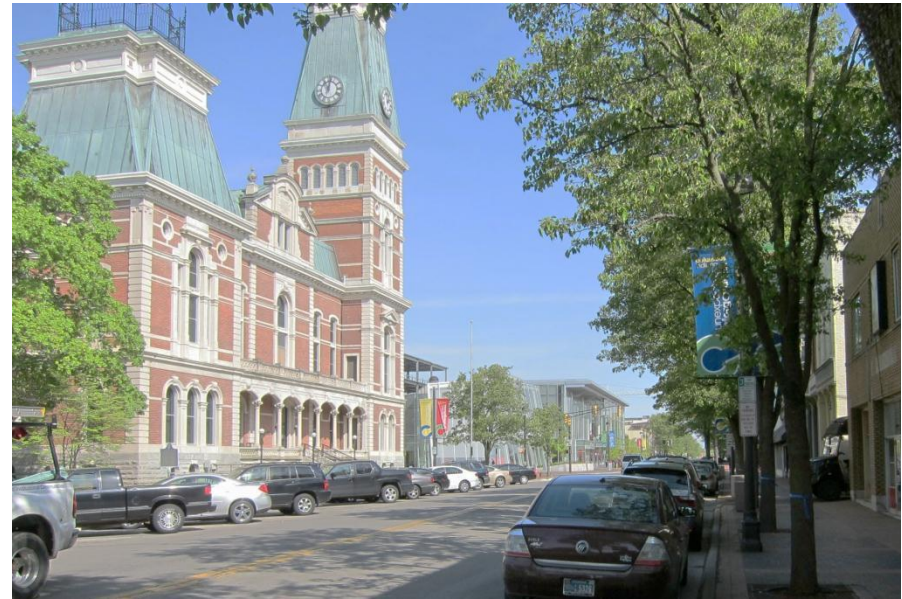


DEFINING ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN EXCELLENCE an AIA Committee on Design Conference

Columbus, Indiana, April, 2012
By John Morris Dixon FAIA



Much about Columbus, Indiana, is unremarkable. Yet its collection of architectural landmarks acquired over the past 70 years makes this community of about 44,000 a unique case study in design excellence. Some 130 conferees gathered there in the spring of 2012 to examine over 30 notable works of Modern American architecture, to meet with several of their architects, and to participate in discussions on defining design excellence -- the on-going objective of this year's Committee on Design activities.





A unique architectural history

Columbus's heritage of Modern architecture is the result of a unique foundation-supported program. The Cummins Foundation—with support from the city's major industry, Cummins, Inc.—has long offered to pay architects' fees for public buildings in the city and surrounding Bartholomew County, provided the architect is chosen from a list drawn up for the foundation.

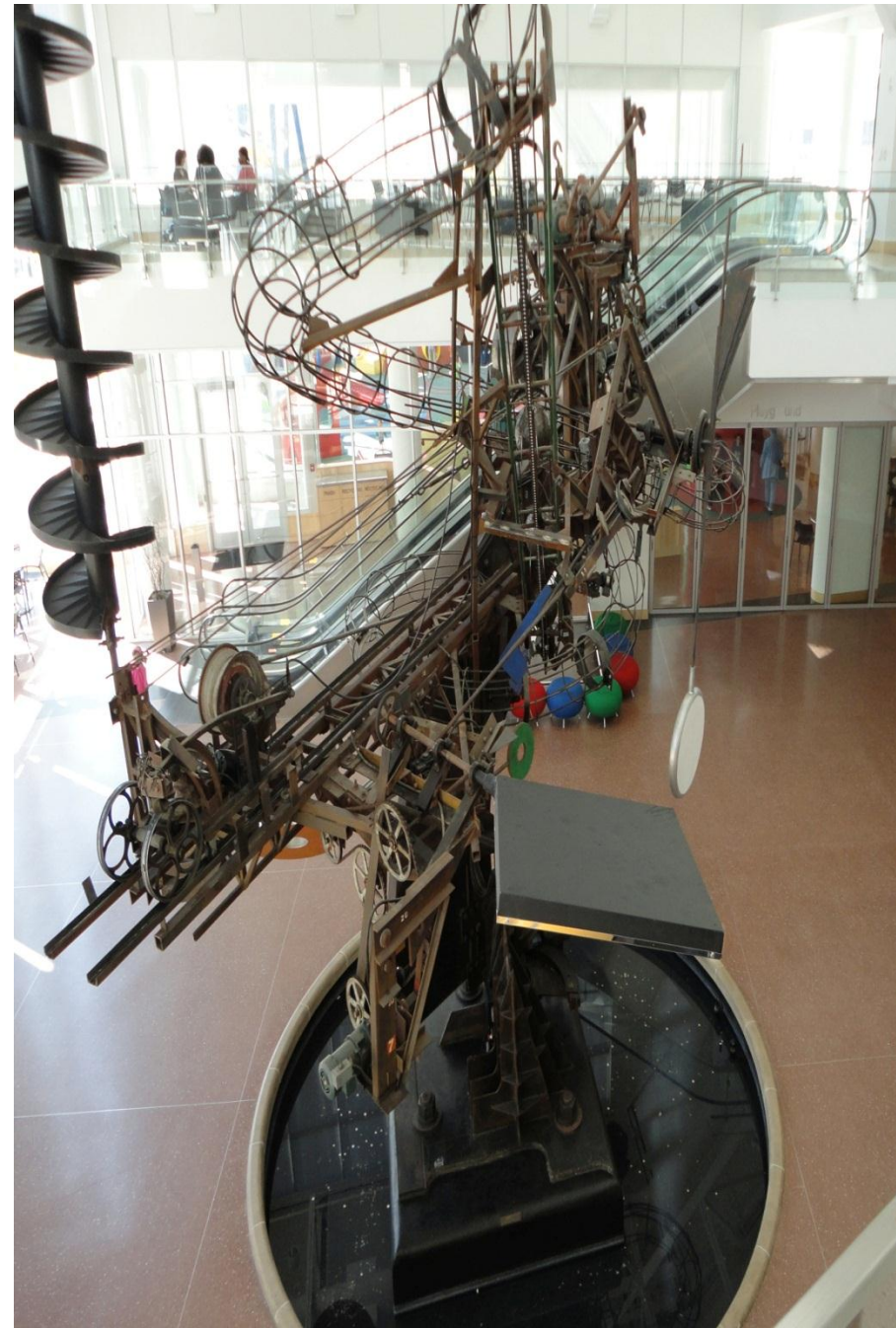
The foundation's Architectural Design program began in 1957, with the contribution of fees for one public school. The outcome for that first school was so satisfactory that the foundation agreed to pay fees for additional schools, if requested, and the program evolved to cover fees for public buildings of all kinds. As part of the agreement, these architects would control not just buildings, per se, but their interiors and furnishings, as well. Architects of comparable distinction were chosen for all Cummins factories and offices and for the area's Irwin Union Bank. Following the examples set by both the public buildings and the corporate facilities, other Columbus clients commissioned internationally-known architects for projects in the area, including some notable Modern churches.

The leading design advocate for all these architectural efforts was J. Irwin Miller (1909 - 2004), who was for various periods the chief executive of Cummins, the bank, and the foundation. A life-long resident of Columbus, educated at Yale and at Oxford, Miller had been indelibly influenced by his early encounter with the Saarinens, father and son, as they designed the town's First Christian Church, completed in 1942.



As a conference setting, Columbus offered a dense core suitable for walking tours, along with more far-flung landmarks to be visited or viewed along well-organized bus itineraries. The itineraries included key works by Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Harry Weese, I.M. Pei, Gunnar Birkerts, Skidmore Owings & Merrill, Kevin Roche, Alexander Girard, Taft Architects, Leers Weinzapfel, Ratio Architects, Deborah Berke, William Rawn, and Koetter & Kim, spanning the years 1942 to 2012. Conferees experienced, as well, examples of fine landscape architecture by such masters as Dan Kiley, Michael van Valkenburgh, and Jack Curtis, plus significant installed artworks by Henry Moore, Dale Chihuly, and Jean Tinguely.

Like the many Committee on Design conferences over the decades, the event offered more than an opportunity to examine noted works of the past century by architects of international stature. There was the chance to learn about the performance of these buildings -- functionally and aesthetically -- over significant periods of time and about their influence on the community. While most of the committee's conferences are held in major cities -- where architectural and urban design achievements tend to be concentrated -- Columbus offered a chance to experience the effect of exceptional architecture in a small city that is in many respects representative of the American hinterland. Moreover, conferees could consider the effect of a unique system of support for design excellence, through the selection of architects, by a charitable foundation.







Warm-up discussion

On the afternoon of April 12, before the conference's 5:00 pm opening reception, many arriving participants attended the pre-conference symposium—open to all local residents, as well—entitled “What Is Architectural Design Excellence?” It was held at the downtown quarters of the Indiana University Center for Art + Design, a new component of the state's university sited in the architecture-rich environment of Columbus. Billed as a rehearsal for a similar event at the forthcoming AIA Convention, this symposium took up the design excellence—or shortcomings—of six buildings in Columbus. (Landmarks of Washington, DC, would be examined at the later event.)

The Moderator of the symposium was Anne Schopf, FAIA, of Seattle, and the panelists included: Will Bruder, AIA, of Phoenix, architect of several recent landmarks in the Southwest; Ed Feiner, FAIA, of Washington, DC, principal of Perkins & Will and former chief architect of the U.S. General Services Administration; Jane Weinzapfel, FAIA, of Boston, whose firm, Leers Weinzapfel, designed 1991 additions to two Columbus public schools; Susan Szenasy of New York, editor of *Metropolis* magazine; and Kelly Wilson, career educator and director of the hosting Center for Art + Design. They offered many provocative observations, but no consensus developed.



On design excellence:

In an excellent work, said Bruder, "All the senses are alerted and nourished." "A building should encourage us to look at the world from a different point of view." Feiner defined excellent architecture as "an exemplary advancement for its time, with perceived lasting value for the ages." Weinzapfel characterized excellent design as expressing "pride of place" and offering "a sense of delight." A excellent work should not be "just an individual icon," but show a connection with its place. The architect's initial question, she said, should be "What does the place deserve?" For Wilson, fine architecture should be "multivalent, which is different from ambivalent." The more you see it, the more of its qualities you can "tease out." Excellent architecture, he observed, takes "banal" requirements as a basis for something "momentous." Feiner concluded that the final criterion should be "What is a keeper?"—not "What is acceptable?"



