This diversity is really not surprising, however—buildings, infrastructure, and other elements of the constructed landscape affect everyone. Therefore, absolutely everyone has a vested interest in the mission of the National Building Museum.

The breadth of our mission and of our potential audience actually poses numerous challenges for us. We must work harder than most museums to define and communicate our subject matter clearly and to help prospective visitors understand the relevance of specific exhibitions or programs to their lives. We must also work very hard to respond to the diverse expectations of both new and repeat visitors, who look to the Museum for ideas and information about topics ranging from historic preservation to cutting-edge design to emerging construction technologies. While it would be foolish to try to be all things to all people, we do have an opportunity—and, I believe, an obligation—to serve as a comprehensive intellectual resource for anyone interested in the built environment.

I am grateful to my predecessors—most recently, Susan Henshaw Jones—and the many trustees, staff members, and supporters who built the Museum into the dynamic institution that it is today. I look forward to working with all of our current friends to forge an even more exciting and auspicious future for the National Building Museum.

Sincerely,

Chase W. Rynd

President
STONE RANGES IN A DELICATE, TRANSLUCENT CURTAIN. An Escheresque composition of giant, interlocking brick squares rotates with the touch of a finger. A smooth terrazzo surface undulates and then morphs into a jagged “fabric” of slate. Concrete blocks are carved into sensuous, sculptural forms that reflect light and sound in unexpected ways.

These astonishing installations are the centerpieces of the National Building Museum’s exhibition Masonry Variations, which is on view until April 4, 2004. Deliberately subversive in spirit, the exhibition called on four teams of highly inventive architects and skilled craftworkers to create architectural sculptures that challenge fundamental assumptions about common masonry materials. The results are sublimely beautiful.

Jeanne Gang, AIA, of Studio Gang Architects, worked with a team of masons led by Matthew Stokes Redabaugh to turn stone, the quintessential compressive material, into a tensile one. After discovering that there were no existing engineering guidelines for the use of stone in tension, the team conducted extensive tests to determine the material’s limitations in such an application. Their research led to a solution in which thin slices of marble, cut into jigsaw puzzle-like shapes, were laminated with fiberglass backing, glued together with structural silicone, and then draped gently from the ceiling to the floor. Lit from behind, the stone curtain assumes an ethereal glow.

The brick team, led by Houston architect Carlos Jiménez and mason J. Keith Behrens, confronted the presumed immobility of brick structures. By devising a hybrid system in which bricks bound by traditional mortar were inserted into a hinged steel armature, the team created, in effect, a brick mobile. Though simple in concept, the sculpture, when pivoted, yields a seemingly endless variety of complex geometries. Complementing the rotating squares is a “floor” of perforated bricks lit from below, allowing visitors to perceive the depth of the material in a way that is generally not possible in typical brick veneer walls.

Terrazzo is made from a mix of stone and a cement-based or chemical binder, which is then polished to yield a smooth surface. Julie Eisenberg, of Koning Eizenberg Architecture, and a team of craftworkers under the direction of Michael Menegazzi, were eager to challenge the seemingly inevitable flatness and smoothness of terrazzo surfaces. Inspired by an ancient Roman terrazzo remnant in Herculaneum that had been warped by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius, their installation incorporates an unexpected wave in its ostensibly horizontal “floor.” Even more
Old Urbanism
The Continuing Viability of the Rowhouse

Tony Schuman, a past president of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, is associate professor at the New Jersey School of Architecture, New Jersey Institute of Technology. He serves on the advisory committee for the forthcoming National Building Museum exhibition Affordable Housing: Designing an American Asset. This article was inspired by the current exhibition Rowhouse Redux: Washington Architects Renew City Living, which is on view through January 18, 2004. The images shown here are from the exhibition.

In JOHN WATERS’ 1998 FILM PECKER, a busload of clad-in-black artsy types from New York travels to Baltimore to see a photography exhibit by the eponymous hometown hero. As the bus rolls through the outskirts of the city, one of the cognoscenti points out the window and exclaims, “Look! Rowhouses!” as if discovering a new form of urban habitat.

