VISION + VOICE

Volume 2 | Changing the Course of Federal Architecture

MARGARET **McCURRY**

A. EUGENE **KOHN**

GARTH **ROCKCASTLE**

ROGER **SCHLUNTZ**

AMY **WEINSTEIN**

RAY **HUFF**

LAURIE **HAWKINSON**

KAREN **BAUSMAN**

JOSEPH **VALERIO**

CAROL **ROSS BARNEY**

JAMES **CUTLER**

THOMAS **HACKER**

RALPH E. **JOHNSON**

WILLIAM **BAIN**

VISION+VOICE 2 Changing the Course of Federal Architecture

Volume 2

Volume 3

As the Design Excellence Program gets more comfortable with a diversity of voices, from Thom Mayne to Robert Stern, greater freedom is being given to those voices. To allow these voices to experiment with a range of design sensibilities is not only a great compliment to the program, but to society....The program is growing and better reflecting the diversity and the cross-section of values in our culture.

– Garth Rockcastle, GSA National Peer

Introduction

In 1990, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) reestablished its national design awards program, which had been dormant for more than a decade. The biennial program proved to be a clarion call that something was amiss. GSA's new buildings simply did not measure up. The awards went primarily to historic buildings designed by dead architects. The 1990 and 1992 awards juries, which were composed of private-sector design professionals, overwhelmingly recommended awards for preservation, sending a clear message that there once was a time when the federal government designed and constructed buildings of distinction that were worthy of restoration. Jurors raised a big question mark: Why couldn't federal architecture have the high standards it once did?

GSA got the message. In 1993, it invited the members of the jury and other prominent design professionals, along with representatives from the American Institute of Architects and the National Endowment for the Arts, to what was termed a "procurement" meeting at its headquarters in Washington, DC, to discuss how the process could be improved to produce well-designed buildings that provided quality work environments and brought civic pride and value to their communities. While dozens of recommendations emerged from the meeting, one resonated above all the others: focus on the quality of the lead designer—the person responsible for the design of the building. At the time, the GSA architect/engineer procurement process centered on putting together the whole team of architects, engineers, and consultants, along with meeting requirements for including minority and women-owned businesses. It was a cumbersome, time-consuming, and costly process that relegated creativity and quality to the bottom of the evaluation criteria. Architecture firms seemed to put their third string team on GSA projects, not their most talented designers. "Good enough for government" was—unfortunately—the mindset of both GSA and the design profession.

Following up on the recommendation to emphasize the lead designer, GSA initiated a couple of pilot projects. It asked architects in the private sector to participate in design reviews and architect selection processes for several new federal courthouses. Based on these successful efforts, GSA initiated the Design Excellence Program in 1994. The program streamlined the architect/engineer selection process for major new construction projects, focusing on the lead designer through an evaluation of

his or her portfolio. Fewer requirements and faster GSA response translated into lower costs for both the federal government and the private firms competing for projects. Lower costs, in turn, opened up opportunities for emerging talents and small businesses, making the process more inclusive.

Since its inception a decade ago, the Design Excellence Program has evolved and expanded to produce buildings that best reflect the dignity, diversity, vigor, and stability of the federal government. This two volume publication highlights those changes through the voices of architects, artists, landscape architects, and construction managers who have contributed to the program's development. Based on oral histories recorded from the summer of 2002 to the winter of 2004, their insights build on the first volume of *Vision+Voice*, which documented the recollections of public officials and design professionals on federal design initiatives from the 1960s to the initial years of the Design Excellence Program. This earlier publication highlighted the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," a one-page document written in 1962 by the late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, that laid the groundwork for the Design Excellence Program and its quest for distinguished contemporary architecture representing the best of America and its democratic values.

Volumes 2 and 3 of *Vision+Voice* trace the progress of the Design Excellence Program over the past decade, starting with some of the trail-blazing architects who helped establish its direction. Initially, Design Excellence only applied to new buildings costing $25 million or more. Over time, it has broadened its reach to encompass virtually all new GSA construction projects as well as major repair and alterations to existing structures. As discussed in this publication, urban design and historic preservation have become increasingly significant parts of the Design Excellence Program in recent years as government officials and the public alike realize the potential of federal projects to revitalize neighborhoods and communities.

Several chapters discuss the role of Design Excellence peers who help GSA maintain the highest standards in selecting architects and guiding the design and construction of federal projects. Over the past

decade, these leading private-sector design professionals have grown in number and types of expertise to broaden the scope of the Design Excellence Program. The first National Register of Peer Professionals established by GSA in 1994 comprised 23 people who were all architects and acted as advisors to GSA's Architect/Engineer Evaluation Boards. By 2002, the register was composed of more than 350 experts representing a wide range of disciplines from architecture, preservation, and urban design to engineering and construction management, who were full-fledged voting members of A/E Evaluation Boards.

As reflected in this publication, the Design Excellence Program has continued to embrace a broader range of disciplines, with increased attention paid to interior design, landscape architecture, and civic art. The goal is to better integrate all elements of design in order to create more secure and inviting environments. With that aim in mind, GSA launched the First Impressions Program in 1998 to revamp the lobbies and public spaces of existing federal buildings. In 2000, Art in Architecture, the GSA program for commissioning civic artwork, was joined with the Design Excellence Program to form the Center for Design Excellence and the Arts. The objective is to foster closer collaborations between architect and artist in order to integrate artwork more fully into each building. A conversation between an architect and an artist in this publication illustrates the success of this collaborative strategy.

