cruz’s work seeks to integrate two cultures that are geographically close, yet culturally distant from one another. He illustrated his talk with examples of work by his firm, Estudio Teddy Cruz, including projects for affordable housing, community centers, and other developments on both sides of the border.

Cruz has earned a national reputation for his innovative designs for low-income housing, such as the Casa Familiar in San Ysidro and the Housing Corridors in San Diego. His work has been recognized with numerous architectural prizes, including the Rome Prize and the Sterling Memorial Prize.

Since its inception in 2005, the L’Enfant Lecture on Urban Planning and Design has featured noted British planner, teacher, and author Sir Peter Hall and Enriquie Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, Colombia. To hear an audio recording of Teddy Cruz’s lecture, go to the museum’s web site at www.nbm.org.

IN MEMORIAM:
John P. “Jay” Gleason

Longtime National Building Museum supporter and trustee John P. “Jay” Gleason, who was president of the Portland Cement Association (PCA) from 1986 until his retirement in 2007, died of cancer in January. He was 66.

Jay earned a bachelor’s degree from Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, and went on to serve for seven years as a deputy assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Commerce. He joined the building industry in 1977, when he was appointed president and chief executive officer of the Brick Institute of America, a position he held until he moved to PCA. Under Jay’s leadership, PCA became a valued partner of the Museum. The board and staff extend condolences to Jay’s family and colleagues.
Museum Dedicates Beverly Willis Library

by Amanda Murphy, Development Coordinator

On March 10, the Museum unveiled a newly renovated space that will serve as an in-house research facility and a resource center for outside scholars. Named the Beverly Willis Library in honor of founding trustee and pioneering architect Beverly A. Willis, FAIA, the room houses the Museum’s staff library and other research material. It also serves as an access point for Ms. Willis’ electronic archives covering her work and research over the past 40 years. Located on the fourth floor, the room includes much-needed space for small meetings, and will be available for use by companies and organizations that are Museum sponsors.

The renovation project began in fall 2006 when a team of designers from STUDIOS Architecture agreed to lend their talents and services free of charge. For several months the design team worked with Museum staff to re-imagine the space as a dynamic, multi-purpose suite. Todd DeGarmo, principal of STUDIOS, explains, “STUDIOS has long felt the National Building Museum is one of our profession’s best, but undervalued assets. The Beverly Willis Library was a rare opportunity to provide a destination and place for study for the scholars, staff, and professionals who come to use it.”

In Summer 2007, Grunley Construction came aboard and offered to donate time and services to making the library a reality. Thanks to these efforts, the project was completed within a month of Ms. Willis’s 80th birthday. Other major sponsors included Aurora Storage Products, Avitecture, Ennis Electric Company, John H. Hampshire, Inc., and Nucraft.

IN MEMORIAM: Richard A. Nagelhout

by Seymour Selig, Museum Volunteer

Members of the National Building Museum community were saddened to learn of the passing of Richard Nagelhout, who died of esophageal cancer on December 6, 2007. Most of us knew him as an outstanding docent and the distinguished gentleman conveying credibility at the information desk. His competence and pleasing personality were truly a model for all. Most were unaware of his devotion to the many museums in Washington, particularly those related to his love of history. He and his wife were avid supporters of the Historical Society of Washington, the National Archives, the Capitol Historical Society, the Sewall-Belmont House and other scholarly venues, as well as important civic and cultural causes in the District and Montgomery County. It was my privilege to know Dick when he was an important Navy official while we were at the Office of Naval Research together. He will be greatly missed.

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Leading Donors Become Industry Partners
By Melinda Hungerman, Corporate and Association Relations Manager

Every year, the National Building Museum’s exhibitions, public programs, festivals, and other activities receive vital support from a core group of institutional donors. These donors represent the greatest percentage of the Museum’s contributed income from year to year. In appreciation of their critical, ongoing support, the Museum launched the Industry Partners program to recognize our close partnerships with these organizations.

Industry Partners comprise leading companies, associations, government agencies, and foundations that contribute $15,000 or more annually, addressing the Museum’s most pressing needs. These contributions may include membership in The Corinthians or support of the annual black-tie Honor Award gala, along with directed sponsorship of exhibitions or educational programs.

The Museum would like to thank its current Industry Partners, as of February exhibitions or educational programs.

Industry partners enjoy access to special receptions at the National Building Museum. Photo by Paul Morji.

We are actively seeking additional Industry Partners and look forward to negotiating a tailored agreement to meet the needs of any interested organization. Typical benefits include access to our historic building for events, strategic marketing throughout the year, and free admission to public programs. A new Industry Council, in the planning stages for 2008, will offer a forum for leaders in this group to discuss and collaborate on timely issues.

If you are an existing or prospective institutional donor interested in becoming an Industry Partner, contact Melinda Hungerman, manager of corporate and association relations, at 202.272.2448, ext. 3208 or via email at mhungerman@nbm.org.

Celebrating the Season at the Corinthian Holiday Party
by Christina Berkemeyer, Director of Individual Giving

On December 17, 2007, the National Building Museum welcomed more than 200 Corinthians, trustees, and special friends to the annual Corinthian Holiday Party. Executive director Chase Rynd hosted the evening’s festivities in the historic Pension Commissioner’s Suite.

The theme of this year’s holiday party was inspired by the Museum’s current series of exhibitions and programs addressing mid-20th century modernism, and was fashioned in the bold and innovative style of the period. Guests reveled in the modern merriment of free-form jazz, surreal edibles, and avant-garde cocktails. The Pension Commissioner’s Suite was adorned in modern décor accented with traditional holiday colors of red and green.