The rowhouse, of course, is the defining building type, defining upper-class districts like Boston’s Back Bay, Philadelphia’s Rittenhouse Square, or Washington’s Dupont Circle, as well as working-class neighborhoods like North Philadelphia, Boston’s South End, or Baltimore’s Canton. Initially built as a single-family dwelling, the rowhouse takes on different aspects based on the economic circumstances of the owner. In the middle- and upper-class version, the house was typically three to four stories tall above a service basement. The first, or parlor, floor, accessed through a series of steps, or stoop (from the Dutch stoep), four to five feet above the sidewalk, contained the public receiving rooms. Upper floors held sleeping quarters for the family members. Grander residences might also contain a piano nobile, an additional suite of formal drawing rooms above the parlor floor. The basement contained the kitchen and pantry, with the dining room in the front of the basement or on the parlor floor served by a dumbwaiter. Servants’ rooms were located in the basement or turked behind the stairwell on upper floors. The working-class version was more modest, typically two floors above a cellar, with kitchen, dining and sitting rooms on the first floor and bedrooms above.

Although the rowhouse went by different names—larger buildings being known as “town houses,” sandstone-clad buildings as “brownstones”—these variants all belonged to the same generic type by virtue of their common features: a “party wall” shared with the house next door; a regular set-back creating a coherent “street wall,” consistent height and building material; a public presence toward the street and a private garden to the rear; and consistent width, typically from 15 to 25 feet, based initially on the spanning capabilities of wood joists and later on subdivision of the land to facilitate real estate sales. According to housing historian Norbert Schoenauer, the rowhouse evolved from modest rural dwellings with the residential portion in the front and a
workspace behind accessed by an alley or a mews. The rowhouse did not assume a purely domestic form until the separation of work and residence evolved with the rise of factory production. Although ground-floor commercial usage flourished in some locations, for the most part the rowhouse remained a purely domestic building type, contributing to the evolution of cities into separately zoned residential and commercial districts.

Versatility

The rowhouse has demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to changing economic circumstances. The original large, single-family houses, which presumed the owner's ability to engage live-in help, became subdivided into separate apartments on each floor when the economic fortunes of the family and/or the neighborhood declined. Further subdivision into two apartments per floor or even into single rooms often followed. In areas like Manhattan’s Upper West Side this was the case in the 1880s and 1890s. As the economy revived in the 1890s, rowhouses, available at attractive prices, were prime targets for gentrification by a new wave of urban homeowners, who often split the houses into two duplex apartments.

The rowhouse is inherently an environmentally-friendly building form. Because one family generally occupied the entire house, or at least, in most cases, an entire floor, cross ventilation was available to reduce reliance on mechanical temperature controls. This was further facilitated by the building’s relatively shallow footprint, since most rowhouses were only two rooms deep, with the center portion occupied by stairs, closets, and dressing rooms. The attachment to adjacent buildings meant reduced exterior wall exposure resulting in both construction savings and reduced heating and cooling loads. But perhaps the most important environmental benefit of the rowhouse is the density that it affords, typically between 15 and 30 units per acre assuming single-family occupancy. This is sufficient density to attract local retail and to warrant service by mass transit, two features that reduce dependency on the automobile and its attendant air pollution.

As a model for contemporary housing, the rowhouse faces a vexing dilemma—parking. There is an inherent contradiction between residents’ desire for on-site parking and the ability to maintain the integrity of the street front and the rear yard. In street-and-alley cities like Washington, DC, parking is easily accommodated. In denser older cities like New York, parking is provided through private (and expensive) multi-story garages or through a nightly search for a legal on-street parking space. Providing a private garage within the rowhouse itself is costly. Setting the house back to allow a parking pad in front is cheaper but the proliferation of curb cuts impairs the vibrant street life that rowhouses help create. Block-long developments often provide parking behind the houses, but this comes at the expense of the rear yards that are such an important feature of the rowhouse type. One alternative solution involves converting on-street parallel parking to angled or head-in parking on the street, which impedes traffic but increases the number of parking spaces. The approach to the parking question impacts the urban fabric as much as the individual dwelling, and as such is a critical question in contemporary rowhouse design.

Rediscovery

The rowhouse has enjoyed a recent resurgence in popularity in both suburban and urban settings, albeit for quite different reasons. Suburban homeowners have not abandoned their dream of a detached house, but rapidly rising land values require higher densities to keep purchase costs within reach. In response, suburban developers have turned to the rowhouse form, generally advertised as “town homes.” The developers often take pains to camouflage these foreign forms with their connotations of urban congestion by siting them to appear as large freestanding homes on winding streets without sidewalks.