New voices continue to be added to the Design Excellence Program. Emerging talent, small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned businesses, along with artists, designers, and managers from other disciplines, are steadily enriching the design of federal buildings. But even the best design can be thwarted with poor project management and poor construction. That reality prompted GSA to create the Construction Excellence Program in 1999. The voices of several construction excellence peers reveal the variety of methods used by GSA during recent years to improve the building process and to prevent cost overruns. Working in tandem, the Design Excellence Program and Construction Excellence Program have helped GSA achieve a lasting legacy of quality federal buildings and a strong framework for future projects.

The GSA awards program in 1990 was interesting because it was almost impossible to talk about high design standards with the crop of stuff that was there. None of them were worthy of holding up as models.

– Hugh Hardy, Chair, 1990 GSA Design Awards Jury

Chapter 1

Blazing the Trail

Before officially establishing the Design Excellence Program in 1994, GSA began exploring ways to elevate the design of federal architecture. This chapter focuses on some of those pioneering efforts through the voices of the architects who helped blaze the trail to design excellence. Several reflect on their involvement in the GSA Design Awards, which were reestablished in 1990 to honor excellence in federal design, engineering, and civic art. As they point out, the entries to this awards program drew attention to the scarcity of quality in new buildings constructed by the GSA and the need for improvement. Federal architecture, as one architect notes, simply didn t measure up to the designs being done in the private sector. Finding few projects of merit, jurors suggested various ways of changing the agency s method of selecting architects and improving the design of new federal projects.

That feedback led GSA to reexamine and revamp the architect / engineer selection process. Several voices in this chapter explain the shifting emphasis from large firms with a proven track record in a single building type to individuals with strong design portfolios that demonstrate creative talents. That change, they note, laid the foundation for the Design Excellence Program and its positive effect on public architecture. They also discuss the benefits and drawbacks of alternatives to the traditional architect / engineer selection process, including design competitions and charrettes that have been used by GSA.

As trail blazers for the Design Excellence Program, the architects in this chapter relate their experiences in helping GSA to define and refine the very notion of quality public architecture. They weigh in on striking a balance between regional and national identity, security and openness, cutting-edge and traditional design—issues that continue to be debated as the trail to design excellence ventures in new directions.

VISION+VOICE

MARGARET **McCURRY**

A. EUGENE **KOHN**

GARTH **ROCKCASTLE**

ROGER **SCHLUNTZ**

MARGARET **McCURRY**

At my very first meeting with GSA, there was a discussion about something that was eventually named the Design Excellence Program. We talked about how the strongest design architects in the country could be engaged in government work and what it might take to accomplish that.



The meeting took place [1993] during a recession when a lot of the larger architectural firms were looking for government projects because corporate work had dried up. At that point, we were trying to see if there was some way to have the criteria change from project management competence to high design competence, and how you could marry those two. It was a very exciting, hopeful time for those of us who were involved.

During the jury for the 1992 GSA Design Awards, there wasn't a significant piece of architecture that we actually could award at that point. Good, solid work, but nothing really creative or imaginative. We all stressed that there had to be a mechanism that would premiate the design architect. We wondered if GSA had to engage only large firms or was there a way that smaller, high profile design architects could be engaged in the process? And, how could you team groups together?

I thought that GSA should actually interview and select the production team rather than having, say, five design architects selected and then have each team up with a production firm in another city. If you're a design architect, you have to negotiate with firms that you don't really know that well and try to find out very quickly who they are and then sell yourself to that firm.

I found that process a very difficult one, and I thought that GSA should begin to explore quality production teams so the designer wouldn't have to go out and find their own

production firm. The team could be customized according to GSA's understanding of production firms, which has to be quite knowledgeable. I've known stories of teams that were put together, and it was a disaster for one reason or the other. Some had to be separated, while others managed to get to the end of the project somehow, but it wasn't a pleasant experience for anyone involved.

I've enjoyed being a part of the peer review process because I've really begun to appreciate what a federal agency goes through in the process of trying to create really good architecture around the country. Being exposed to the judicial process, I've learned how courthouse design has changed dramatically for so many reasons. Security is one of the biggest factors and so is the pure size of the legal cases.

One of the first federal courthouse projects that I was involved in was the one in Omaha, Nebraska. That was just when GSA was getting its feet wet [in the Design Excellence Program] and I remember a very strong pool of applicants in the final process. It was interesting to go to Omaha and see that there were a lot of missing teeth in the fabric of the city and to try to think about how a new courthouse might help fill in some of these gaps and revitalize the downtown.

It was insightful listening to the different architects present their work, including Philip Johnson, who was playing up the fact that the courthouse could be his last building. Philip had incorporated wonderful, twisted bronze columns and they were very classical in their intent. You could see the judge just going, "yeah, this is my guy," and he lobbied to try to have him selected when everyone from GSA knew that bronze columns were not in the budget.

The winner was James Ingo Freed of Pei Cobb Freed, who was severely handicapped with Parkinson's disease. In spite of his disability, he gave such an impassioned plea, almost a history lesson in architecture, to the judges and GSA. Everyone was blown away by his spirit, and they knew that he would be a strong leader of the design team. It was such a moving experience to listen to another architect talk with passion about what he does.

