

## DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

by

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The *New York Times* architecture critic, Herbert Muschamp, recently wrote that "architecture is in truth a developer's worst nightmare." Muschamp was reporting on the recent architectural competition for the Con Edison site in New York City, in which the developer, FBS East River Associates, rejected three winners of the Pritzker Prize--architecture's Nobel--and several other architectural stars, in favor of a consortium of more mainstream firms. Since one of the rejected designs was a high-rise apartment that resembled a melting candle, it is possible that the stars were simply having an off-day. Nevertheless, leaving aside the question of why developers who, after all, hire architects, would inflict nightmares on themselves, Muschamp raises an interesting point: is there a disconnect between design-oriented celebrity architects and market-oriented real estate developers? Name architects do work for corporations such as Lloyd's of London (Richard Rogers), the Commerzbank in Frankfurt (Norman Foster), or Daimler-Chrysler in Berlin (Renzo Piano), but they usually design company headquarters, projects driven by CEO vanity, perhaps, but not by developers. Gerald Hines is a rare case of a developer who regularly commissions famous designers--currently Frank O. Gehry for Pariser Platz 3 in Berlin--but he is the exception that proves the rule.

One barometer of cutting edge architecture are the Progressive Architecture Awards, which have been granted annually for almost fifty years. This year the jury reviewed more than 400 entries and picked nine projects. The range was large, from an

airport terminal to a private house, but what was striking was that not one of the projects was a developer-driven building. The Honor Awards handed out by the American Institute of Architects are traditionally more mainstream. They consider only projects that have been built (the Progressive Architecture Awards are for commissioned but not yet built work). This year, the fourteen Honor Awards recognized three campus buildings, a luxury house, and an assortment of publicly-financed buildings-- two libraries, a concert hall, conference centers, a low-income housing project, even a homeless shelter. Only two awards were given to commercial buildings: one for the restoration and conversion of a 100 year-old architectural landmark--the Reliance Building in Chicago--into a hotel, a project that required public subsidies and historic tax credits; the other for a new corporate headquarters, the Condé Nast Building on Times Square in New York City.

Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of new buildings in the U.S. are developer-driven commercial developments, such projects are rarely recognized in architectural awards programs. This gives the impression that Muschamp is correct, that architectural innovation and commercial projects are incompatible. Yet, in the past, some of the most imaginative and experimental architecture was commissioned and built precisely by and for real estate developers.

## EXPERIMENTAL DEVELOPMENTS

One of the earliest examples of commercial aspirations producing outstanding architectural innovation was a complex of residential squares in Bath, England, begun by John Wood in 1728. Wood was an architect and a speculative builder. The practice then was for landowners--or syndicates of landowners--to pool their resources to create an attractive landscaped square, then engage one or several builders to develop the surrounding residential properties. Wood was already experienced in building such developments in London when he started his work in Bath, an up-and-coming resort town. His plan was ambitious, and included no less than three squares linked by streets. The novelty of his project, which was financed by groups of investors, was the idea of selling individual plots with predesigned façades that were composed to give the impression of a much larger palatial structure. The first square, Queen Square, had a

block of 8 residences masquerading as a grand house with a central bay and end pavilions. The second phase, called the Circus, was a landscaped circle surrounded by a ring of 33 three-story houses behind a façade that was loosely based on the Roman Coliseum. The third phase was called the Royal Crescent (evidently, naming developments to attract homebuyers has a long history). The Royal Crescent was a grand semi-oval of houses facing a park. The imposing curved façade consisted of giant columns standing on a plain lower service floor, and rising through the full height of the two main floors (a service floor was in the attic). The monumental façade of this buildings, which was completed by Woods' son, was designed in the Palladian style with absolute uniformity of materials and details. Behind the street wall, the houses were planned and built according to the homebuyers' individual specifications. The result was a success in financial as well as architectural and urban design terms, and the Bath model was copied in Georgian property developments in London's West End, Edinburgh, Exeter, and Brighton.