In cities, the rowhouse revival came in response to two impulses: the desire to demolish high-rise public housing projects, widely seen as symbolizing deteriorated living conditions in poor neighborhoods; and the success of the “New Urbanist” movement in promoting pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, and mixed-income development as an antidote to congestion, sprawl, and segregation. Although that movement is primarily an urban “greenfields” development model, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in launching the HOPE VI program in 1995, anticipated New Urbanism as its urban redevelopment strategy, resulting in the construction of thousands of units of rowhouses on sites formerly occupied by project slums and towers.

The current round of rowhouse construction has the effect of increasing density in the suburbs and reducing density in the center city, where the quantity of replacement units is generally lower than the number of apartments demolished. The suburban developments, by denying the essential urban character of the rowhouse through the absence of sidewalks or retail facilities, sacrifice the street life that makes urban rowhouse neighborhoods such rich social environments. Suburban “town home” developments, moreover, are generally restricted to market-rate sales and rentals, creating gated enclaves for the wealthy and missing an opportunity for mixed-income development that might contribute toward lessening the de facto class and racial segregation between city and suburb.

The urban HOPE VI developments, by emphasizing mixed-income occupancy and home ownership, sometimes cannot rehouse all of the poor families from the former projects. In cities like Newark, New Jersey, where most HOPE VI projects are single-family rowhouses, the resulting density is lower than that of the historic city, meaning that the neighborhoods cannot support the former level of retail and services. More troubling is the concomitant trend toward building huge-box retail stores with huge parking lots along the older commercial spines. The effect...
is the suburbanization of the city. Happily, there are examples of innovative approaches to rowhouse development that preserve neighborhood character and address deeper social and economic issues as well. The most promising of these is to design the rowhouse as a two- or three-family house. This doubles or triples the density with benefits in terms of local services and transit. The presence of one or two rental units within the house facilitates the ability of the owner to meet mortgage payments, opening up home ownership to families of more modest means. Finally, it creates the opportunity for multi-generational families to have independent living quarters under a single roof, strengthening neighborhood stability as well as family ties. The rediscovery of the rowhouse by policy makers and developers is occurring on a variety of site conditions where rowhouses, sometimes in combination with higher-density forms, will figure prominently in the proposed solutions. In focusing the attention of the design community on this venerable urban housing type, such initiatives exploit the rowhouse’s potential not only in terms of urbanity, scale, and environmental sustainability, but also for its ability to adapt to changing needs—incorporation of the automobile, the rise of digitally-based live/work arrangements, and various household compositions including single-parent, two-working-parent, and extended families. As avatar of the “old urbanism,” the rowhouse offered an urban dwelling form that housed different classes in dwellings that emphasized a common relationship between citizen and city, an urbanity that was ruptured with the rise of the housing project on the one hand and the suburban house on the other. It remains to be seen if the current rowhouse revival can help rekindle a society whose divisions by race and class are so clearly etched in our dwelling forms.

Stories of Home: Photographs by Bill Bamberger pairs portraits of first-time, low-income, homebuyers with excerpts from interviews conducted with these families in Chattanooga, Tennessee; San Antonio, Texas; and rural eastern North Carolina. Not only are the images hauntingly beautiful; they are also revealing from a public policy perspective. They capture the human side of architecture, giving voice to how buildings—and homeownership—can have a lasting impact on both individuals and families. The exhibition is on view through March 7, 2004.

Bill Bamberger has been photographing Americans and the rhythms of their daily lives for two decades. In addition to his one-person exhibitions at such institutions as the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, the North Carolina Museum of Art, and the Yale University Art Gallery, Bamberger has found innovative ways to bring his work directly to the communities in which he photographs—often by converting underutilized buildings to custom-made exhibition space.
stories of home is made possible in part
by the additional support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Homeownership Alliance, Inc., the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the Enterprise Foundation, and the MMA Foundation, Inc.

An accompanying 72-page publication, Stories of Home and the Mobile Gallery, is published by the College of Architecture, University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The book includes an introduction by National Building Museum curator Chrysanne Brook.

The exhibition is the culmination of “This House Is Home: An Initiative to Advance Affordable Home Ownership in America,” organized by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill through its Center for the Study of the American South and Center for Urban and Regional Studies. Conducted in partnership with The Enterprise Foundation and the National Building Museum, the multi-disciplinary initiative raised public awareness of affordable-home ownership through scholarship, community outreach, and the arts.