On the role of the client:

"All clients hire us for design excellence," asserted Bruder, and "expect design excellence." Design is not a solo performance by the architect, but involves many people. Weinzapfel agreed that architecture does express the aspirations of the client, but cautioned that those can be as minimal as "fast and cheap" or "meets code." Referring to his role at the GSA, Feiner recalled, "I was a good client."

On the design team:

Feiner confirmed the basis of the Columbus architecture program by saying that what's "crucial" is "selection of the architects." They "will do better design even if they have a crappy budget." Szenasy maintained that the design team should include "community people" and a wide variety of professionals. "No way to do it without several specialties—landscape, interiors, graphics, developers." Crediting an alternative to the old design/bid process, she noted, "Integrated project delivery can help."

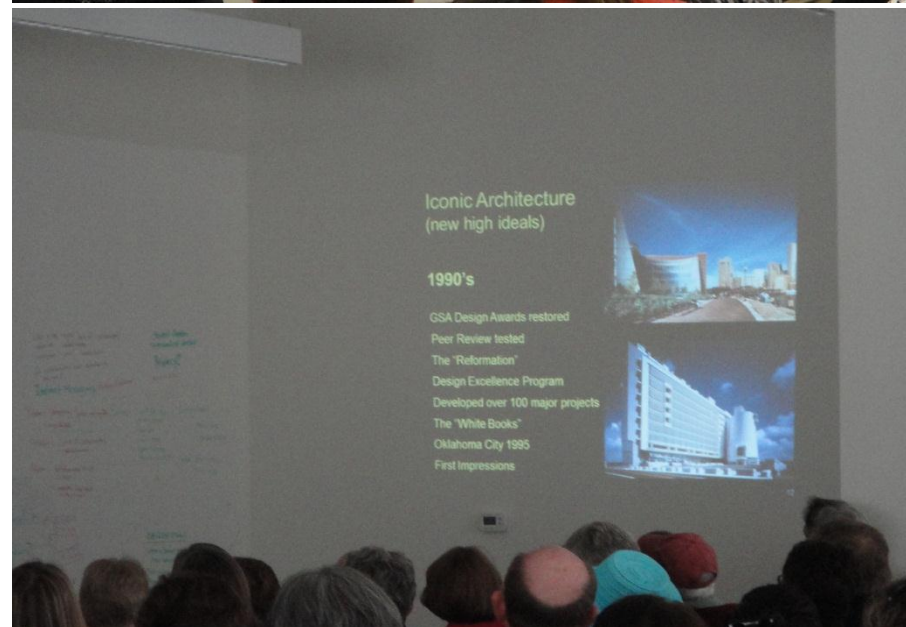


On communicating with the public:

Szenasy asserted at the outset, “I will talk about the non-architect’s vision of architecture.” She stated her objections to the profession’s in-group criteria and terminology—or “architectese.” She conceded, “I have learned the lingo, but don’t use it with the public.” She cited a recent competition among architecture school students for redevelopment of an old quarry in Vermont; there were 227 entries, and none showed any consideration for the little town nearby. Her message: “It’s not good design if it’s not related to people.”

On public perceptions of architecture:

Feiner cited a 150th-anniversary survey by AIA on the “most beautiful” buildings in the U.S., which revealed that the public considered the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas more beautiful than Richard Meier’s U.S. Courthouse at Islip, New York. The public’s perceptions of architecture reflect “our educational system—our K-12 education.” We should “start at the beginning to expect more in all the arts. No Child Left Behind doesn’t do that.” On a hopeful note, Szenasy observed that “Everyone has the yearning for a beautiful place.”



On excellence in Federal architecture:

Feiner noted that he has spent most of his life as a government architect, “a lesser life form” in this profession. At GSA, he didn’t set out to launch its signature Design Excellence Program; it just evolved. Back in the 1960s, there had been the 1962 “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture” drawn up by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. During the 1970s, the Federal building program was dominated by the rise of construction management and lease-purchase procedures—with a resulting erosion in quality. In the 1980s, “technology took the lead,” with such innovations as “space-reduction programs.” In the 1990s, GSA “started to build iconic architecture again.” Now federal construction is dominated by security rules and speedier “project delivery strategies” such as design/build. His measure of whether the GSA Design Excellence Program was working: “the appearance of its buildings on postcards and telephone book covers.” His brief history of Federal architecture concluded with a quotation from President John F. Kennedy: “I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty.”



On Columbus:

Szenasy opined that Columbus is “lucky” that its principal landmarks date from decades ago. “These buildings were built at a time of great optimism in America.” If you had a more recent architectural program, “you’d have a Libeskind and a Gehry scaring you, a Koolhaas overwhelming you.” Bruder added that there’d be “architecture with the latest parametrics.” Weinzapfel countered, “I don’t feel so doom-and-gloom.” Bruder pointed out that the noted architects who worked in Columbus “created these buildings with the same budgets as others had.” They didn’t “take the easy way out” of blaming budget constraints. Bruder brought up the criteria behind the Columbus architect lists—“curated lists.....which reflected Cranbrook values.” And he questioned “the effect of these 100-plus buildings?” Were they effective in stating “This is a special place”? Wilson observed that while “the town is peppered with architectural landmarks,” their combined effect “coagulates in only one place,” the space between the First Christian Church and the public library.

On bolstering downtown Columbus:

“The challenge here is the urbanization of Columbus,” said Weinzapfel. “Suppose [for instance] that you made a six-block area six times as dense.” (A downtown apartment complex was in fact under construction a few steps from where we were meeting.) Bruder spoke of the need for “place-making in an auto culture.” The place should provide for residents’ needs within “20 minutes on foot or by bike.” He asked whether there “is a master plan in place.” An audience member replied, “There has been quite a bit of master planning in Columbus, subject to changing views about architecture.”

On the six Columbus buildings proposed for discussion:

The six examples agreed upon by Committee on Design Chair Mike Mense, FAIA, and the symposium participants were: First Christian Church, 1942, by Eliel and Eero Saarinen; Miller House, by Eero Saarinen, 1957; Fire Station No. 4, 1967, by Venturi & Rauch; Smith Elementary School, 1969, by John Johansen; City Hall, 1981, by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Hotel Indigo, c. 2010, the conference hotel. It should be borne in mind that the hotel was the only example some of the panelists had yet seen. Of the six, the design quality of four was left unquestioned, with discussion confined to the fire station and the hotel.

Szenasy linked the fire station to her points about the profession vs. the public, saying its design involves “lots of in-profession jokes.” Wilson said that, in Venturi’s view, the profession “had been in a vise.” “This was an intellectual attack on the status quo.” He spoke of the struggle to translate “the brilliance of Venturi’s written word into design”—to develop the “civic image of a public building.” Feiner considered it “a billboard, a graphic.” An audience member observed, “Most of the public sees it as a nice little fire station—a yawner” (which Venturi might interpret as a compliment).

About the Hotel Indigo, Feiner said it is “a most banal building—looks like everything else—not uplifting.” Wilson called it a “collection of quotations that don’t add up,” with “no relationship of parts.” An audience member thought the hotel “may have messy vitality,” saying that maybe “younger people are closer to it.” Another audience member felt “The problem with the hotel is it’s not special to the place; it’s generic.” Szenasy commented, “The world of architecture has known about Columbus buildings for generations. You’d expect [a higher level] of judgment about design” than is evident in the hotel.

The relative isolation of the hotel from the dense development on adjoining downtown blocks was also discussed. Szenasy said guests “just drive up and drive out” without contacting the city. Wilson agreed that it’s “at the periphery.” An audience member pointed out that it does have a pedestrian entrance on the street, oriented toward the adjoining downtown, although those arriving by car, bus, or van may see only the parking lot entrance. Szenasy observed that “a small-town hotel could be a destination for the community,” a site for “dining and celebrations,” which would call for closer integration with the community.



Conference Launch at The Commons

The Commons, Koetter Kim & Associates and CSO Architects, 2011

Site of the official opening of the conference at 5:00 pm on April 12, this block-long structure exemplified the shift in architectural and urban design concepts over the past several decades. Completed in 1975 as a multipurpose center-of-town structure, The Commons was designed by Gruen Associates, Cesar Pelli partner in charge. It was thoroughly remodeled in 2011. Its radical reconfiguration—and reduction in overall size—reflects the change in downtown revitalization strategies since it was built. The Commons has thus become the only Columbus building that has been an architectural landmark twice over.

The Commons of the 1970s featured an innovative indoor public plaza and playground in a large glazed volume along the town's main retail street, with a skin of tinted glass that turned a blank face to the world outside until after sundown, when interior lighting made it transparent. This unique enclosed public space, with park-like plantings and seating, led to an indoor shopping mall filling the remainder of its two-city-block footprint, all clad in the same sleek glass envelope.





As reconfigured, The Commons has a less monolithic exterior of clear high-performance glazing, more transparent at all hours, with retail along much of its first-floor street front and an ample mezzanine public space above it for meetings and performances. The indoor playground has been updated with a series of climbing environments—visible from the street—occupying a two-story glazed portion of the street frontage. A one-block stretch of public street that had been closed to make room for the shopping mall has been reinstated, and the far end of the site reused for a multi-story parking garage and mixed-use structures. A large mechanized sculpture by the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely, a notable work created for the original Commons, has been retained as a key feature in the tall lobby of the remodeled structure.

In the meeting hall of the remodeled Commons, participants were welcomed by the mayor of Columbus and the conference chairs and were oriented to the town through an illustrated talk on its architectural legacy by Anthony Costello, FAIA, architecture professor emeritus of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. (The scheduled speaker, Bradley Brooks, director of historical resources at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, was unable to attend because of an emergency, and Costello spoke from his notes. The architects of The Commons remodeling, Fred Koetter, FAIA, and Susie Kim, AIA, were also unable to be attend.)