There is starting to be some recycling of firms that have already done successful courthouses. Of course, judges, being a rather conservative lot, tend to gravitate toward someone who can show them something that is three-dimensional, which they can actually go to and look at. So it's time to re-evaluate ways to bring new talent into the arena. Many more firms are out there that are really good and haven't come into the fold yet.

Competitions, especially the type of two-phased competition that's done in Europe, are a way of getting smaller, high profile design firms to consider applying for federal projects. But architects can be their own worst enemies. They will go to great lengths to win a competition. They will spend every dollar and then some, even when they're not paid. You almost have to protect them from themselves because the bigger firms that have more money and reserves will clearly do a slicker project. They might have more access to certain techniques of presentation than smaller firms have. That could sway you one way or the other. The down side is that someone will create an image that can't hold up to the design because of all the complexities that go into the building. So there's some danger there.

The evolution of a design over time is a much better approach than trying to create some quick image that won't withstand all of the program data that has to go into it. Projects should be awarded based on past work and the potential for new good work.

One way to encourage smaller, younger and older firms to get involved in the Design Excellence Program might be to set up a series of seminars in the different parts of the country led by GSA. Peer reviewers could demystify the process of submitting a portfolio and give a clearer idea of

what GSA is looking for. A lot of firms don't submit because they are concerned with not being able to show a body of work. They aren't sure what that body of work might be.

It would be interesting to have GSA publish a definitive guide to courthouse-making or border stations, the things that you learn once you are involved in these building types. They would provide guidelines so that architects, before they even enter a competition, could really begin to understand what it means to design these buildings. They would also have a realistic chance of their projects being built.

What one should look for in an architect is a very strong design talent, as well as an ability to adapt, to change, to be creative in all kinds of circumstances. Architects should be good listeners to people and program requirements. They shouldn't be so engaged with their own design greatness that they can't solve problems.

Roman L. Hruska U.S. Courthouse, Omaha, NE

Finding ways in the interview process to have the personal talents of an architect come forth might help in selecting a younger architect that might be untrained but has the right kind of personality to develop into a good architect for GSA.

It's certainly a challenge to figure out how to balance security, openness, and good design. I remember being on a panel to decide how security could be increased for the Chicago Federal Center designed by Mies van der Rohe. It has a very open plaza. Obviously, bollards had to be constructed, and we looked at different ways to do that while respecting Mies's "less is more" design. It's been done very successfully with a simple rhythm of granite cubes that repeats the rhythm of the windows. It's almost as though the cubes were there from the beginning.

Another successful example is the federal courthouse in Minneapolis. Martha Schwartz, a landscape architect from

Boston, created earth mounds that were related to the geology of Minnesota. If one is open and flexible toward different ways of meeting these security requirements, you'll find design talent that will come up with solutions for them.

We always think security must be incorporated into architecture in some way, but perhaps it could also move into art as well. I joke that there could be a wonderful piece of Big Brother-like sculpture that sat out on a plaza with robot mechanisms inside that could actually watch and keep track of people.

Some years ago when Harry Cobb of Pei Cobb Freed was doing the Hammond, Indiana, courthouse, we had a peer review session to talk about how art might be integrated into the building. Harry had a tough budget that he had to work with and in the process of describing the building to us, he mentioned walkways that connected two parts of the building. He had been looking at several artists, including Dale Chihuly, who is a glass artist. The other peer reviewer and I came to the same conclusion at the same moment. There could be a glass bridge handled as a piece of sculpture instead of glass chandeliers hanging in the lobby. It didn't happen, but it led to a very interesting discussion of how an artist could be brought in as part of the architectural team, rather than just creating a separate piece of art for a space.

GSA has built some of the highest quality architecture that is being produced in this country. It's a very diverse collection too. An architect as modern and unique as Richard Meier can be accepted in one community and then Bob Stern ends up in another doing good historical buildings. It shows the willingness to embrace different varieties of architecture in different communities. The Design Excellence Program has certainly been very helpful in convincing the public about the value of really good design in their lives. It's beginning to have an effect on the people who visit federal buildings and experience the quality of a space.

Historically, some of the best buildings in any community have been those that have been done for the government. So I wish there were a way that the Design Excellence Program could be applied to government agencies at the state and local level. I see so many terrible public buildings going up.

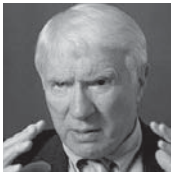
There might be a point in time when public tours can be made through a number of the new federal buildings so that more and more people at the state and local level begin to see the quality of the work that has been done. It isn't any more costly to have a good design than it is to have a mediocre design. You just have to set up criteria for good architecture and figure out a way to have it occur.

MARGARET McCURRY IS A PRINCIPAL OF THE CHICAGO-BASED FIRM TIGERMAN-McCURRY ARCHITECTS, A FIRM THAT STRIVES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. AFTER SERVING AS A JUROR FOR THE 1992 DESIGN AWARDS, McCURRY WAS APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 1994 AT THE PROGRAM'S INCEPTION. McCURRY HAS A SPECIAL INTEREST IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION AND HAS WORKED WITH THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN, YALE, AND THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO. SHE IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

A. EUGENE **KOHN**

Our firm's involvement with GSA started in the late 1980s when we were working on the Foley Square courthouse. It was to be the largest courthouse in America at the time, and it was one of several projects for GSA that became a design/build project. There was a competition of developer teams, and our team was selected but that didn't mean it was over. In fact, that was the beginning of our work because the judges and GSA wanted certain parts of the projects altered, so before the building was finally awarded, it went through many changes.