Principal national sponsors of “This House Is Home” are GE Mortgage and the Ford Foundation.

Stories of Home is made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Homeownership Alliance, Inc., the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the Enterprise Foundation, and the MMA Foundation, Inc.

Enterprises and organizations, and citizens. I never imagined that the public outreach part of this would deliver that kind of human interaction, that kind of substance, those stories. For me, portraiture is as much, or more, about the rapport I have with people as it is about lighting and depth of field. It’s about these individuals feeling safe enough and trusting enough that they are comfortable revealing something that is essential, something of who they are. I think the reason that portraiture works like this is because if you trust and believe in the people whom you are photographing, they will meet you right there in the middle and support you from the day you take their picture onward. I think it’s about speaking that kind of truth and inviting them in. I hope that the public outreach part of this included that the public outreach part of this mobile gallery became a reality.

The mobile art gallery—this is truly original to this exhibition. It was the public outreach part of this, that kind of substance, those stories. It’s about these individuals feeling safe enough and trusting enough that they are comfortable revealing something that is essential, something of who they are. I think the reason that portraiture works like this is because if you trust and believe in the people whom you are photographing, they will meet you right there in the middle and support you from the day you take their picture onward. I think it’s about speaking that kind of truth and inviting them in. I hope that when people look at my images some of the aesthetic issues disappear, and they feel like they are standing there eyes to eyes, face to face with someone whom they might never know except for the experience of being there with them by looking at this photograph.

In the Santa Cruz neighborhood, where the mobile gallery was sited in San Antonio, Texas, and in Chattanooga and rural North Carolina where I photographed with Alice, we were blessed with the support and generosity of a community of neighbors and allies. One of the most rewarding aspects of this project has been the ways in which the mobile gallery and its evolving exhibition engaged such a diverse group of neighbors, community organizations, and citizens. I never imagined that the public outreach part of this would deliver that kind of human interaction, that kind of substance, those stories.

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Affordable Housing
Designing an American Asset

by Ralph Bennett

“Affordable” is a relative term, but housing affordability is a quantifiable matter these days, thanks to formal guidelines established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In general, affordability in housing is defined as not having to spend more than 30% of your before-tax income for shelter. HUD estimates that some 11 million American families exceed this benchmark, with 14 million households paying more than half their income for housing—a condition described as “critical housing need” by the National Housing Conference. It is obvious that, for many parts of America, the economy simply fails to produce the housing needed by the entire population.

Efforts to overcome this market dysfunction have, over the years, stimulated many complex arrangements for providing affordable housing. The National Building Museum’s upcoming exhibition, Affordable Housing: Designing an American Asset, will show how public funding is used to leverage greater investments through incentives, guarantees, and grants, and illustrate the results with a number of exemplary projects. Government housing programs assist Americans at all income levels, especially through the mortgage interest deduction, which benefits every American who owns a house. The exhibition will focus, however, on the results of the many programs at all levels of government—local, state, federal—that provide housing to the neediest citizens.

Starting in the 1890s, philanthropic organizations attempted to provide sanitary housing for slum dwellers. Although the efforts were modest, they represent the beginnings of a sense of public responsibility for improving housing conditions. The first federal housing programs were associated with the buildup for World War I and were quickly disbanded after the war as the private sector succeeded in limiting government involvement. The depression generated a legacy of programs that remain useful today: Public Housing, Public Housing Authorities, and the Federal Housing Administration. After World War II, federal housing policy turned to housing production for returning veterans through the G.I. Bill, while continuing programs assisted the poorest citizens.

Contrary to popular understanding, the best known federal programs like Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher programs (formerly Section 8) do not now produce many new units. Lesser-known, newer programs like the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, the HOPE VI program, and the Department of Agriculture’s Rural Housing Service are much more productive. Building affordable housing today is an increasingly complex task—often a small development will use many funding sources, require many years of patient work by a large cast of players, and jump many regulatory hurdles. Despite the difficulties, many high-quality projects have been designed and built.