Walking Tour: the Downtown Cluster

The conference's site visits began with a walking tour of landmarks clustered at the center of Columbus.

First Christian Church, Eliel and Eero Saarinen, 1942

The innovative design of this prominent structure inspired the town's unique Modern architecture odyssey—not-so-incidentally introducing the young J. Irwin Miller to the young Eero Saarinen. We toured this seminal structure and enjoyed its combination of severe form and warm textures, its subtleties of lighting, its careful avoidance of total symmetry—and its instances of restrained decoration. It was disconcerting to learn that a glazed area that indirectly illuminated the wall behind the altar has long been boarded up awaiting repair and to see that openings in its carillon tower had been covered with fiberglass panels to protect its brickwork from water damage. A reflecting pool at the base of the tower has long since been converted to grass because of the maintenance and safety issues it posed. There is concern that the economic strength of this downtown congregation may be dwindling, along with its membership.





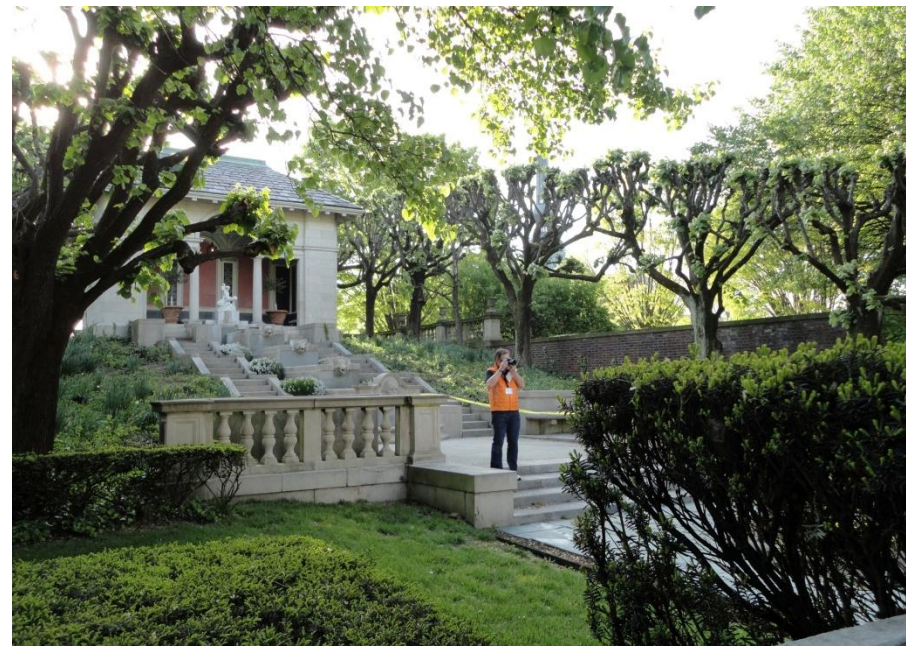
Cleo Rogers Memorial Library, I.M. Pei, 1969

Directly across the street from the First Christian Church, this deferential public building is set back from the street, making way for a well-proportioned plaza whose third wall is provided by the Irwin family house, completed 1910. The Pei firm's 1960s sensitivity to urban design is vividly demonstrated here in the library's front, with a large area of uninterrupted brick wall clearly designed as a backdrop for the plaza and for the monumental Henry Moore sculpture, Large Arch, 1971, at its focal point. The library interior is disciplined and restrained, and a 1987 addition at its rear designed by Columbus architect James Paris is a model of sensitive expansion, seeming integral to the original scheme.



Irwin House and Gardens, remodeled by Henry Philips, 1910

Its dark red brick walls forming a third side of the little plaza between the church and the library, the Irwin House is one of Columbus's pre-modern structures with a key urban role. Transformed from an 1864 Italianate house into a hybrid with elements of the Arts and Crafts and Classical Revival movements, it is the house where J. Irwin Miller grew up. Part of its walled site is occupied by a symmetrically laid-out garden, with terraces, loggias, pools and fountains—unusually elaborate for what is only an oversized in-town building lot. Not open to the public, the house is operated as The Inn at Irwin Gardens, which housed seven conference participants in its well-preserved period interiors.



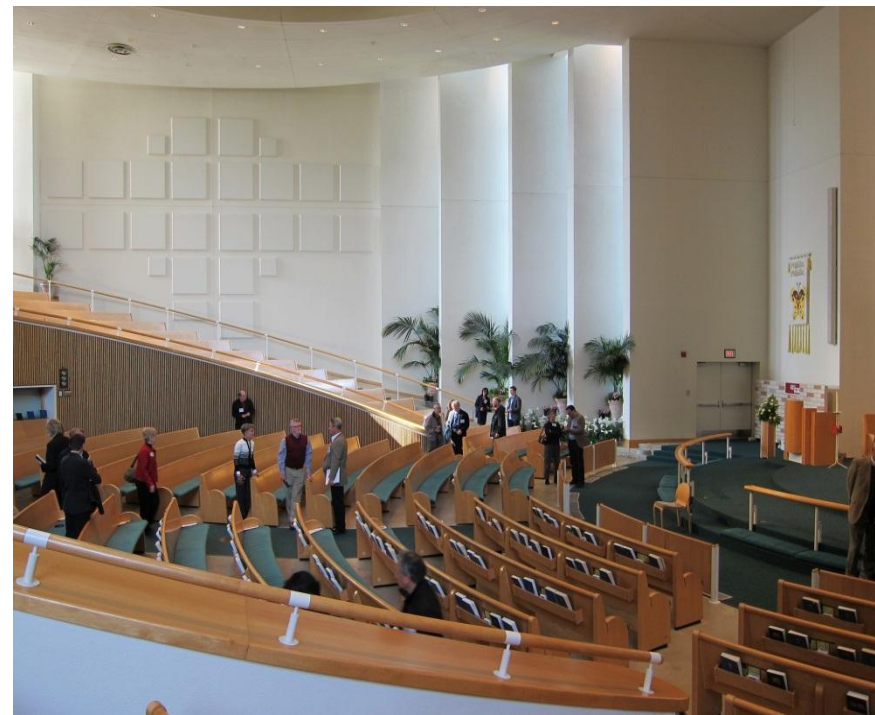
Lincoln Elementary School, Gunnar Birkerts, 1967

Just a block east of the church and library, this is the first of the numerous Columbus public schools designed under the Cummins Foundation program to be built in the downtown area. At the time of its design, there was much concern about its intrusion into a central residential neighborhood, so the objective was the smallest possible bulk, footprint, and silhouette. The design response was to sink a square, brick-walled structure a half story into the ground, surrounding it with a circular dry moat with a tree-planted berm encircling that. At the time of the conference, the original tree circle had been cut down to make way for replacements, so its screening effect was missing. Inside, the building was one of the earliest schools to have an elevator and air-conditioning. It is organized with a central multipurpose gym, surrounded by corridors on two levels. One of the complex natural lighting schemes for which Birkerts became known brings daylight from clerestories into both the corridor and the gym, while giving the corridors views into that central space. Classrooms have relatively small windows opening into angular notches in the outer walls. There was encouraging evidence that students and faculty of the school were welcoming Birkerts himself and taking the opportunity—along with conference participants—to learn more about his design.



St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Gunnar Birkerts, 1988

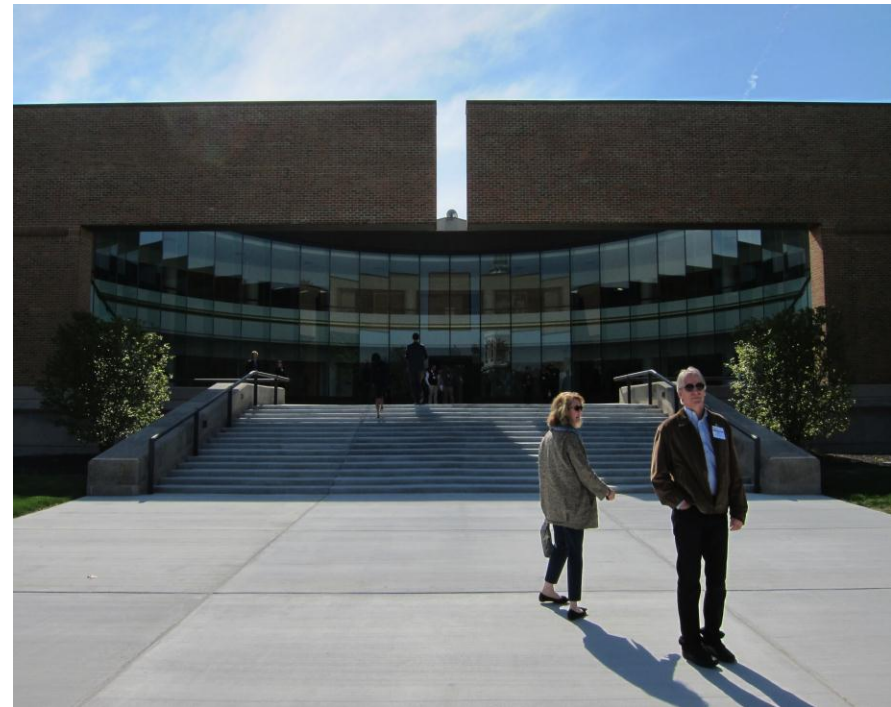
Across the street from the school is a much later and more visually prominent landmark by the same architect. (It seems the imperative to maintain a low profile out of respect for the residential neighborhood no longer applied.) The church's sanctuary takes the form of a brick-walled cylinder, recalling the masonry and circle of trees of the architect's school across the street. Atop this cylindrical form is a 186-foot-tall copper-clad spire recalling the Lutheran Church's Northern European origins. The cylinder is interrupted irregularly by tall, narrow windows shielded by concrete fin walls. Along with a skylight in a central dome, they flood the sanctuary with indirect light. A steeply raked balcony clasp the main-floor pews in a C-shaped configuration makes the interior seem comfortably occupied with widely varying numbers of worshipers. Discussing the church with conferees in the sanctuary, Birkerts stressed the effect of circular gathering ("I don't believe in the linear church.") and pointed out that every feature of the seemingly symmetrical scheme is actually asymmetrical (as are most features of the Eliel Saarinen's nearby First Christian Church).