I was very involved in this project, both in terms of design and management, and really working to bring it together for the client as well as for our own firm. I remember coming back from Japan on a Friday evening. Prior to my trip I had pinched a nerve and was in horrendous pain the entire trip, wearing one of those neck braces. When I arrived at Kennedy Airport and got in the car to head home, I got an urgent call to go down to GSA to make some changes in the scheme. So I took the cab straight down to GSA's headquarters in New York for a three-hour meeting. I was sketching, drawing, working with all of GSA's people and Ed Feiner in particular. We came up with a scheme that everybody seemed pretty excited about. It met high standards for design and still worked functionally for the judges. That scheme lasted from then on. It was refined, improved, but never changed after that. It was a momentous moment in the project's history.


As a firm, we were not pursuing government work until Foley Square. The reason was that the quality of federal design at that time was not really very significant. It seemed to be done by architects who either weren't capable, or, if they were capable, didn't really care. Maybe they didn't assign the kind of staff to it that would bring out the best. It was quite possible that the federal government and GSA in particular weren't as concerned about the quality of architecture.

So along with a lot of architects, we stayed away from pursuing GSA work. Foley Square introduced us to the potential of what could be terrific work and a chance to accomplish something important for the civic buildings in our society.

Still, things hadn't changed dramatically. When I served as chairman of the 1992 GSA Design Awards, the entries, whether they were courthouses or office buildings, were just mediocre. They really didn't measure up to the quality of architecture that was being produced for private clients and receiving awards from the AIA, for example. We could not find a project worthy of the awards, so we did not give any awards to new buildings. As it turned out, the previous GSA Design Awards jury led by Hugh Hardy had

not given any awards as well. That combination made GSA respond by saying, we had better do something, our buildings aren't winning any awards, and we need to have better architecture.

What it did was to reinforce what Ed Feiner and others at GSA at that time were fighting for, to improve the quality of federal architecture around this country. And it coincided with what would be a major building program for federal buildings, particularly federal courthouses. So, the development of the Design Excellence Program couldn't have come at a better time than it did. I participated in those early meetings, both through the jury and sessions with various regional heads of GSA to help put that program together. I feel pleased that I was a small part in those early days of helping the program, along with other fine architects.

One of the most important steps in the Design Excellence Program was to eliminate the idea of a team submitting. Years ago, you had to spend a fortune trying to put together a whole team that might look better than any other team. Frankly, that was not a good idea because the best architect and best engineer could be on two different teams. Now, you try to pick the right designer for the right project in the right city, and then you form a team.

And, obviously, submitting the portfolio of the lead designer and the firm is great because it gives GSA a chance to consider the right kind of firm or designer for a specific place and building type. And then after that, the interview process, if you are fortunate enough to make it, allows you to present your attitude, your team, and your enthusiasm in person.

Now when a government commission is announced, our eyes light up. Everybody quickly runs to see what he or she can do to help get the job. We obviously look at the size and location, and we try to gauge whether we are the right firm for it. We are excited about the potential and are still

responding to the Request for Proposals for federal work across the country, large and small. We're currently designing the new federal courthouse in Buffalo, which is very exciting, and we're delighted to be doing it.

We tend not to get too involved when a GSA project is too small. It is probably better for a smaller firm to take on that project, and it's a good opportunity for them to get into the game and do it. Parts of larger projects also could be given to younger, smaller firms, giving them a chance to really have a crack at being creative and getting known. GSA is trying very hard to gear certain sized projects to the younger firms. It's a goal worth trying. It's important.

I'm not a big fan of competitions or charrettes, to be honest. There are sites where a competition makes great sense, but many projects are made better through the interview process because, even in the private sector, competitions are a bit misleading. There is a danger in competitions that you can be seduced by a very handsome rendering, model, or presentation and later discover that it's way too expensive, and then when you alter it, it loses the energy, the excitement, the creativity, and the uniqueness that made it win. So, I'm always cautious about competitions in both the private and public sectors.

In charrettes, the ability to draw and to convey an idea in a very short period of time is critical. There's something about a beautifully spontaneous sketch that I think can sway a jury. So, I'm not sure that in that charrette process you really come away with the best firm. Again, if all the firms are terrific, as they usually are, you can't go wrong. You're not going to make a horrible mistake one way or the other. But, in fairness, I'm not sure a charrette is the best way to choose the firm.

The peer review process is a great program. Most peers are wonderful architects, people who are sincere about the profession, and they come to really be helpful. Not that every idea that they're going to throw out is the idea you should adopt because, frankly, the architects often have thought of those ideas and have had a chance to rule them out. But a fresh look at the project is helpful. And then you can discuss it, debate it, and try it out.

I recently participated in a review of Hugh Hardy's federal courthouse in Jackson, Mississippi. The comments we made have been very, very helpful, and I think Hugh has benefited. I know he took them in great spirit. The nice thing about the peer review process is that it's not just the architect who is learning from the comments, but as a peer, I'm learning, too. I learn from Hugh's courthouse design, from comments from other architects, and then all of sudden, there's a great idea that I could use on some other building.

So it's about learning. And it's nice to see architects come together and help each other to get better quality for the buildings. I would suggest that the peer review program is a good idea for other institutions.