The nineteenth-century American apartment house is another example of a happy union between design and development. The first apartment house in New York City is generally considered to have been built in 1857 by Richard Morris Hunt, recently returned from Paris, and the first American to graduate from the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts. Hunt would become the leading American architect of his generation, responsible for the Metropolitan Museum, as well as the base of the Statue of Liberty. The six-story apartment building, known as the Tenth Street Studio Building, was modeled on Parisian ateliers and was intended specifically for wealthy artists, combining living and working spaces. The elegantly designed building was a great success--tenants included celebrated painters such as Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt and Winslow Homer. The Studio Building introduced upper-class New Yorkers, who lived in individual town-houses, to the idea of communal living, and was soon followed by buildings that offered "studio apartments" to non-artist tenants.

One of the most prominent New York apartment house for the wealthy was the Dakota, [ [Slide 1 – The Exterior of the Dakota Apartments in New York City](#)] facing Central Park on West 72nd Street, so named because its then remote location was likened to the Indian territories. The Dakota opened in 1884. The dramatic building was

developed by Edward Severin Clark, an executive recently retired from I. M. Singer's sewing machine company, and designed by Henry J. Hardenbergh, also a Beaux-Arts alumni. With only 65 rented apartments, the luxuriously appointed building was one of the costliest built in the city. Like Wood, Clark believed that creating a grand architectural image would attract the wealthy and Hardenbergh used an eclectic Gothic style to create the impression of a grand chateau. The amenities in the nine-story Dakota included hotel-style guest rooms, a telegraph and messenger office, a florist, and a laundry. The project was a great success, attracting businessmen and families (usually without children). The quality of its architecture--and its durable construction--ensured its longevity, and after more than a hundred years it remains as attractive and exclusive as ever.

A more recent example of an apartment-house builder commissioning an outstanding architect is 860-880 Lake Shore Drive overlooking Lake Michigan in Chicago, developed by Herbert Greenwald and designed by the premier pioneering architect of the modern movement, Mies van der Rohe. [ Slide 2 – “The Exterior of Lake Shore Apartments in Chicago by pioneering architect, Mies Van Der Rohe”. ] The façades of the two identical flat-topped, slender 26-story high-rises consisted entirely of a steel skeleton infilled with glass. This type of simple aluminum and glass curtain wall is familiar today, but in 1951, when the buildings opened, it was revolutionary. 860-880 Lake Shore Drive has been called "among the most influential designs for high-rise structures of the twentieth century," for it changed the course of architecture, influencing the design of both office buildings as well as high-rise apartments for more than two decades. Lake Shore Drive also proved to be a good investment; at \$10.38 per square foot construction cost, it was actually less expensive than many more conventional buildings. Greenwald and Mies worked together on a number of successful apartment house projects in Chicago and Detroit until the former's death in a plane accident in 1959.

## SHOPPING PLACES

Mies van der Rohe built many apartment and office buildings, and even once--in Montreal--a service station, but he was never invited to design a shopping mall. Malls,

perhaps because they are internally--not externally--focused, are not generally associated with great architecture. Even the Hahn Company's imaginative Horton Plaza in San Diego, a 1.5 million square foot mall whose colorful and theatrical design (by the Jerde Partnership) places it head and shoulders above the run-of-the-mill mall, does not quite reach the level of first-rank architecture. Yet shopping places have a distinguished history of ground-breaking design.