City Hall, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1981

Philip Enquist, FAIA, of SOM recalled how design partner Edward Charles Bassett created a bold civic presence for the relatively small volume of the building, which faces the massive Victorian county courthouse diagonally across the main street. He extended the building's front along the diagonal of its full-block site. Clad in large areas of uninterrupted brick, this front wall parts at the center to reveal a semi-circular court contained by an all-glass lobby wall. Stretched across this opening is a super-scaled split lintel, a Modern echo of the Baroque split pediment. Enquist pointed out that the legally defined "street walls" along two flanking streets are each only one inch wide. The rear faces of the triangular structure have a more traditional brick-walled dignity. Convening in the building's ample main meeting room, participants heard a series of design statements and enjoyed box lunches.



Design Statements at City Hall

The slide presentation by **Kevin Kennon, AIA**, of Kevin Kennon Architects, New York, was a presentation of his proposed Tian Fang Tower for the new eco-city in Tianjin, China. The two-million-square-foot project is to be the signature tower of this planned precinct of some 350,000 people, focused on sustainability. The tower and the cluster of low-rise mixed-use structures at its base are all composed of the same spatial modules, variously oriented. In the tower, two-story common spaces with generous greenery will fill vertical gaps between these modules.

Nancy Rogo Trainer, FAIA, of Venturi Scott Brown & Associates, Philadelphia, spoke of the life-long experiences, outside of education and practice, that can shape perceptions of design excellence—for instance childhood impressions of her local Carnegie library, perhaps not excellent, but ennobling to users. “At VSBA,” she said, “we don’t talk about excellence. When we say something is ‘pretty good,’ that’s high praise.” She illustrated the firm’s work with images of Wu Hall at Princeton, which she characterized as “quintessentially American—maybe brash, maybe rude, but very engaging.” Her visual tour of works that might meet the goal of being “delightful” included Labrouste’s libraries in Paris, the little Harvard Lampoon building in Cambridge, the new High Line in New York, Philadelphia’s main railroad station, the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, the Woodlands Cemetery near Stockholm. “Choosing between being perfect and being delightful,” she concluded, “I’d take delightful.”



Michael Ross, FAIA, of HGA Architects and Engineers, Los Angeles, recalled that growing up in New York when Wright's Guggenheim Museum went up—breaking a long line of rectangular structures—influenced his thinking about architecture, as did serving for some years as a Los Angeles correspondent for *Progressive Architecture* magazine. Working for Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates (on projects including their 1973 Cummins Health Center in Columbus, which conferees would visit) inspired him to create works that may “inspire, transform, give a bit of a kick or shock.” Now, in an office specializing in health care facilities, he tries to interpret the program so as “to give clients something beyond what they hoped for.”



Walking Tour of Washington Street, the "Main Street" of Columbus

The Republic, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1970

Sited across Washington Street from the City Hall and 11 years older, the building housing the city's newspaper, *The Republic*, is a very different work by a different SOM design partner, Myron Goldsmith. A one-story structure deferring to the neighboring civic buildings, it is distinguished by its pure Miesian order and detail. With an uninterrupted envelope of clear glass with widely-spaced mullions, it embodies the transparency its client wanted—an effect that had more impact originally, when operating presses (no longer there) could be observed from the street.

County Courthouse, Isaac Hodgson, 1874

The dramatically massed, towered Victorian courthouse, clad in red brick with prominent stone trim, dominates the Columbus skyline. Seen often by conferees and sometimes cited as one the city's most memorable structures, it was not on the program for an interior visit.

Veteran's Memorial, Thompson & Rose, 1997

Sited in the city-block park surrounding the courthouse, the memorial is the result of a nationwide design competition. Its densely clustered limestone shafts are engraved with excerpts from letters written by men and women who perished in military service—a moving and sobering experience for those who paused here.





Storefront Improvements, Alexander Girard, 1964

With Irwin Union Bank's support, designer Girard specified paint colors to highlight the Victorian-era detail of storefronts along several blocks of Washington Street, the city's main retail area. A variety of subtly contrasting off-whites, creams, and ochers were occasionally accented with bright orange, blue, and other vivid colors.

301 Washington Street, interiors by Alexander Girard, 1972

This vernacular commercial building on the main commercial artery was the “neutral” office of the town’s architecture patron, J. Irwin Miller (the office not associated with his executive roles at Cummins or the Irwin Union Bank). The lobby and three modest rooms upstairs look just as they were designed by Girard, in muted shades of white, beige, and brown, emphasizing the textures of wood and textiles. Miller's grandfather operated a dry goods store in this building and remodeled it in 1881. The exterior of the building has been painted according to a scheme by Girard (see Storefront Improvements, above).

Zaharakos Ice Cream Parlor, 1900, restored 2009

No visit to Columbus is really complete without the experience of this pre-Modern Washington Street landmark, where vintage-style sodas and banana splits are offered in a setting of fancifully carved oak, marble counters, and Tiffany-style glass. A century-old orchestrion -- a mechanical pipe organ with percussion punctuation, restored in 2009 -- belts out waltzes and ragtime.



Irwin Union Bank, Eero Saarinen, 1955

The first of the local bank's Modern landmarks was its main downtown branch. Embodying one of the banking innovations of its time, it is a glass-walled pavilion, in this case square in plan and one story high. Suspended fixtures indirectly light nine shallow domes in its flat roof to create a suggestion of skylights. A central stairwell leads to offices and the vault in the basement. In 1973, Kevin Roche designed a through-block glazed passage that links the pavilion to a renovated existing commercial building next door, where more bank offices were housed. The whole complex is now closed -- though open to conferees -- awaiting a new use.

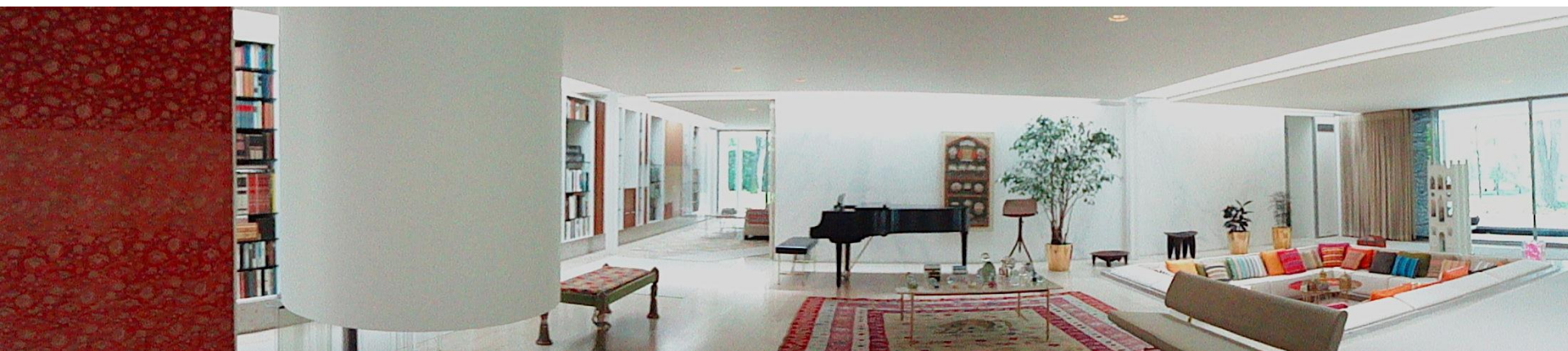


Landmark House and Gardens

Miller House, Eero Saarinen, Alexander Girard, and Dan Kiley, 1957

Rarely even glimpsed except by guests of the Millers -- and identified in its 1958 magazine publication only as a house in the Middle West -- the home of the J. Irwin Miller family has recently been opened to the public under the auspices of the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Sited on level land overlooking a riverbank meadow, the one-story, flat-roofed house is organized on a rigorous nine-square geometry, the nine bays delineated by paired steel beams topped with linear skylights. Within the pavilion-like structure, every family need, including covered parking for two cars, is accommodated. Spaces for specific uses—bedrooms, kitchen, dining space, library—are located around the exterior. The central living area, which pinwheels out from the central structural bay to into adjoining ones, is dominated by a “conversation pit,” energized with upholstery and pillows in colorful Girard fabrics. Some partitions bounding this space are faced with floor-to-ceiling slabs of unpolished white marble. Other surfaces support shelves and niches filled with vividly colored folk objects curated by Girard. Outside, Kiley's landscaping departs from the usual naturalistic site treatment of 1950s Modernism, with allees, fountain pools, and geometrical planting beds recalling Baroque precedents.















Corporate Amenities

Cummins Corporate Office Building, Kevin Roche, 1984

The conferees' visit to this three-block-long corporate campus started with a reception attended by company executives and community leaders in its ample lobby/exhibition area, followed by dinner in its unusually gracious employee dining facility. (The world-class dinner menu and service made a strong impression on all present.) The low-rise office complex meanders through a site that is roughly half open area landscaped by Jack Curtis. The whole development is unified by a continuous bold cornice along the bordering streets, which extends from the large entrance portico along the office block walls and extensive trellised loggias. Near the center is a four-story, brick-walled 19th-century factory structure, set at an angle following a former railroad alignment. Extending from the base of this found structure, employee dining spaces are wrapped around pre-existing brick walls, with continuous glazing facing out to pools, fountains, and greenery.