One of the biggest challenges in the future is going to be how to solve security and openness in our society. People in office buildings used to be encouraged to come into the lobbies, atriums, and courtyards and have coffee or sit at their computers. All of that has changed. People don't want that. They are afraid of what could happen. In both the public and private sectors, this is a major design issue and threatens the quality of life of our cities, depending on how we solve it.

We want transparency in our buildings. We want openness in our society. Big barricades are marring the city of Washington and many of our federal buildings in New York. They are not encouragements to bring people together. There are a lot of things one can do in terms of technology to help define what security is and make buildings safer without all these barriers.

Now because of 9/11, all of the requirements for security and safety are using up a very major chunk of the building budget. We need to sit down together and discuss how to solve all of these issues of security and blast resistance, how to do quality architecture and meet these budgets and requirements. It is going to be a really tough assignment. The way to lick it is to be intelligent about doing the best within this new framework but not give up quality, not give up on design excellence.

I think we're going to face a very difficult time over the next five or ten years. The economy will be burdened by enormous debt that the federal government has. There is going to be a great concern about whether the public and the government will stick by the standards of quality of design and not lose those. I hope we can be strong enough to stand up and say when we build a building, let's do it right. We all have to work together to find a way to achieve it and convince Congress that, despite rebuilding Iraq, there's got to be money set aside to keep up the quality of our built environment.

Great architecture can be so important to one's pride of place. Look at how Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum changed Bilbao, Spain, into a well-known city. That structure made people so aware of the quality of design and what it could do for a place.

In France, the government has achieved great architecture. Our government should do that. It's part of setting the quality of life we're all trying to achieve and the kind of government and kind of freedom we want. Great design really does enhance one's life, allows one to work better, be more productive, and enjoy one's home. Architecture is important to that. We ought to be proud of it.

Art is also very important to me and has been all my life. In the private sector there have been times I have been able to convince clients to introduce the work of the artist as part of the architecture, that is, not wait until the building is done and ask, what are we going to put in the lobby, what are we going to put in the plaza? Like architecture, art makes a great contribution to civic life. So putting the two together is quite wonderful.

I do think the architect should be part of the selection of art. A peer could also come in and give his or her evaluation. Maybe a famous museum director or gallery owner helps to select the art, without obviously picking their own artists. Imagine the opportunity for young artists to do a work of art that's part of a civic project. They ought to be given that chance.

A. EUGENE KOHN DESIGNED THE DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN U.S. COURTHOUSE AT FOLEY SQUARE IN NEW YORK CITY. A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS AND THE FIRST FELLOW OF THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN, KOHN IS A FOUNDING PRINCIPAL OF KOHN PEDERSEN FOX ASSOCIATES PC, NEW YORK, NY, THE FIRM THAT IS CURRENTLY DESIGNING THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK. KOHN CHAIRED THE 1992 DESIGN AWARDS JURY. HE WAS APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 2002 AND HAS SERVED ON NUMEROUS PEER REVIEWS AND SECURITY CHARRETTES.

GARTH **ROCKCASTLE**

In 1994, soon after GSA had set the policies and procedures for the peer review process, I was invited to blaze the trail as one of the first peers on the architect selection team for the federal courthouse in Kansas City. I have since served as a peer for 14 or 15 different projects, including architect/engineer selections and design reviews.

During the architect selection process, I like to size up the situation, figuring out the biases of the judges, in the case of a courthouse, the administrative personnel, and other peer reviewers. The most effective peer reviewers attempt to find the voices that are missing around the table. So, for example, I might become an advocate for younger, less known talents and speak on behalf of them to keep a balance between biases around the table. A good peer in the selection process is a mediator and someone who understands what seems to be absent.



I participated as a peer in the architect selection for the Salt Lake City federal courthouse, which was decided through a limited competition. It was quite an effort to make sure that at least one or two of the architects on the short list were younger, more risky candidates. New York architect Tom Phifer was one that we argued for getting in the group of finalists. He had just started his office and had previously worked on courthouse projects with Richard Meier but hadn't done a courthouse on his own. It was a perfect opportunity to bring in such a younger, less known candidate into a field of established firms. Our decision proved to be effective. We advised the judges and the administrative people, and Tom won by such an overwhelming margin of their votes that it wasn't really even close.

One of the peer's roles is to voice concerns that others in the room might be too intimidated to bring up. I remember being a peer reviewer for the federal courthouse in Phoenix. There was a lot of reluctance to question the architect Richard Meier about his aesthetic sensibilities. I raised a question about the relevance of the earthenware, ceramic traditions of the Southwest and whether Meier's metal-paneled, glass-skinned building was appropriate in that region. Meier was startled that someone had raised that question. Even though he didn't follow the advice or the provocation, he did a great job defending his views. So

raising the issue of materials brought a clear focus on the architect's thinking to the conversation.

Another role of the peer is to question what you may consider not to be the best effort of a firm. For the new federal courthouse in Denver, for example, we helped nudge the St. Louis firm of Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum to a better solution by highlighting half dozen elements that were really weak. We also compelled HOK to involve the local architect and gave them a much richer cross section of ideas from which to chose and discuss. The project took a turn for the better before it entered design development. In other cases, peers help the judges realize that the building design is good by advocating what you consider to be great architectural thinking. I remember the federal judges in Las Vegas thinking that a courthouse is a courthouse is a courthouse. Architect Mehrdad Yazdani was really struggling to get the judges to think more openly and creatively, and we really helped the effort. So the work of the peers really varies. The reviews are quite different, depending on who's in the room and what the underlying issues are. You have to read the landscape pretty quickly and act on it. The circumstantial and idiosyncratic nature of the reviews is what I like most about the program.