What is probably the world's first purpose-built shopping mall opened in Paris in 1784. The client was Citizen Philippe Egalité--previously the Duc d'Orléans--whose family owned a chateau on a large estate near the Louvre. Egalité, short of funds, turned developer to transform his back yard into what today would be called a mixed-use entertainment complex, which he called the Palais Royal, no doubt capitalizing on its proximity to the Louvre. He hired the prominent architect Victor Louis. Louis was the designer of the most ambitious French theater of the eighteenth century, the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux. His design for the Palais Royale was focused on a central courtyard, about 300 feet wide and 900 feet long, laid out as a pleasure park following the English fashion. [Slide 3 – “ An Engraving of the Palais Royale Showing the Court and Garden.” ] In the center was a roofed amphitheater--the so-called Cirque Royal--used for public performances, concerts and balls. The park was surrounded on three sides by a five-story building. On the ground floor, a two-story arcade facing the garden contained the retail spaces: booksellers, cafés, eating places, music rooms, gaming houses. There were several small hotels. Egalité imaginatively added a puppet show, a waxworks, a Turkish bath, and a theater (which later became the home of the Comédie Française), much as a modern mall owner uses food courts, theaters, and arcades to attract the public. The third floor contained grand apartments, and the two upper floors smaller rooms--all were rented, many to the *courtisanes* who became a notorious fixture of the Palais. It is sad to report that despite these many attractions, the Palais was not a financial success; like many developers since, Egalité overextended himself and went into bankruptcy. The Palais Royal exists, still a beautiful work of architecture, and still a functioning retail/residential complex, though considerably more sedate than in its heyday.

Some of the most exciting architectural spaces of the nineteenth century in European cities were the glass-roofed shopping arcades. The origin of the arcades was

the Parisian *passage*, a narrow passageway bordered by retail spaces on both sides joining two streets in mid-block. The success of the *passages*, which quickly spread to other cities, was based on the exploitation of inexpensive land made possible by two new technologies: cast-iron and glass. The passageways were roofed by delicate cast-iron structures covered in glass. The Royal Opera Arcade was a famous London glass-roofed shopping street which was opened in 1818 and was designed by the famous architect John Nash aided by the gardener (and greenhouse expert) Humphrey Repton. Joseph Paxton, who built the Crystal Palace, proposed a glass-roofed shopping arcade that was 108 feet high and ten miles long, built on top of a proposed underground railway line. Paxton's ambitious arcade was never realized, but enormous glass-roofed arcades were built in Berlin, Naples, and Moscow. The largest was in Milan, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, built in 1865-67 and financed by British investors. It is a beautiful building with four vaulted arms meeting in a hexagonal dome.

The public found the tall, glass-roofed shopping spaces exciting, but then--as now--public appetites proved fickle. The vogue for building arcades was over by the 1870s, and it was followed by another retailing innovation: the grand department store. One of the pioneer merchandisers was John Wanamaker, who hired the leading Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham, to design his flagship store in Philadelphia (Burnham was also the consulting architect for Selfridge's on Oxford Street in London). [ Slide 4 - "Exterior of the Wannamaker Building, Philadelphia, 1909" ] The grand spaces, luxurious materials, and elaborate details of department stores were an integral part of their allure, and many outstanding architects participated in their design. One of the best was by the celebrated Boston architect, H. H. Richardson, who in 1885-87 built a wholesale department store in Chicago for Marshall Field. The 7-story building occupied half a city block. This big box was not made out of flimsy corrugated metal, it was an imposing Romanesque structure of red sandstone and red granite and was probably the most famous--and the most influential--of Richardson's buildings (it was demolished in 1930). A successor to Richardson's department store, also in Chicago, was Schlesinger & Mayer (now Carson Pirie Scott) on the corner of State and Madison. Built in 1899, this is the last major work of Louis Sullivan, and one of the pivotal buildings of early modern architecture. The undecorated upper façade of the building expresses the iron and steel

frame structure and presages the functional office buildings of the next century, while the ornate lower floors are a perfect foil for the display windows. Richardson, Burnham, and Sullivan were not the only prominent architects to design department stores, European department stores were built by such outstanding architects as Victor Horta, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and Erich Mendelsohn. In the 1960s, shopping came full circle as the two formats--glass-roofed arcades and department stores--were combined in the indoor regional shopping mall.