Bus Tour of the Northern Suburbs

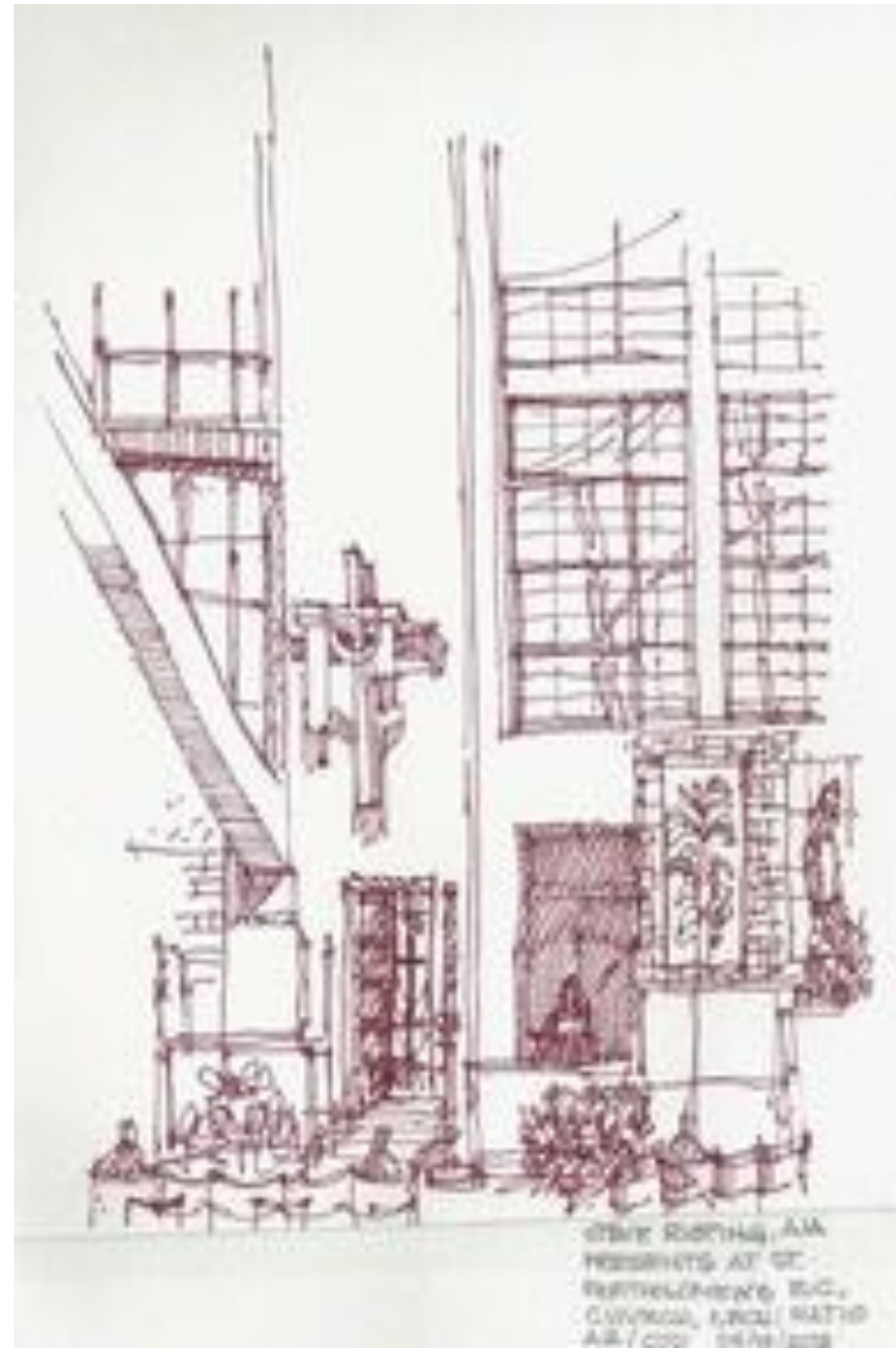
North Christian Church, Eero Saarinen, 1964

The younger Saarinen's counterpart to the 1942 church downtown is set back on a generous, well-landscaped site. It reads very much as an abstract, scaleless object, a hexagonal pyramid topped by a tapering steeple. A continuous areaway providing light to auxiliary spaces below the sanctuary adds to its image as a discrete object sitting lightly on the earth. Inside, the planes of the hexagonal pyramid converge on a central skylight, creating a powerful spiritual feeling. Tiered seating descends toward a central altar and lectern platform, embodying the liturgy-in-the-round concepts -- vs. axial layouts -- that were current among many religions in the 1960s.



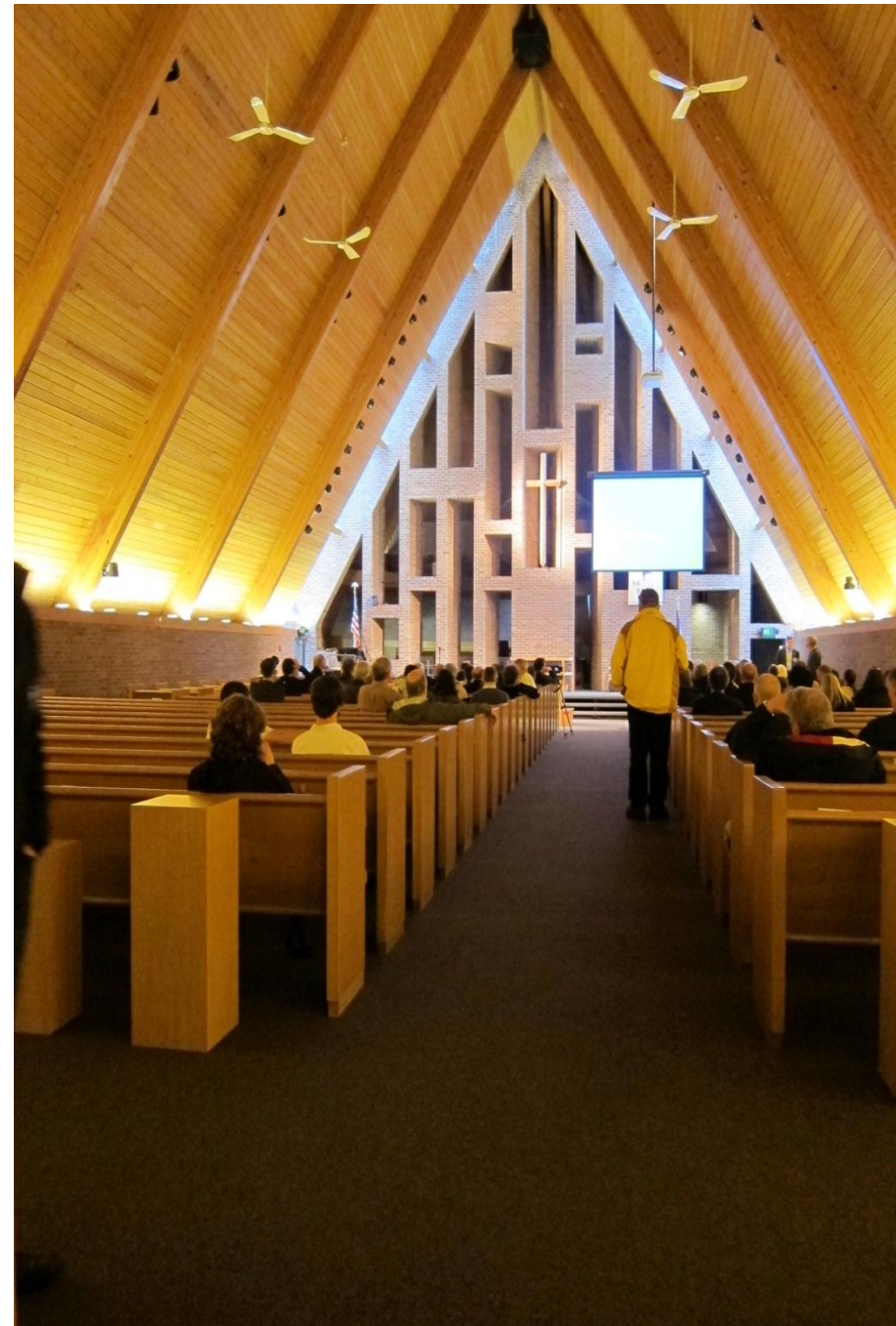
St. Bartholomew Roman Catholic Church, Ratio Architects, 2002

A much later church by an Indianapolis firm responds in certain respects to the precedent of North Christian. It, too, displays an essentially pyramidal form, rising to a central bell tower. But its form is much less geometrical, more organic, with roof planes rising above a large sanctuary with a curvilinear plan that suggests the shape of a snail. Inside the seating is arrayed on three sides of the altar platform. On the exterior, the sanctuary and auxiliary spaces are enclosed by an irregular but continuous one-story wall of rough-cut stone, with buttresses expressing its load-bearing function.



First Baptist Church, Harry Weese, 1965

From the same period and in the same area as the North Christian Church, this structure evokes traditional architecture, rather than abstract sculpture. Standing at the top of a knoll, the church departs sharply from established Modernist design, with brick walls and a steeply peaked roof over an axial sanctuary. Yet its traditional concept is given a revisionist treatment: the wood-framed nave roof springs from solid, chest-high walls, with subdued daylight admitted through a narrow gap at the base of the roof. The ceremonial platform is dramatically illuminated from a slot of skylight separating roof planes from the brick wall behind the altar. Presenting a variation on the historical reredos, that altar wall is pierced by an asymmetrical composition of openings that screens the choir and organ from the congregation. On the exterior, the architects developed an expressionist version of the traditional masonry-walled, peak-roofed church, with end walls of exaggerated steepness marking the altar locations of the sanctuary and the smaller, similarly shaped chapel.





Harry Weese's Columbus Work

This church was the setting for a presentation on Harry Weese's Columbus work by Cynthia Weese, FAIA, and Ben Weese, FAIA, of Weese Langley Weese, Chicago, both of whom worked with Ben's older brother. They discussed and illustrated the firm's work in Columbus (see tour below), which departed in some respects from the mainstream Modernism of its time in the adaptation of more traditional building forms and construction techniques. Rather than imposing a recognizable style, Harry Weese's work was sensitive to its specific settings -- the Columbus buildings quite distinct from work in more urban settings.



Seen Along the Way

Among buildings seen from the buses on the way to the next meeting place (amidst recurring downpours, which discouraged closer examination) were:

Schmitt Elementary School, Harry Weese, 1957, and Leers Weinzapfel, 1991

Characterized originally by a series of low gables, the school has a 1991 two-story, flat-roofed addition with exposed steel framing painted red.

