

Re:New

Ever since the AIA Convention left town in 1992, Boston has been busily preparing for its return in May 2008. We buried a whole highway system, planted a new linear park (OK, that one's not quite finished, but you get the idea), and — figuring nothing is too good for the AIA — we even built a nice spiffy new convention hall. We hope the AIA appreciates our hard work.

Welcome to the New Boston. Actually, it's the New New New Boston — we've been through a few iterations since the 1960s, when the term "New Boston" was used liberally by the media to describe the shocking changes in the previously moribund cityscape: the new Boston City Hall and Government Center, and skyscrapers such as the State Street Bank, the Prudential tower, and the New England Merchants Bank.

By the time the AIA Convention came to Boston in 1976, Boston had reinvented itself once again: with its rediscovered appreciation of the harbor and waterfront and the opening of the Faneuil Hall Marketplace that year, Beantown was at the forefront of the nascent back-to-the-city movement. When the Convention returned 16 years later, the cityscape had changed yet again, as continuing investment made Boston an international symbol of urban renaissance. Today, after yet another 16 years, Boston is still evolving; in this issue, contributor Robert Turner describes what's new since the last time the Convention came calling.

In fact, a decade-and-a-half turns out to be a very good measure of change in a city: it's enough to reflect building cycles and generational changes in leadership as well as political, social, and cultural transitions. And it is a refreshing downshift from the breathless chase after "the new" that pervades our culture, where the novel passes into nostalgia in an instant. Since Michael Lewis wrote *The New New Thing* eight years and one bubble ago, his title phrase has passed from assumed irony to objective assessment: the blog *Soft Machines* reported a year ago that "it's fairly clear that nanotechnology is no longer the new new thing" — a judgment that will no doubt shock those who haven't yet figured out what nanotechnology is. Staying on top of the new is an exhausting proposition.

The new has been so entwined with our understanding of the modern era, our cultural obsession with youth, and the economic engines that sustain our society that a rejection of the new seems heretical. The past is useful only if it can be repackaged and rebranded — retro, neo, *vintage*. Fans of *Dwell* magazine's Modern Revival style eagerly decorate their lofts with Barcelona chairs that were designed 80 years ago — the equivalent of Mies van der Rohe furnishing his 1929 Barcelona Pavilion with Victorian settees by Belter or Herter. It's hard to

imagine that even the most clever tastemakers of that era could have successfully repositioned Belter's rococo carved furniture with the aura of freshness, youth — and yes, newness — that the Barcelona enjoys today.

And yet there are some signs that the previously unquestioned supremacy of the new is facing challenges. As sustainability begins to influence our values and choices, previously unfamiliar calculations are now part of everyday conversation: Does buying that new electronic gizmo mean the old one goes to the landfill? Is renovating that existing house more carbon-neutral than building a new one? What's the carbon analysis of replacement windows anyway? Will the payback from energy-saving features of a new appliance justify tossing the old one if it can't be recycled? Suddenly, pairing "new" with "waste" and "consumption" seems hip and not just plain cheap.

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We do not yet know fully how environmental concerns will alter our culture and society. But we can guess that cities will be at the center of some new sustainable order. Boston — with its relative density, existing infrastructure, proximity to similarly dense smaller cities, and access to a deep reservoir of talent and innovation — has the opportunity to become a national model for a sustainable society. Perhaps the AIA Convention will return in another 16 years to see if we have met that challenge. By that time, Boston should be new, again.

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With this issue, *ArchitectureBoston* celebrates its 10th anniversary. Launched in June 1998 as a quarterly with a distribution of 10,000 copies, today it is a bimonthly with over 25,000 readers. I would like to thank the hundreds of people who have contributed to its success, including the board of directors and staff of the Boston Society of Architects; its advertisers; its editorial board; its editorial staff, designers, and sales staff; and especially, the contributors and readers who have made *ArchitectureBoston* a nationally respected forum for the discussion of the built environment. ■

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