



Aqua\_ray. Prototype, 2007. Rudolf Bannasch and Leif Kniese of EvoLogics and Markus Fischer of Festo. Image by Walter Fogel.

## Design and the Elastic Mind

Museum of Modern Art, New York City  
February 24–May 12, 2008

**Think of MoMA and design.** Did you think of drawings by Mies van der Rohe or something to sit on by Charles and Ray Eames? Maybe a self-aligning ball bearing by Sven Wingquist? MoMA's permanent collection of architecture and design was assembled piece by piece, each a convincing statement in the ongoing discussion of design and art.

In contrast, *Design and the Elastic Mind*, about “the latest developments in design and what the future holds,” fills six rooms with a range of objects and themes, with varying success. As with the Whitney Biennial, so here: written descriptions of the ideas behind the designs are vital to bridge the gap between viewer and display.

The exhibition is a science fair of concepts intended to “highlight how design is the bridge between advanced research and everyday life.” That's not news. That's always been the case, as

MoMA's permanent collection will attest. The difference here is the lack of discrimination in selecting manifestations of “the latest developments and what the future holds.”

According to senior curator Paola Antonelli, “...the designer has changed from form giver to fundamental interpreter of an extraordinarily dynamic reality.” In that case, something is getting lost in translation. Is MoMA asking that we adopt new criteria for appreciating design in an art museum — the design of process, over the design of product? To captivate in an art museum setting, interpretations still need attention to form.

Dominic Barth, a former journalist and book editor, is a graduate student at Columbia University School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.

## Still Standing

**Produced by Perry King Neubauer FAIA**  
2007, DVD, 35 minutes  
(available from [pkneubauer@verizon.net](mailto:pkneubauer@verizon.net)  
or 617-234-4434)

### A look back at The Architects

**Collaborative**, *Still Standing* is low-tech yet powerful. In 2006, former TAC principal Perry Neubauer interviewed founders Sally and Chip Harkness and Norman Fletcher (who died in 2007), and their recollections are interwoven with archival photographs of the architects and their work.

Neubauer reminds us how radical the TAC idea was — until its founding in 1945, most practices had the principal's name on the door, a Big Man backed up by anonymous specialists. TAC's Big Man was Walter Gropius, but his insistent egalitarianism had a powerful effect on the firm, its work, and even the profession.

These were young, beautiful people out “to remake the world”; as elders, they look back with pride, passion, and humor: one of the key moments in putting together Harvard's Harkness Commons was throwing the bentwood chairs Ben Thompson had designed out the window to see if they would break. They didn't. The building lives on as well, along with many of TAC's ideas and ideals. The hard fact that their authors can't makes this DVD a poignant experience.

Bruce Irving is a home renovation consultant in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

▼ Photo courtesy, Perry Neubauer FAIA.



## Jonathan Segal FAIA Conversations on Architecture

The Boston Society of Architects  
January 29, 2008

**Scratch most architects** and you'll find a developer — or a developer wannabe anyway. What architect wouldn't want to live a little higher on the food chain and end the abuse that casts a shadow over design school? Too few, however, have the nerve to put their fortunes on the line — or relish going over to the dark side when they would rather wax poetic about light.

But San Diego architect Jonathan Segal makes the case that being a developer isn't a sellout; it gives architects the tools they need to rebuild the world as they would like it to be. In his recent presentation at the BSA, he laid out an alternative to the architect's underpowered position: "It's all about control." Architects stopped being master builders, he suggested, when

they ceded everything but design to somebody else.

Segal finds the sites, crunches the numbers, GCs the jobs, and gets in the bulldozer to dig the footings; he lets his wife do the sweet-talking when it's required. And with his three employees, he designs glorious places to live, winning five national AIA awards and a slew of other honors. His presentation showed how market demands and regulatory constraints can be turned into expressions of contemporary urban life.

Kettner Row is a line of stucco-clad townhouses with double-height glazing and projecting metal canopies. Built next to San Diego's downtown, it filters its southern California vernacular through a Modernist aesthetic. The Titan is a maze of parking spaces, gardens, and floating apartments; a pierced wrapper of rusted steel plates shields the interiors from the freeway outside. And The Union is a cluster of rowhouses on concrete-block bases defined by folded stucco planes infilled with glass. All are inventively sculpted

with an unerring eye for composition.

But much of the architectural poetry is inspired by prosaic building considerations. Segal's simple but sexy spaces are cleverly interlocked on multiple floors to allow him to skirt restrictive code requirements. The urbane syncopation of his façades is derived from the flexible interiors that allow easy subdivision or the conversion of first floors to offices. Saying he is too cheap to keep painting, Segal uses materials that weather to a rich patina. By controlling costs, codes, and construction, he maintains mastery over the design.

Architects' diminishing role in building, Segal says, won't be stopped through their artistry or moral authority. They've got to grab the wheel of that smoke-belching 'dozer and learn to steer it where they want it to go.

David Eisen AIA is a principal of Abacus Architects + Planners in Boston and writes about design for the *Boston Phoenix* and other publications.



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