The Museum received a response to a wide national solicitation held during the spring and summer of 2003. The projects included in the exhibition were selected for their design quality, and serve as proof that the quality of much affordable housing rivals that of market-produced housing for any income level. The projects show remarkable breadth of location, style, sponsorship, financing, demographics, and depth of subsidy. They range from a new rowhouse development in Washington’s LeDroit Park neighborhood, under the auspices of nearby Howard University, to a converted public market in Oakland, California, building affordable housing.
Support the Museum

Choose National Building Museum #8661! Did you know that you can support the builders, planners, architects, and designers of tomorrow through your workplace giving campaign? Each year we involve thousands of local students in educational activities ranging from city planning and urban design to building bridges and constructing houses. If you are taking part in the United Way or Combined Federal Campaign, you can support our youth education programs by making a gift to the National Building Museum #8661.

To learn more about our education programs and how you can get involved, please contact Shar Taylor, Director of Development for Annual Giving, at 202-272-2448, extension 3905, or via email at staylor@nbm.org.

Information about workplace giving at www.unitedwayorganization.org.

The design community remains persistently intrigued by affordable housing as a vehicle for exploring ideas about architecture, planning, and lifestyle. The future of housing in general and affordable housing in particular can be inferred from the ideas portrayed in these projects.

At a time when government resources are scarce and the need for housing affordable to a wide range of American families is increasing, this exhibition will show how affordable housing improves communities, providing new investment and beautiful buildings while meeting a crucial and deepening social need.

The projects vividly illustrate the broad range of design approaches in American architecture and planning today: the abstractions of neo-modernism, traditional planning and design, and a rich variety in between.
2003 Honor Award Recognizes New Sports Facilities

The past decade has generally been a propitious one for America’s urban areas, which have become increasingly popular destinations for shopping and entertainment, while also attracting new residents who previously would have been drawn to the suburbs. Many factors have led to these favorable developments, but one of the most profound has been the resurgence of downtown areas as preferred locations for major league sports venues.

In recognition of this trend, the National Building Museum presented its 2003 Honor Award to Major League Baseball and the National Football League. Both organizations have been influential in encouraging team owners to locate new professional sports facilities in city centers, often in neighborhoods that had faced extended periods of decline or even near-total abandonment. As a result of these efforts, many American cities have reinvigorated, with new ballparks and stadiums providing the impetus for substantial private, mixed-use development. Moreover, many of the new sports facilities have been works of high-quality architecture and construction in their own right, marked by a thoughtful approach to local architectural contexts, careful consideration of pedestrian and mass transit access, and innovative engineering to enhance the structures’ programmatic flexibility and the fan experience.

Held on September 15, the Honor Award gala attracted nearly 1,000 people, despite the imminent threat of Hurricane Isabel, which was scheduled to hit Washington the next day. The keynote speakers at the gala were Steve Largent, a former US Congressmen and member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and George Will, the widely read columnist whose love of baseball is as legendary as his political commentary. The evening concluded with the presentation of the shared award to NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and MLB Commissioner Bud Selig, who accepted on behalf of the leagues.

The gala raised about $500,000 in support of the Museum’s vital exhibitions and programs. The Board of Trustees thanks everyone who contributed to the important event.

HONOR AWARD

T HE LAST DECADE HAS GENERALLY BEEN A PROSPEROUS ONE FOR AMERICA’S URBAN AREAS, WHICH HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY POPULAR DESTINATIONS FOR SHOPPING AND ENTERTAINMENT, WHILE ALSO ATTRACTION NEW RESIDENTS WHO PREVIOUSLY WOULD HAVE BEEN DRAWN TO THE SUBURBS. MANY FACTORS HAVE LED TO THESE FAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS, BUT ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND HAS BEEN THE REEMERGENCE OF DOWNTOWN AREAS AS PREFERRED LOCATIONS FOR MAJOR LEAGUE SPORTS VENUES.

