

Covering the Issues

Talk about digging big... Tunnels are “changing the world,” enthuses engineer Martin Herrenknecht, owner of Herrenknecht AG, the global leader in tunneling machines. Burkhard Bilger profiles Herrenknecht in “The Long Dig,” (*The New Yorker*, September 15, 2008). From Istanbul and Barcelona to New York City and the new city of Dongtan, tunnels now being dug underground are not only changing the traffic patterns and daily lives of the people above, but are also enabling urban growth to continue. Or so argues Herrenknecht. The Gotthard Base Tunnel through the Swiss Alps will make Switzerland “as flat as Sweden” and alter transportation routes across the entire continent. Beyond a simple company profile, Bilger explores the history and marvel of tunneling, along with larger questions about the relationship between infrastructure and urban experience, and our ability to carve the earth.

Back to school... We probably haven’t begun to hear the end of Newton North — an exceptionally expensive high school in a tony Boston suburb, which recently triggered initiatives for statewide school design standardization. *Boston Magazine* promises the “Lessons of Newton North” in its School Issue (September 2008). Still under construction and still a political fireball, it may be too early for lessons. Instead, writer Jason Schwartz delivers a balanced essay about the school: why it now costs \$200 million (clues are in the windows and the building’s low, zig-zag configuration); local opinions, pro and con; Newton’s role as a national leader in progressive and “trailblazing” education; and this building’s role in a larger story about deferred maintenance in a town. Schwartz discusses client input and the design process, as he questions the

functional life of buildings and sheds light on the tough questions facing this community — and others — about where limited resources should go.

Shhhhh... A front door closing, a car starting, an airplane taking off, the ceiling fan, a garbage truck, the refrigerator motor, a bird — my world, like yours, is full of auditory distractions. Noise interrupts sleep patterns; increases anxiety, aggressions, and social conflict; and makes it hard for kids to learn, writes Mary Desmond Pinkowish in “Quiet Please!” This is one of a collection of related articles in *Ode* magazine’s “Silence Issue” (July/August 2008). Not overtly architectural, to be sure, though important food for thought. It’s a gentle reminder that the buildings and landscapes we design affect all of the senses, and that those other senses — like sound — deeply impact experience.

What’s the rush?... What’s going on at Ground Zero? Lots, suggests Scott Raab. OK, maybe not lots in the ground, but lots behind the scenes, and Raab says we shouldn’t get all worked up over it. Raab has chronicled the construction of the Freedom Tower since it began. In this, his fifth and latest installment for *Esquire* (October 2008), he takes irreverent aim at all the naysayers as he explains what’s taking so long and imagines what this site will mean in the near and distant future. Raab takes irreverent aim at high-minded design, too, as he argues for the importance of getting it right (as opposed to just getting it done), and the imperative for this building to inspire us.

Creating creativity... *Harvard Business Review* continues to feature the business of design. In its September 2008 cover



story “Collective Creativity,” digital animation guru Ed Catmull describes what it takes to support creativity in an office setting — and make it profitable. As the head of Pixar (the makers of *Toy Story*, *Ratatouille*, and *WALL-E*), Catmull has established a 13-year track record of wrangling thousands of ideas and hundreds of people into movies that repeatedly deliver critical acclaim and popular success. His advice? Step One: Hire good people — because good people can develop mediocre ideas into something spectacular, but mediocre people will mangle good ideas. Make excellence the only standard. Encourage everyone to speak up, regardless of job title. And “stay close to the academic community” — the best source for the next generation of great minds. Back to Step One.

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, is the principal of Schneider Studio in Boston.