## SKYSCRAPERS

The architectural model for the early department stores was the Renaissance palazzo, enlarged and scaled up. However, real estate development has produced at least one type of building that is completely new in the history of architecture: the skyscraper. The skyscraper originated as a formula for building speculative office buildings: how to create the largest amount of leasable space on a small city lot. Two construction technologies made skyscrapers possible; frame structures of cast iron and then steel; and elevators. Telephones also played a role, since without phone communications, offices in tall buildings would have been too isolated. The earliest skyscrapers were designed by a generation of outstanding architects: Louis Sullivan, who is generally credited with the "first" skyscraper, the Wainwright Building in St. Louis; Daniel Burnham, the architect of the Reliance Building in Chicago, whose Flatiron Building has become a New York icon; and Cass Gilbert, who designed the world's tallest building for Frank Woolworth, the chain-store multimillionaire.

The Woolworth building which opened in 1913, cost an unprecedented \$13 million, and partly justified its cost by acting as a giant billboard for its owner's five-and-ten-cent empire. By then, the high-rise office tower had captured the American public's imagination. The architect who popularized the skyscraper as corporate symbol was Raymond Hood. He started by building the neo-Gothic Chicago Tribune tower in 1922, and went on to design a striking series of high-rise office buildings, each with its own character reflecting a different corporate identity: the New York Daily News building, the American Radiator Company building, and the McGraw-Hill building. Hood's success

encouraged other architects and developers, and produced one of the great periods of American skyscraper design, characterized by such memorable designs such as the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building. [Slide 5 “ Empire State Building, New York City. View from the East” ]

A particularly American type of development project is the multi-use urban complex. An early example stands out: the Auditorium Building (today Roosevelt University) in Chicago. The Auditorium Building, which opened in 1889, was Chicago's most famous landmark. It included a magnificent 4,200-seat concert hall, a 400-room hotel, an office tower, as well as retail spaces at street level. Developed by a private group of investors headed by Ferdinand Wythe Peck, and including some of the wealthiest businessmen in the city, the building was designed by Louis Sullivan and is generally considered his masterpiece. Although the construction cost approached \$3 million, an unprecedented sum, for more than two decades the Auditorium prospered.

The most successful union of real estate development and architectural and urban design since the Woods' developments in Bath is probably Rockefeller Center in New York City. The unlikely origin of the project was a 1929 plan to build a new opera house. The land--three city blocks--was leased from Columbia University by a corporation headed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. When the Wall Street crash halted the opera house project, it was decided to develop the site commercially. The team of architects, headed by Raymond Hood, produced an exceptional design that introduced a new street in the middle of the long Manhattan blocks, and opened up a plaza (with its famous skating rink), connected to Fifth Avenue by a 200 foot-long pedestrian passage. The heart of the project was the 70-story RCA (now the GE) Building, Hood's masterpiece. Construction of the immense project, which included Radio City Music Hall, took ten years.

### BEST FOR WHOM?

When *Architectural Record* magazine polled its readers in 1956 to determine the most significant works of architecture in the last 100 years. Interestingly, 8 of the top 15 buildings (excluding houses) were commercial buildings and several were developer-driven (see Fig.1). These included not only nineteenth-century buildings such as the



Carson Pirie Scott store, but also recent high-rises such as Lever Houses and the Lake Shore Drive apartments. When the magazine carried out the same survey 35 years later, the list had changed. As architectural fashions had shifted, buildings dropped off the list, and others were added. Several buildings completed since 1956 were new on the list, which now included only six commercial developments. What is striking is not that there were fewer commercial projects, but that all but two were built before 1933, and the newest--the Seagram Building--was 33 years-old. In other words, during the least 30-odd years, there had not been any commercial projects built that were judged important enough to include on the list.