In keeping with the party’s theme, guests were invited to participate in “Name that Breuer,” a puzzle asking them to identify eight photographs of some of Marcel Breuer’s most influential and famous architectural works. Winners enjoyed prizes ranging from a small-scale model Breuer chair from the Vitra Design Museum to Robert F. Gatje’s book Marcel Breuer: A Memoir and the newly published National Building Museum Art Spaces book from Scala Publishers about the Museum’s historic home.

To find out more about becoming a member of The Corinthians please contact Christina Berkemeyer at 202.272.2448, ext. 3501, or via email at cberkemeyer@nbm.org.

Corinthian members celebrate the holiday season at the 2007 Corinthian Holiday party. Photo by Peter Cutts.
The Museum thanks the following individuals, companies, associations and agencies for gifts of $250 or more received from November 1, 2007–March 31, 2008. These generous gifts provide essential support for the Museum’s exhibitions, education programs, and endowment funds. Some of the contributions listed below are in partial fulfillment of larger pledges.

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Concrete Kress

by Chrysanthe B. Brokos, Curator

Over a 14-year period, Oklahoma City’s Capitol Hill section featured a distinctively modern silhouette in the form of an S.H. Kress & Co. store. The store opened in November 1960, just in time for the Christmas shopping season.

The two-story structure’s dramatic sawtooth roof was made of poured-in-place concrete, as were the perimeter walls and subfloors. One might have expected such a contemporary design in a more suburban locale, but this five-and-dime actually had a strong street presence in a residential neighborhood at the corner of South West 25th Street (also known as Commerce Street) and South Hudson Avenue, only a few miles from the downtown store.

The store was built during the prolonged sit-in demonstration at the lunch counter of the city’s largest department store, John A. Brown Co., which lasted from August 22, 1958, to June 23, 1961. In fact, the lunch counter at the Main Street Kress store had been targeted as a potential sit-in site by the local NAACP Youth Council in August 1958. To avoid a demonstration, the store’s manager, E.G. Gresham, removed all of the stools at the counter and announced a new policy of integration.

The sleekly modern design of the new Kress may have been a way for the company to demonstrate a clean break with the past and its old policies and to show its commitment to a new beginning in the city.

All of the images in the Museum’s collection relating to the construction of this Oklahoma City Kress store were taken by the Meyers Photo Shop of Oklahoma City between June and November 1960. In addition to being preserved in the S.H. Kress & Co. Collection at the National Building Museum, these images are also archived as part of the Barney Hillerman Collection at the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Readers Show Scholarly Inclinations

The stepped “doors to nowhere” pictured in the Winter 2007-08 issue are passenger access doors in the lower station of the Monongahela Incline Plane in Pittsburgh. Originally built in 1870, this simple transit system consists of two steel tracks carrying a pair of tram-like cars pulled by steel cables. The Monongahela Incline Plane was the first of at least nine passenger inclines that once served the hilly city. It climbs the steep escarpment of Mt. Washington, across the river from downtown Pittsburgh. The top of the mountain had previously been accessible only via a long staircase or a winding, unpaved path.

The lower station, designed by the local architecture firm of MacClure and Spahr, was completed in 1904 and replaced an earlier structure. The doorways and other details of the interior have been modified since the photograph was taken.

Eight respondents correctly identified the building. Each of the first five respondents received a National Building Museum coffee mug as a prize. The prize winners were: Ray Kaskey, James Biss, Nancy Iacomini, and Casius Pealer, all of the Washington area, and B.T. Whitehill, of New York, NY. The other correct respondents were Donald J. Snyder, Jr., Latrobe, PA; Scott Weidenfeller, Washington, D.C.; and the team of Jane Cowan/Tim Ries, Brooklyn, NY.

this issue’s mystery...

World’s Biggest Slinky

At first glance, this photo may look as if it were taken by one of those 360-degree cameras, but it wasn’t. Can you identify the mystery structure and its location?

Responses will be accepted by e-mail or regular mail. To be eligible for a prize (reserved for the first five correct respondents only), send an e-mail to mysterybuilding@nbm.org. You may also respond by regular mail, though you will not be eligible for the prize. The mailing address is:

Mystery Building, National Building Museum, 401 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

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THE MAN BEHIND THE LANDMARKS

A New Exhibition Explores the Work and Life of Eero Saarinen

by Johanna Dunkel, Marketing Communications Manager

On May 3, 2008 the National Building Museum will open the exhibition Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future in its first-floor galleries. This traveling exhibition, organized by the National Building Museum in collaboration with the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and the Museum of Finnish Architecture in Helsinki, with the support of the Yale University School of Architecture, is the first full retrospective of Saarinen’s career and sheds new light on the “the least-known famous architect of the 20th century.” Visitors to the exhibition will view never-before-published sketches, personal correspondence, photographs, large-scale models, original furniture samples, and other artifacts that demonstrate Saarinen’s profound influence on architectural theory and practice for more than a half-century.

Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future will be on display through August 23, 2008 and will then continue its U.S. tour at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and Walker Art Center, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Yale University Art Gallery and Yale School of Art and Architecture.

Global Sponsor ASSA ABLOY
Support for the touring exhibition is provided by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates as well as Autodesk; Florence Knoll Bassett; Agnes Gund and David Shapiro; Elise Jaffe and Jeffrey Brown; Jeffrey Klein; Earle I. Mack; Ministry of Education, Finland; and Marvin Saarlo, among others.

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Additional support is provided by the Dedalus Foundation; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP; Carolyn Brody; Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, Dr. Tori Alder and The Honorable Paul Frazer, among others.

The exhibition is organized by the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York; the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki; and the National Building Museum with the support of the Yale University School of Architecture.