For the most part, I have enjoyed the peer review of our design for the Edward Zorinsky Federal Building in Omaha. The experience, however, raised the one reservation I have had about the peer process and, that is, the peers change all the time. One or two of the peers were in a couple of the review sessions, but there was always someone new. Not knowing the history, the new peers felt free to bring in another perspective. That meant dealing with yet another perspective and bias about our design. This project is quite a tricky one. It is the renovation of an early 1960s federal office building that was designed in the late International style, not particularly thoughtfully, and was in pretty rough shape. It is a building that was locally despised. I always made a point of asking the taxicab driver on my way to the building from the airport what he or she thought of it. In my 15 visits to Omaha, my poll was running about zero to 15. There was not a single person that ever described the building as having redeeming value. We sometimes wondered why we weren't tearing it down.

I had the luxury of presenting the project to a gathering of about 120 peers at Yale University and at a conference held by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Because it's a late modern building and one that GSA and historians are struggling with in terms of preservation, opinions ranged all over the place among widely respected colleagues. Some felt the old exterior skin of the building should be stripped from the structure to create a new federal presence on the concrete frame. In other words, we should think fresh about the building. At the other end of the spectrum was the idea that this brand of modernism, even the character of this building, was already handsome, and we should just acclimate ourselves to the sensibilities of the 1960s and the values that under-girded its conception. This argument was to preserve the building, clean it up, make it work better, but not to refashion it according to current sensibilities because that would only date the building in another way. The view was that there is something deeper in the aesthetic of the existing building to look for.

The peers that were charged with reviewing the project lined up on the two sides of those arguments. Some of them said, "Have at it." Others said, "You have to respect some aspects of this building." For example, during the Yale conference, Bob Stern came up to me and said, "Garth, you are going to regret that wavy roof up there. You know, it looks snappy now and it's a nice transformation of the building, but it just isn't going to weather well." That was a great moment for me. It was non-competitive

and genuine. It was only a few months later I thought, "Bob is right. The roof is not going to weather well." And we went in another direction.

Our first pass at the design was more faithful to the original building. The second pass, a little less faithful. During the second pass, we discovered the golden mean proportioning system that underlies the building. We folded that system into a new aesthetic that used the same proportioning system but adjusted the variables. I was pleased with the second iteration, as I was with the first. But it was tricky because the peers were struggling with the same issues as we were. For projects in which there's room for interpretation and value judgments, it is important that there is consistency in the presence and the voice of the peers because it can be very disruptive when there isn't.

Our work on 1960s federal office buildings has really generated a lot of controversy and discussion. That is sharpening the analytical perspectives that are being brought into the conversation about what to do with federal buildings from the post World War II era.

It is not unlike 30 or 40 years ago when people felt comfortable about razing historic Neo-classical buildings. The same thing is true now with buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. My first recommendation in dealing with this architecture is don't rush to conclusions. Seeing this work for what it is and reflecting on what it means to the body of federal buildings is difficult. That being said, it's also important to get on with eliminating and radically transforming those buildings that really don't have architectural merit. It's a double-edged sword. Because if you spend too much time anxiously awaiting a determination about whether or not a building is significant, you can lose the value of either preserving or removing it from the inventory. There ought to be extra consideration and contrary voices brought to bear on this preservation issue

because it will help GSA and the profession better find its way through this thicket. It is not accidental that, parallel to examining modern federal buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, there is renewed interest in this generation of buildings. Architects are beginning to see values in some of these buildings that they are re-introducing in contemporary work. A lot of the most avant-garde architects practicing today are adopting design sensibilities that are remarkably parallel to those of this earlier era.

As the Design Excellence Program gets more comfortable with a diversity of voices, from Thom Mayne to Robert Stern, greater freedom is being given to those voices. To allow these voices to experiment with a range of design sensibilities is not only a great compliment to the program, but to society. And I have seen greater and greater freedom. The program is growing and better reflecting the diversity and the cross-section of values in our culture.

In some circumstances, the federal government should be in the vanguard of design and, in others, it shouldn't try to, because not all commissions lend themselves to being treated as leading-edge projects. So, judgment has to be exercised. But the Design Excellence Program shouldn't shy away from risk. Yet, it shouldn't also be obsessed by it. There are moments where I have wondered if the program is trying too hard to be a media sensation. The program may need to be constantly refined and noodled with, but it's clearly evidenced its value and doesn't need to be justified any more.

Edward Zorinsky Federal Building, Omaha, NE

I would say 20 percent of Design Excellence projects should lean into the winds of real adventure and consider risky architects and risky concepts. Some of those will not succeed as well as others, but they will still be a positive reflection of the program in the long run.