Northside Middle School, Harry Weese, 1961, and Leers Weinzapfel, 1991

Notable in 1961 for its unorthodox use of brick bearing walls with brick-arched window openings, this school has acquired a 1991 wing with a spacious interior atrium, a prominent two-story-high portico, and exposed red-painted steel framing, intended to establish an affinity with the nearby Schmitt School.

W.D. Richards Elementary School, Edward Larrabee Barnes, 1965

This brick-walled school is distinguished by a bold saw-tooth silhouette, created by the one-pitch classroom roofs that provide each with an ample light monitor.

Par3 Clubhouse, Bruce Adams, 1972

A geometrically abstracted version of a vernacular farm building, the simple structure in a public golf course is clad in vertical wood boards and wood roof shingles.



Fire Station No. 4, Venturi & Rauch, 1968

The exterior of this modest structure, an icon of the early Postmodern movement, presents a superscaled graphic treatment rather than allusions to historical architecture.

L. Francis Smith Elementary School, John Johansen, 1969

A small-scaled school displaying the architect's characteristic composition of cubic volumes connected by brightly colored circulation tubes.

Eastbrook Branch Bank, Harry Weese, 1961

This small structure announces its presence in an industrial area with four prominent mechanical equipment towers.

Parkside Elementary School, Norman Fletcher of TAC, 1962

Showing a kinship with other buildings by The Architects Collaborative, this one-story school has brick walls and shallow concrete vault roofs.

Advance Manufacturing Center of Excellence, Cesar Pelli, 2011

This sprawling complex is unified by a symmetrical plan. Its flat roofs at two levels -- for high industrial bays and for more conventional spaces -- extend to form broad overhangs.





A Midday Discussion Break

Columbus Learning Center, Kohn Pederson Fox (Kevin Kennon, designer), 2007

A break in the Northern Suburbs Tour for lunch and speaker presentations took place in Columbus's center for adult education, a one-building campus composed of three linked volumes variously clad in brick and continuous glazing. Its ample lecture hall was the venue for design statements by three architects and an after-lunch panel discussion. The sleekly cylindrical rotunda in the complex is the setting for a skylight installation by the glass artists Dale Chihuly.

Design Statements

Kevin Kennon, AIA, of Kevin Kennon Architects, New York, spoke about designing the learning center where we were meeting to accommodate the merger of two existing two-year community colleges—one technologically oriented, the other focused on sciences and humanities. The center has to serve, as well, for broader community education purposes, accessible 24/7. Its configuration is intended to complement the neighboring Advanced Manufacturing Center of Excellence, which was being planned at the same time.

Daniel McDoubrey, AIA, of Venturi Scott Brown & Associates, Philadelphia, enumerated four strategies for building in a historic environment: literal replication, invention within a style, abstract references, and intentional opposition—all of which may be valid, depending on the situation. He illustrated these approaches with several works of VSBA, ranging from the large and prominent addition to the National Gallery in London (invention within a style) to the less imposing addition and renovation of the Allentown, PA, Art Museum (intentional opposition).





Jane Weinzapfel of Leers Weinzapfel, Boston, spoke about the many criteria for design excellence: aesthetic, functional, contextual, social, and sustainable. And she pointed out that several parties must strive jointly for excellence: architects, consultants, clients, and increasingly the public. She discussed her firm's design of additions and renovations at two Columbus schools, Schmitt and Northside (Northern Suburbs tour, above). She spoke about how their designs reflected changes in school policies and operation over a 30-year period and her intention to establish a visible relationship between neighboring schools for different age groups.

Carlos Jimenez told of his introduction to Columbus about ten years ago, when Will Miller of Cummins was impressed by a Jimenez building in Houston. He recalled approaching town and seeing a highway sign saying "Different by Design: Columbus, Indiana." "What is admirable about Columbus," he found, "is the attitude that design makes a difference." His first commission was for a prototype Irwin Union Bank branch for strip-shopping locations, three of which were built, 1995-2001, in Columbus and vicinity. He then designed the Columbus Child Development Center, 1997-2001 (on tour below), a prototype Cummins Engine distributorship, built in Houston, 1997-2001, and an office building for Irwin Mortgage near Indianapolis, 2001-2003.



Panel Discussion, “Modernism, Mannerism, or Architecture.”

Panelists for this discussion at the Learning Center lecture hall were Kevin Kennon, AIA, Susan Szenasy, Nancy Rogo Trainer, FAIA, Jane Weinzapfel, FAIA, and the moderator was John Morris Dixon, FAIA. The first subject addressed was style, prompted by the “isms” in the discussion title. Szenasy quickly asserted, “We need to move beyond style,” but she later proved willing to discuss it. Kennon stated that the question of style was a minor part of the design process: “With all the other considerations, there’s not much room for style,” He might define style as “what intuition brings” to the process. “Each architect brings something of self to the table. Maybe that’s what we call style.”

Moderator Dixon offered a definition of style as “a set of aesthetic preferences. For instance Modernism is characterized by an avoidance of ornament.” From the floor, Committee on Design chair Mike Mense, FAIA, cautioned that “architects run from the word style.” Kennon offered the word “identity” as a “more relevant term.” Trainer, citing the old distinction between architecture and mere building, asked the larger question, “What makes it architecture?” One answer she gave is “paying attention to the specifics of the program,” rather than simply erecting shelter. Szenasy cited the choice of materials and techniques as determinants of style—for instance the specific ways glass and steel are used in Modernism.

Kennon took up the subject of design excellence and its effect on Columbus, saying that the town’s experience with exceptional architecture is “now 70 years old. Three generations have experienced this experiment. It has made a difference to their lives.” When he worked in Columbus, he reported, he found clients and community residents unusually knowledgeable about architectural issues.



Dixon then asked members of the audience to address the effect of the town's architecture. One attendee reported that at least one town native considers the imposing 1874 County Courthouse, preceding all the Modernism by several decades, to be the most important architecture in town (Walking Tour of Washington Street, above.) Szenasy said architecture should be judged by the perceptions of those who use it. For them, functional aspects such as durability and accessibility are crucial. Weinzapfel spoke up to "say something positive about style." She said style had to do with "validity" in relation to "place, climate, and traditions of people." This validity, combined with "core principles" of design and use of materials can lead to "a notable result that can be labeled as a style."

Dixon questioned whether excellent architecture isn't often understood to be "what we choose to write about, to honor with awards, and to visit." And what role, he asked, "does innovation play in our judgment of excellence"? Kennon reported that "innovation is a key component" of his firm's work—"even if it fails." He favors "risk-taking as an impetus. The result may be wonderful [but it fails] if it doesn't engage the culture" for which it is designed. Szenasy observed that "without innovation, there is no progress. And innovation occurs in times of optimism."

Mense asked about the well-known Venturi & Rauch fire station (which we had seen earlier that day). Trainer, from today's Venturi firm, said architecture such as that "has to do with making everyday things work really well and express their functions really well." Dixon cited statements from earlier in the conference that excellence involves consideration of the particular over the universal.



A member of the audience in his twenties pointed out that very few young designers were present at this conference. (That is a perennial concern, given the costs of attending and the need among established architects for continuing education points. Two selected architectural interns attended this meeting with AIA support). Trainer sees “young people thinking across disciplinary boundaries—thinking about whole environments, not just buildings.” Szenasy observed that the young have advantages in their “energy and technological knowledge,” and they “have to push forward” with those advantages. Trainer would urge young professionals “to figure out what they want to learn—because their education isn’t over—and find people who will help them to learn.” Kennon urged architectural firms to engage with youth in order to survive.



Continued Bus Tour of Outer Columbus

Fire Station No. 1, Leighton Bowes, 1941; addition, James Paris, AIA, and Nolan Bingham, AIA, 1990

Of unexpected interest, not part of the well-known Columbus canon, was this modest-scaled but fine example of the Art Moderne style, with sleekly curved brick walls, curved glazing at corners, and stainless steel trim and signage. The original building has been carefully retained and renovated (though its current maintenance is clearly inadequate), and expanded to become the city's fire headquarters. The large and sensitive 1990 addition by Columbus architects effectively complements the older structure with a similar vocabulary of curves in matching brick and glass—even similar sleekly designed roll-up doors.



Cummins Health Center, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, 1973

This corporate service building presents a lively composition of angular forms, many clad in vividly colored ribbed metal siding, inside and out. The central circulation/lobby space is like a complex walk-in sculpture, with bold ductwork slashing through it. The building has been rehabilitated after a 2008 flood that damaged many structures in its area. Some of the original furnishings were lost. Attendees were briefed on the building by Michael Ross, FAIA, of HGA, Los Angeles, who worked on the building as an HHPA staff member early in his career.



Cummins Child Development Center, Carlos Jimenez, 2001

This child care facility, another service for Cummins employees, is characterized by simple, minimal forms and surfaces. One-story classroom wings are laid out to define a central paved play court and other outdoor spaces landscaped by Jack Curtis. Like the Health Center, it required repair after the 2008 flood.



McDowell Elementary School, John Carl Warnecke, 1960

Now adapted as an Adult Education Center, this school is laid out with classrooms and shared facilities clustered in separate pavilions, under hipped roofs with broad overhangs, linked by open covered walkways— a formally elegant design recalling the California environment of the Warnecke office.



Inside Story of the Architecture Program

Otter Creek Country Club, Harry Weese, 1965

The setting for an evening reception and dinner, followed by an enlightening talk by Columbus's Will Miller, was this country club at the far edge of town. Defying country club design conventions, Weese's building has simple timber framing and all-glass infill walls overlooking a landscape designed of equal simplicity by Dan Kiley. Continuous verandahs with wood-shingled roofs shade the tall glass. The effect is of spaciousness, transparency, durability, and humility.



Will Miller's View of Columbus Architecture

After-dinner speaker Will Miller is the son of J. Irwin Miller and a leader of the family's enterprises and philanthropies. He grew up among the town's notable projects and has continued his family's support of the architecture program. His talk, entitled "The Strategy and Value of Architectural Design Excellence in Columbus, Indiana," was framed in business terms. Armed with a variety of graphs and charts, he began with the business principles of Cummins, Inc. (originally the Cummins Engine Company), by far the town's largest employer.