Fig.1

**Top 15 Works of Architecture (*Architectural Record*)**

(Dates are dates of completion)

• = commercial project

1956 survey

- Wainwright Building, St. Louis (Louis Sullivan), 1891
- Carson Pirie Scott Store, Chicago (Louis Sullivan), 1904
- Rockefeller Center, New York (Hood et al.), 1933
- Lever House, New York (SOM), 1952
- Trinity Church, Boston (H.H. Richardson), 1877
- PSFS Building, Philadelphia (Howe & Lescaze), 1931
- GM Technical Center, Warren, Mi. (Saarinen & Saarinen), 1957
- Lake Shore Drive Apartments, Chicago (Mies van der Rohe), 1951
- S.C. Johnson & Son Administration Building, Racine, Wi. (Frank Lloyd Wright), 1939
- Monadnock Block, Chicago (Burnam & Root), 1891
- Daily News Building, New York (Howells & Hood), 1930
- TVA Norris Dam & Powerhouse (Roland Wank)
- Boston Public Library, Boston (McKim, Mead & White), 1898
- Stock Pavilion (Nowicki & Dietrick)
- Christian Science Church, Berkeley, Ca. (Bernard Maybeck), 1910

1991 survey

Notre Dame-Ronchamp chapel, France (Le Corbusier), 1955  
 Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth (Louis Kahn), 1972  
 •Seagram Building, New York (Mies van der Rohe), 1958  
 •Chrysler Building, New York (William Van Alen), 1930  
 •Rockefeller Center, New York (Hood et al.), 1933  
 •Lever House, New York (SOM), 1952  
 •Wainwright Building, St. Louis (Louis Sullivan), 1891  
 S.C. Johnson & Son Administration Building, Racine, Wi. (Frank Lloyd Wright), 1939  
 Unity Temple, Oak Park, Mi. (Frank Lloyd Wright), 1904  
 Bauhaus, Dessau (Walter Gropius), 1926  
 •Carson Pirie Scott Store, Chicago (Louis Sullivan), 1904  
 Dulles Airport, Chantilly, Vi. (Eero Saarinen), 1962  
 Sydney Opera House, Sydney (Jørn Utzon)  
 Salk Institute, La Jolla (Louis Kahn), 1965

One explanation is that real estate developers were more open to architectural experimentation in the past than they are today because building budgets have shrunk. This assumes that exceptional architecture always costs more which, as Mies van der Rohe's Lake Shore Drive apartment towers show, is hardly the case. The ability of star architects such as Gehry, Foster, and Piano, to build large (unsubsidized) commercial projects also suggests that building budgets are not to blame.

There is an alternative explanation. Developers in the past were not attracted to cutting edge designs for abstract reasons. The Woods' pioneering residential developments in eighteenth-century Bath depended on their striking design for their financial success; so did Edward Severin Clark's Dakota, and Herbert Greenwald's Lake Shore Drive apartments. In all cases, architects designed buildings whose architectural intentions complemented the development goals of the building owners. The "best" architects--Stanford White, Daniel Burnham, Raymond Hood--saw no contradiction between good design and good commercial design. The leading architects of their times, Louis Sullivan and later I. M. Pei, cut their teeth on commercial work. They knew how to balance functional and aesthetic goals, to work within budgetary constraints, to adapt buildings to their users, and to make designs that attracted and delighted the public.

Starting in the late 1960s, however, this changed. Governments--at all levels--tax-exempt institutions, and private individuals were the ones with the largest building budgets. Architectural reputations were more likely to be based on public buildings, institutional buildings or private houses. Public clients were notorious for ignoring the user--whether it was the tenant in a high-rise public housing block, or a child in a windowless schoolroom, and for spending--other people's--money on architectural experiments. Institutional clients, whether university presidents or museum boards, were not particularly concerned with public appeal. And the private patron was likely to tolerate design idiosyncrasies--leaky roofs--in exchange for living in a "work of art." Such clients have encouraged architectural styles that are often bleak and whose minimalism runs in the face of common taste. It is a didactic architecture of private symbols and quirky theories, that favors aesthetics over function, exterior expression over interior convenience, and design purity over clients' demands. Above all, it is an architecture with its own language and its own agenda, that turns a deaf ear to the demands of the marketplace. That is the real developer's nightmare, architect's who are unable--and unwilling--to listen.