The size of commissions is one way to judge whether or not to take a risk on new talent. The border station at Champlain, New York, is a good example. It is a modest size but highly visible project. In greeting visitors from Canada, the border station serves as the introduction to this country. Its aesthetic traditions as a building type have not been established or are certainly open for reconsideration. So the project is really suited for a smaller firm with a strong design reputation. To give the commission to a big firm that perhaps would assign a junior designer to the project and not care that much about it would have been a huge mistake, even if the firm had 20 border stations to its name. An office building offers another opportunity for bringing new architects to GSA. Many architects who have never done public buildings but who know office culture and workspace issues are good possibilities. GSA has a greater reluctance to consider architects for courthouse commissions who haven't been involved with courthouses or don't align themselves with experienced courthouse consultants. But that's a risk worth taking, especially on commissions in places where the judges are comfortable and aesthetic traditions are more dynamic. Miami is such an example where GSA was right to take a risk on a federal courthouse design.

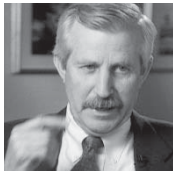
One of my interests in the Design Excellence Program has been its relationship to voices other than architectural voices and ways of opening up the program to experimentation. Through the Art in Architecture Program, it can bring experimentation with public space and its iconography to the federal building inventory. I had an absolutely first-rate experience with the artist chosen for the Zorinsky Building. GSA had pre-screened the qualified artists and brought them to the table. The peers and I went through the inventory and rated the artists. I rated the artists that I knew best and admired most, but the artists on my list didn't make the final cut so I was in new territory. Artist Joseph Kosuth, a highly conceptual artist, was eventually chosen. I started looking into Kosuth's work and after reading more about it, decided it could be ideal for a project like the Zorinsky Building where part of the challenge was to explain the aspirations of the original building. Kosuth embraced the idea of exposing the contrast between the time of the building's conception and the present. He introduced text, such as a quote by Martin Luther King, Jr., that would have been uttered during the 1960s when the building was being cast in concrete. The parts of the building that we were doing anew got quotes from contemporary figures. The art is a dynamic engagement with the architecture and one of discovery over time. It doesn't all hit you over the head at once. Kosuth's interpretation of the architecture through cultural and political filters was hugely profound to me. It is a great example of an artist approaching the artistic questions of architecture and the cultural questions of program with incredibly fresh insight, insight that architects would never have been able to come up with. His art sharpened the design of the building. It helped me sort out the fact that I didn't need to do a seamless renewal of the old with the new. Instead of being singular, the new portions could be schizophrenic and more honest to our predicament of redoing the building. So I'm a big fan of the Art in Architecture Program and think that it needs to be given freedom in order for the program to truly lead the country in taking the disciplines of art and architecture on some really great adventures.

An ever-present challenge for the design Excellence Program is the constant search for a federal presence. What does that look like? What does it feel like in architecture, landscape architecture, and in design in general? Those are such important questions to continue to ask.

The ways in which they have been answered so far are great and they deserve to continue to be answered in the same way. But there are also new ways to answer those questions. Should the federal presence relate to the sustainability movement and responsible building performance? Should it tap the intellectual traditions of our civilization? It must do all these things and more. Our culture is becoming more and more diverse, not only in terms of our ethnic and racial differences, but also in our interests. As our population grows larger, this diversity becomes more and more important for each of us. We want to establish and feel that our identities within this culture are worthy. But how do we project those identities on the facilities that are collectively owned? GSA could take almost any lofty aspiration that the federal government has for the common good and ask what architecture and design could do to serve it. Inviting the great design minds of our time to come up with the answers would be a bold, positive step toward pushing the Design Excellence Program forward.

APPOINTED THE DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING, AND PRESERVATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND IN 2004, **GARTH ROCKCASTLE** HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN THE DESIGN EXCELLENCE PROGRAM. IN ADDITION TO SERVING ON NUMEROUS PEER REVIEWS AND SELECTION PANELS AS A GSA PEER SINCE 1994, ROCKCASTLE'S FIRM, MEYER SCHERER AND ROCKCASTLE LTD, RENOVATED THE EDWARD ZORINSKY FEDERAL BUILDING IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA. HE IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

ROGER **SCHLUNTZ**


Peers play an important role in raising the level of understanding about the qualities and the differences of the architects being considered for Design Excellence projects. We bring a special insight from outside the room as to the strengths of the architects, particularly less known, emerging architects. We ask questions to help the dialogue and the enlightenment that progresses with the selection. The most important part of a peer review occurs at the front end, even before a line is drawn on paper, in making sure everyone has an understanding of the project's primary principles. The peer plays a critical role in determining those first ideas by raising questions of "what if," "could we do this," and "how do we balance the need for security against the need for openness?" Peers also play a very critical role in representing the viewpoints of the public, including the lowest paid worker in the work force that might be using a federal facility, and to act as an advocate for the public interest.

Typically, federal building projects are very complicated and involve a lot of competing interests. The peer reviewer, of course, is the person who does his or her job and leaves the scene. So we are met with a bit of suspicion about our purpose and our intent.

Sometimes the primary desire to build a building on time and on budget overtakes the idea of architecture as enriching people's lives. So the peer must make everyone aware that the building must transcend the common and the ordinary to be something special and dignified.

Everybody in society has certain preconceived values often based on past experiences. One of the challenges in creating quality architecture is to be able to nudge beyond past precedents. The real conflict in federal courthouse design, for example, often comes down to traditional values. There

is a natural inclination of many judges to replicate the U.S. Supreme Court building. That inclination of going with what is easy and understandable contradicts the ways that architecture can be effective with today's modern technology. One way to change that is to educate key decision-makers and client groups. This educational process should include site visits to contemporary federal building projects and discussion about the merits and the difficulties of certain building types.