Miller addressed the origins of the Cummins Foundation's architecture program, citing the baby boom after World War II, which demanded a new school in Columbus every two or three years for 15 years, the disastrous design of the town's first postwar schools, and the growing company's need to recruit talented people. When the Cummins Foundation initiated its program -- offering to pay the architect's fee for one school -- the panel nominating them comprised the MIT Dean of Architecture, the Editor of *Architectural Forum*, and Eero Saarinen. Once the school board chose an architect, the foundation would have no further involvement. The result was so satisfactory that the foundation went on to fund the design of several more schools, then other public structures -- only if requested.



Meanwhile Cummins and the Irwin Union Bank, an older enterprise connected to Miller's family, commissioned works by Eero Saarinen, Harry Weese, Kevin Roche and others. And non-public institutions, including several churches, commissioned architects whose works they had come to know, with no inducements from the foundation. His graphs showed a total of 63 buildings by distinguished architects, 32 of them designed under the architectural program, which has advanced a total of \$19.1 million for architects' fees over a 56-year period—achieving remarkable results with an amount that is minuscule compared to Cummins Engine's revenues over that period.

Strategically, Miller concluded, the architecture program met the company's objectives in a way that benefited others, that offered taxpayers a good deal, and that respected the judgment of public officials. Comparing Columbus to various U.S. model communities, he pointed out that the architectural program was not proscriptive: there was no master plan, no unconventional zoning, no eminent domain. And the program is open-ended -- "a process, not a plan."

He showed, as well, a statistical comparison of Columbus to other Indiana towns with similar populations and work forces -- with no universities and not near a major city. Since 1950, Columbus has grown twice as fast as the average of the others, in both population and labor force, and has a far lower unemployment rate. Of course, it is hard to say how much of this prosperity simply parallels that of Cummins, although the relatively appealing ambiance—architectural and otherwise—has attracted some other employers.





"It is expensive to be mediocre in this world. Quality has always been cost effective. The tragic mistake in history that's always been made by the well-to-do is that they have feathered their own nests. Today we know that society does not survive unless it works for everybody."

-- J. Irwin Miller, 1987

Bus Tour to Hope

The final half day of the conference began with a bus tour of notable projects spanning several decades in the satellite town of Hope, about ten miles from downtown Columbus and within the Bartholomew County range of the Cummins Foundation architecture program.

Hope Branch Bank, Ben Weese of Harry Weese & Associates, 1958

A minimalist composition of square modules, each with a low hipped roof.

Hope Elementary School, Taft Architects, 1989

A small-scaled example of Postmodern design, with abstracted Classical motifs applied to a thoroughly pragmatic structure.

Hope Library, Deborah Berke, 1998

A no-nonsense masonry-walled box-like structure with ample glazed areas and distinctive sun-shading canopies.







Final Gathering and Statements on Excellence

Mill Race Center, William Rawn, 2011

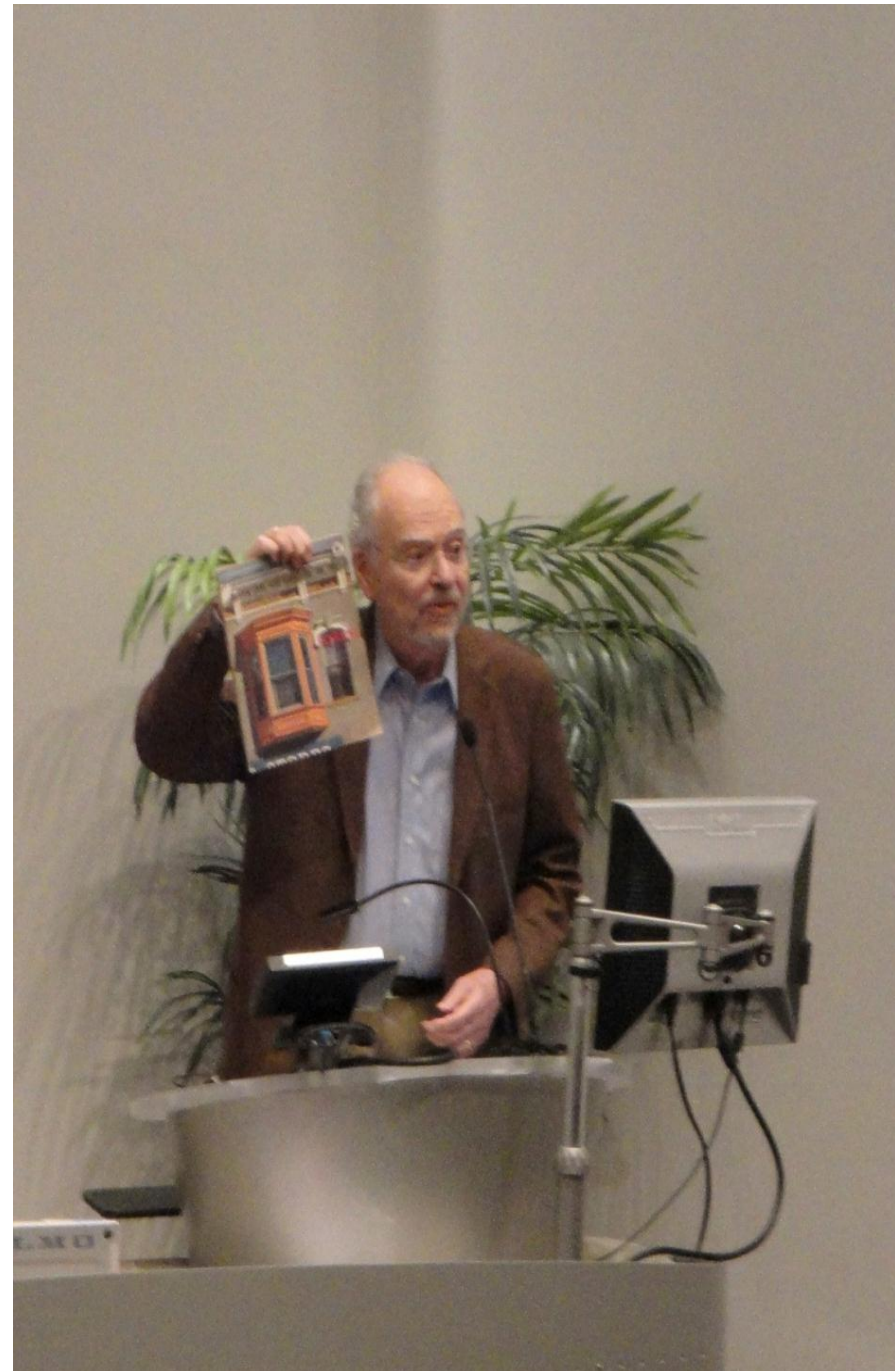
This new community amenity, located in the recently redesigned Mill Race Park (see Optional Sites below) was the setting for the conference's concluding Sunday brunch with statements on design excellence reflecting the Columbus experience. The director of the center spoke briefly about the program and design of the 4,200-square-foot facility, pointing out that it was the result of 20 years of planning and a six-year capital campaign, that it was open to everyone 50 or more years old. He concluded that, based in part on sound local preparation, the Rawn firm had produced an exemplary building.



How Do You Define Architectural Design Excellence?

For this program on design excellence, the speakers were: Ed Feiner, FAIA, principal of Perkins & Will, former Director of Design at the U.S. General Services Administration; Carlos Jimenez, AIA, of Houston, architect of the Cummins Child Development Center (visited on a tour, above); Daniel McCoubrey, AIA, of Venturi Scott Brown, Philadelphia; Charles Dagit, FAIA, of Philadelphia; and Jane Weinzapfel, FAIA, of Boston, whose firm, Leers Weinzapfel, designed additions to two Columbus public schools (seen on a tour, above). Moderator John Morris Dixon, FAIA, encouraged speakers to include “what they had seen in Columbus that influenced their thoughts on design excellence.”

Feiner recalled his initial surprise that the landmarks of Columbus were “a collection of artifacts” most of them widely scattered. He would define excellent architecture as expressing the “values and materiality” of its time. He cited two works in the town as “the most inspirational” to him: the bold Victorian County Courthouse, which was repeatedly noted in the conference material, but not visited on the itinerary, and The Republic Building, its mid-century Modern transparency representing the “freedom” and “openness” of the press and the community (both on Washington Street tour, above).



Jimenez considers himself a Columbus veteran, having made 24 visits since 1994 (in connection with his architectural commissions in Columbus and other work for Cummins). A landmark that impressed him on his first visit was the large, domed, and visually lively county jail designed by Don Hisaka—a building not mentioned at all in the conference material, perhaps because its exuberant Postmodernist design seems contrary to its purpose (Optional Sites, below). He recalled Will Miller’s telling him that criminals would commit crimes in this county rather than surrounding ones so they’d be jailed here. Other works that impressed him were the post office (Optional Sites, below) and the neighboring Cummins corporate offices (Corporate Amenities, above), both by Kevin Roche, which “coexist in excellence.” And finally, he saw an “extraordinary juncture” in the cluster that included the Saarinens’ First Christian Church, Pei’s library, the Irwin House, the Henry Moore sculpture, and the well-defined public space they established (Downtown Cluster tour, above).

McCoubrey noted that he was visiting Columbus for the first time. The town demonstrates for him how excellence depends on clients—and in this case the distinctive role of the Cummins Foundation as well. It also prompts the counter-question “What impedes excellence.” Columbus has a history of commissioning architects—Gunnar Birkerts, for instance—early in their careers. He cited the nearby town of Hope as providing a strong sense of place—of being in Indiana—and singled out Deborah Berke’s “gentle library” there. Among the buildings in Columbus he most admired were the J. Irwin Miller House, for its integration of building and landscape, and the Cummins corporate offices, especially for the way an old industrial building was embedded in the complex (all on tours, above).

Dagit linked excellence to “places we remember,” such as Paestum, Machu Picchu, the Parthenon, the Pantheon, Chartres, and the Salk Institute. The most memorable places are characterized by “majestas and mysterium,” qualities cited by Eliade in his book *The Sacred and the Profane*. He found that Weese’s church (Northern Suburbs tour, above) came “close” to exemplifying these qualities, and he admired all of the churches visited. For him, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer’s health building (Outer Columbus tour, above) offered welcome elements of surprise and shock—even though it “bordered on the edge of chaos.” Ultimately, said Dagit, “You can’t measure design excellence; it just is.”