IN RECOGNITION OF THIS TREND, THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM PRESENTED ITS 2003 HONOR AWARD TO MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL AND THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE. BOTH ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN INFLUENTIAL IN ENCOURAGING TEAM OWNERS TO LOCATE NEW PROFESSIONAL SPORTS FACILITIES IN CITY CENTERS, OFTEN IN NEIGHBORHOODS THAT HAD FACED EXTENDED PERIODS OF DECLINE OR EVEN NEAR-TOTAL ABANDONMENT. AS A RESULT OF THESE EFFORTS, MANY AMERICAN CITIES HAVE REINVIGORATED, WITH NEW BALLPARKS AND STADIUMS PROVIDING THE IMPETUS FOR SUBSTANTIAL PRIVATE, MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT. MOREOVER, MANY OF THE NEW SPORTS FACILITIES HAVE BEEN WORKS OF HIGH-QUALITY ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION IN THEIR OWN RIGHT, MARKED BY A THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO LOCAL ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXTS, CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF PEDESTRIAN AND MASS TRANSIT ACCESS, AND INNOVATIVE ENGINEERING TO ENHANCE THE STRUCTURES’ PROGRAMMATIC FLEXIBILITY AND THE FAN EXPERIENCE.


THE GALA RAISED ABOUT $500,000 IN SUPPORT OF THE MUSEUM’S VITAL EXHIBITIONS AND PROGRAMS. THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES THANKS EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMPORTANT EVENT.
Welcome New (Returning) Trustees!  

Two former Museum trustees were recently elected to new terms on the board. 

DELON HAMPTON, PHD, PE, is chairman of the board of Delon Hampton & Associates, Chartered (GBIA), a consulting engineering, design, and construction management firm founded three decades ago. A former president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Hampton has also served as a director of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, a Malcolm Baldrige Award Overseer for the US Department of Commerce, and an advisor to the engineering departments of five major research universities. He received a Bachelor of Science from the University of Illinois, and went on to earn master’s and doctoral degrees from Purdue University. 

RICHARD M. ROSEAN, SALS, has served as president of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), an international organization of real estate professionals, for more than a decade. Prior to joining ULI, he spent 27 years in New York City in various capacities. Returning Trustees!  

Corinthian Profile  

Portland Cement Association 

SINCE 1986, THE PORTLAND CEMENT ASSOCIATION has supported the National Building Museum’s mission through membership in The Corinthians, participation in the Honor Award, and exhibition sponsorship. The organization was founded in 1916 to “improve and expand the uses of portland cement and concrete,” and today represents 43 cement companies across the United States and Canada. Portland cement, originally developed in 1824 by a British stone mason, is a core element in most concrete used in construction around the world today. The association carries out a range of activities, including marketing, educational programs, research, and advocacy, that aim to raise the quality of the product, the manufacturing process, and generally to contribute to a better environment. 

The National Building Museum is grateful to the Portland Cement Association for its support. 

$100,000 and above  

International Masonry Institute  

International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers  

$50,000–$99,999  

Anderson Corporation  

Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company of the Midwestern States, Inc.  

$25,000–$49,999  

The Associated General Contractors of America  

Bank of America  

The Associated General Contractors of America  

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Alsoness Family Foundation, Inc.  

Corinthian Profile  

Subscriptions to The Corinthian have been received from individuals, companies, and agencies for gifts of $250 or more. The Museum thanks the following individuals, companies, and agencies for gift contributions listed here in partial fulfillment of larger pledges. 

Dr. Richard Longstreth  

Emly Malno  

Thomas L.McCormin  

Derek Moore  

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Minneci  

M. Howard Morse  

Vincent A. Napolitano  

Tampa Bay Devil Rays  

National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers  

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards  

National Postal Gateway/ 

Architectural Institution  

Robert A. Prida and Lynn Palmer  

Laura Preble  

Thank You!  

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Mystery Building

This Mystery Building in the Fall 2003 issue was the Mount Angel Abbey Library, in St. Benedict, Oregon, one of just two buildings in the United States designed by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. Pictured was the main reading room, which is suffused with soft natural light thanks to extensive skylights. On cloudy days, which, of course, are frequent in the region, visitors take advantage of the numerous individual task lamps that Aalto incorporated into the curved reading desk. The staccato visual rhythm of the lamps provides a counterpoint to the otherwise fluid forms of the space.

The Mount Angel image proved to be a tricky one—several readers mistook it for a view of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Johnson Wax building in Racine, Wisconsin. Indeed, the slender columns and gentle curving forms of Aalto’s library are similar in spirit to some of Wright’s work, so the confusion is not surprising.


This issue’s Mystery Building is technically a complex of structures with a colorful history and a location that may be surprising to those who are not familiar with it. Can you identify the complex and its location? There’s no need to name an architect on this one! Send responses to: Mystery Building, National Building Museum, 401 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20001.