Weinzapfel recalled that Eliel Saarinen’s First Christian Church (Downtown Cluster tour) had been an inspiration to her for many things. She brought up the realities affecting such a landmark: it is now 70 years old, and its congregation has been dwindling as population moved outward. The hope is that the downtown population can be encouraged to grow, and the congregation with it. The church may also consider, as many others do, sharing its space with other groups such as a Korean congregation. She also singled out Mill Race Park, where our meeting place was situated (Optional Sites, below); here substandard structures on a flood plain were removed and acreage redesigned to support outdoor recreation. She was pleased to see the walkway (Optional Sites, below) from Washington Street to the town’s Visitors Center and said that more such secondary paths were needed. Returning to her own firm’s work at the Northside and Schmitt Schools (Northern Suburbs tour, above), it was “wonderful” for her to observe kids experiencing these buildings.

Dixon seconded her stress on the need to bolster the downtown population, along with everyday services such as groceries and pharmacies, if its landmark buildings and spaces are to be maintained—and woven into a stronger whole.

After-hours events

Dinner with speakers

On the first evening, all participants were assigned to “Dinner with Speakers” tables reserved at three downtown restaurants. The device proved an excellent way for people who have just arrived at a conference to get acquainted with the place and with each other.

Parlor Chats

Among the scheduled features of this conference were “parlor chats” with speakers, held on two afternoons from 5:00 to 6:00 at the conference hotel lobby bar.



Gunnar Birkerts, FAIA, architect of the school and church visited earlier that day, was the leader and subject of the first parlor chat. He recalled that the 1967 Lincoln School in Columbus helped established his reputation. He chronicled his entry into the profession: having fled his native Latvia in the aftermath of World War II, Birkerts studied architecture in Germany. It was there that he first saw reproductions of drawings by Eero Saarinen—in Prismacolor, vs the severe black and white his school dictated. He came to America in the hope of working for Saarinen and after a few years at other firms achieved that goal. His works, like Saarinen's, are not bound by any philosophy or theory. ("I believe in principles, not in theory.") One consistent principle is to seek "the particular, not the general." As architects he admires, he cited Alvar Aalto and Jorn Utzon, though he never met either. He found "Rudolph and Kahn kind of interesting, but never to the point of being a disciple."

In his own practice, he took only commissions he could devote his full time to—two or three a year. And "I didn't want big jobs. I wanted good ones." He said he inherited Saarinen's work ethic and his insistence on specifying every feature "down to the napkins." But he didn't emulate Saarinen's willingness to try various concepts if the first one presented problems. In his own work, he has been inclined to stick with an initial concept, adjusting it as necessary—always working with the client. "I don't try one idea today, another tomorrow."



Asked which projects should represent his legacy, Birkerts said “Every building is close to me. I like them all!” He spoke with particular pride of the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis (1967-1973, now diminished by unsympathetic additions), its office floors supported by a unique suspension system worked out with engineer Les Robertson. A current project he spoke of is the national library in his native Latvia, now under construction after decades of planning. He found that Latvia had long been “out of touch with the world,” that the building industry and codes—based on outdated Russian practice—had to be revised. Components for many systems had to be imported. His bold design (also engineered with Robertson) generated its own odd problem: how to counter the threat of an avalanche when snow covers its vast one-slope roof.

When asked what he did for fun outside architecture, Birkerts gave the fairly typical architect’s response: “My fun is architecture,” adding that he stays fit—at 86 years of age—with workouts and saunas at a sports club.

Ben and Cynthia Weese, both **FAIA**, held the second parlor chat, talking informally, after speaking earlier that day at the First Baptist Church (Harry Weese's Columbus Work, above) about the elder Weese's Columbus work.

They reminded the group that Harry Weese (1915-1998) made contributions beyond the design of buildings. He and his wife, for instance, were the first in the U.S. to import and distribute furniture designed by Alvar Aalto. In this connection, Ben recalled escorting the visiting Aalto around Chicago. Aalto took little interest in much of the city's prized work, declining even to enter Mies's Crown Hall at IIT, saying "I know what the interior looks like." But he was very enthusiastic about the Glessner House by H.H. Richardson (who had been an inspiration for much late-19th-century Finnish work). Harry later bought the then-threatened Glessner House as one of his pioneering preservation efforts. He also initiated the restoration Adler & Sullivan's Auditorium, contributing his office's work pro bono. And he took the lead in setting up mechanisms to assure the survival of the Glessner, the Auditorium, and other landmarks.

Harry was among the American Modernists who challenged the prevailing insistence on industrialized construction. Like Aalto before him and Kahn after, he made emphatic use of brick bearing walls (notably in Columbus's North Middle School and First Baptist Church, seen earlier that day, Northern Suburbs tour), praising brick as an economical material "that can be laid by hand." The Weeses spoke as well about his advocacy of Maya Lin's competition design for the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, championing it as a member of the design competition jury and contributing a model and other presentation materials for the design's convincing public unveiling -- a critical step toward her design's survival in the face of intense opposition.



Holding Court events, where conferees and speakers could mingle after dinner at a downtown restaurant were scheduled for two evenings. Whatever thoughts were exchanged at those meeting, they have not been recorded.



Appendix: Optional Sites, Visited by Some

Cummins Midrange Engine Plant, Walesboro, IN, Kevin Roche, 1973

Conferees arriving early on April 12 had the opportunity to visit this plant, located amidst farmlands a few miles from downtown Columbus. The extensive structure is sunk one story into the ground, with parking on its roof -- thus minimizing its apparent bulk and its footprint. Many of the plant's high-bay manufacturing areas have views up into trees on the site. Bold wall planes painted vivid red exhibit the signature color for Cummins products and logos. Some of the manufacturing area is surrounded by perimeter offices, the sills of their continuous glazing close to ground level. Deep eaves shade the glass. A large central courtyard, with a maturing landscape by Jack Curtis, offers lunch tables under trees. Conferees were briefed on the building by a member of the plant's staff.



Fire Station No. 6, William Rawn, 1998

Located near a manufacturing area south of Columbus, this building has a crisp, industrial form of exposed steel framing and glass block infill. It was seen by conferees en route to the Cummins plant in Walesboro (listed above).

Second Street Bridge, J. Muller International, 1999

A cable-stayed bridge with 40 cables suspended from a central red-painted tower, the bridge carries eastbound traffic into downtown Columbus on an alignment directly on axis with the County Courthouse tower. As the gateway to the city for those coming from the nearby interstate, the bridge provides a dramatic introduction to a community known for design.



Columbus Visitors Center, anonymous, 1864, addition, Kevin Roche, 1995

Built as a house of Italianate style with red brick walls and stone trim, this centrally located facility was expanded with a complementary wing in the same materials, with similar details. Most conferees found opportunities to visit it. A stairwell "chandelier" by the glass artist Dale Chihuly, in tones of intense yellow, is one feature of the center.

Mill Race Park, Michael Van Valkenburgh; structures, Stanley Saitowitz, 1992

The 1990s development of Mill Race Park turned a large area of flood plain -- previous site of some substandard, flood-prone structures—into a gracious public amenity. The 85-acre property combines natural riverfront and a man-made circular pond, an observation stair tower, an outdoor theater, and stretches of meadow bordered by existing trees and newly planted ones growing toward maturity. While the park was not assigned time in the conference agenda, some conferees took advantage of its adjacency to downtown.

Columbus Post Office, Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo, 1970

A block-long loggia with massive piers faced with red-brown salt-glazed tile and a canopy of Corten steel establishes the public image of this civic building, seen by most conferees in passing.



Walkway Project, William A. Johnson, 1998

A narrow walkway between buildings, leading from Washington Street to a public parking lot and the Columbus Visitors Center, is paved with bricks donated by citizens of the sister city of Miyoshi, Japan. Projecting from the flanking walls is an installation of neon sculpture by Cork Marcheschi that enriches the passage with colorful geometric forms that become more animated after dark. A lucky few conferees explored it.

AT&T Switching Center, Paul Kennon of Caudill Rowlett & Scott, 1978

On a corner site close to downtown, this windowless three-story service structure has dark-tinted glass walls that reflect neighboring buildings. Three-story white metal trellises along the sidewalks supported vines that enveloped most of the building in greenery, but these have been removed to leave the structure looking starker than intended.

Bartholomew County Jail, Don Hisaka, 1990

Filling a city block adjacent to the City Hall, this structure has boldly patterned walls of brick and limestone that suggest livelier uses than incarceration. Its symmetrical composition of volumes is crowned by a kind of dome -- actually a wire mesh cover over a rooftop athletic court. Conspicuously located but lacking any mention in the conference guide (though cited by Carlos Jimenez in his statement on excellence, above) the jail must have mystified some conferees.



Central Middle School, Ralph Johnson, Perkins & Will, 2007

Occupying a two-block-long site adjacent to Lincoln Elementary School, the structure echoes the older building's low profile and brick walls, but with a much larger footprint. Most conferees saw it from the Downtown Cluster Walking Tour, and some visited it.

Clifty Creek Elementary School, Richard Meier, 1982; addition, Stamberg & Aferiat, 1997

Constructed mainly of aggregate block and white-glazed block, with minimalist detail, the school has broad areas of white metal-framed glazing and white louvered sunshades. It was seen from one of the bus tours.

Columbus Regional Hospital, Robert A.M. Stern, 1992

For a 35-acre health care campus outside town, the Stern firm drew up a master plan, including adapting existing buildings, and completed initial construction of new pavilions in a modified traditional, brick-walled mode. The complex was sighted from one of the bus tours.

Creekview Branch Bank, Deborah Berke, 2006

An edge-of-town branch is composed of two sharply detailed minimalist forms: a rectangular brick-walled container of indoor functions, over which rides a rectangular volume with translucent glass walls, turned 90 degrees to form a canopy over the drive-throughs and a light monitor over tellers' area indoors. The building appears to good effect after dark and was seen from buses returning from the dinner and Architecture Program talk at the Otter Creek Country Club.