Competitions increase the probability for design excellence. Their biggest limitation is that they can be very expensive for architects to enter. In any design competition, you have only one winner and several architects who did not win but invested a great deal of emotion, time, talent, and, obviously, money in that activity. GSA's short, four-week competitions, which look at a project diagrammatically, are beneficial in a number of ways because they limit how much the architect can put into the competition.

Typically, when an architect enters a competition, it is like going to war. You don't hold back anything. So, having a competition that is structured, allows only four boards, permits no audiovisual apparatus, and is juried blind is a very good selection process in many ways. It becomes very educational in immediately showing at least three, often four, different approaches to the same solution. So it becomes a part of a very important dialogue as well as the selection process.

In some instances, the competition scheme can proceed to design development and speed up the process.

Other countries use competitions far more frequently than the U.S. does with some pretty good results. I think any building that has a public dimension is a possible candidate for a design competition. In the case of a federal courthouse, for which there are guidebooks to building standards and processes, the dialogue between architect

and client is not so critical at a certain point. The client has time before the competition to amplify the program. The GSA competitions in which I have been involved include a meeting with all of the competitors and the key decision-makers in the same room to amplify the program. The competitors can ask questions and everyone gets the same information. So that dialogue is the creative spark.

Over the many years that I have been involved in GSA's Design Excellence Program, there have been a number of refinements that have been fairly effective. The emergence of an application to encourage architects who don't typically engage in federal building projects to become engaged is very important and that process is continuing to become far more inclusive. Strategies are also in place to match experienced firms that are good at delivering buildings with firms that are known for a high degree of design excellence. The process of engaging the end user in collaboration with the designer has been enhanced so that people come to the table as a team rather than as quarreling factions. That's also been very important. One critical factor in achieving Design Excellence is the building site. The selection of the architect, the fit of the program to the budget, and the process of evolving the design are critical, too, but the site is where it all begins. I have suggested that the architect could be involved in the site selection as a part of the competitive process because without the right site, the project is not going to be destined for greatness.

Since the 1970s, there has been a gradual understanding that making buildings is different from making architecture. A part of architecture has an emotional quality and involves the human spirit, while another part is functional.

All of that has to come together in a crucible that's the designer's responsibility. Often that crucible becomes very difficult for an architect to achieve because of limitations of a budget or a site.

Different architects have different approaches toward art. There was a time when artists were an integral part of

the team. For example, the Nebraska State Capitol was a collaboration of an architect, an artist, and a philosopher. The building design represented the past aspirations of mankind as well as the future. The most successful architecture is a collaboration between an architect and an artist whose works are integral with the architecture, not added on later.

Throughout the history of this country, there have been differences in terms of the public attitudes toward public buildings. In some ways, they reflect the attitudes of the public toward government itself. Government has been seen as a means of facilitating our common interests and our aspirations as a society, as reflected in the first public buildings in Washington, DC. It has also been seen as a necessary evil, something that should be minimized, out of sight, and dealt with as the lowest common denominator. Over time, those attitudes have been translated in different ways. Paralleling those changing attitudes have been changes in architecture. For example, we have seen the revival of classicism in various forms, from the Renaissance to New Urbanism. Since the early part of the last century, we have seen the influences of modernism, of trying to relate architecture to the technologies of our time. Unfortunately, I think there were a lot of modern buildings that became mere containers for modern technologies. Because of the naiveté of these buildings, modernism has been cast as something that is inhuman. But the government built some very elegant and wonderful buildings in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Some of those are certainly worth saving, preserving, and modifying for the future.

The federal government should be in the vanguard of design. Of course, in the profession today there are some very loud voices that say we should be looking backward rather than forward. But the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" are unequivocal in stating that design should express contemporary attitudes and traditions, using the finest architects. I believe that the nature of this country is not to look backward but to look forward, to be innovative, and to apply the best minds and the best ideas in order to achieve the ideals of this nation as it still emerges. The values that our country's top leaders have toward the man-made, as well as the natural environment, are critical in this because all our policies are going to ultimately flow from those leaders. Under good leadership, good things can happen. Even before Daniel Patrick Moynihan became a steward of federal architecture, Lady Bird Johnson, who doesn't get enough credit, started a good conversation about the public right of banning billboards. In insisting that the federal government aspire to the best of civilization rather than to the lowest common denominator in its buildings, Moynihan set a very important standard for GSA to follow. A great deal of the Design Excellence Program's success stems from his leadership. And there have been other leaders within the federal government whose insistence on design quality has impacted hundreds of people both within the bureaucracies as well as in the public realm. Education is critical in making everyone understand that you can make a difference and, once those differences are made, society will be better for it. That education has to occur at all levels, with leaders, the architecture profession, government bureaucrats, and, certainly, the public.

ROGER SCHLUNTZ IS THE DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO AND A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS. AS A GSA PEER SINCE 1994, HE HAS SERVED ON NUMEROUS PEER REVIEWS AND WAS THE DESIGN COMPETITION PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR FOR THE NEW U.S. COURTHOUSES IN LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO; EL PASO, TEXAS; AND MOBILE, ALABAMA.

Security and open public spaces are vinegar and oil. We are not quite sure how well they can mix because security and openness are in many ways diametrically opposed. All too often in design, the cost of either one becomes the dominant element. More subjective issues dealing with human emotions and public benefits are less easy to quantify. How one advocates those ideals, I think, is a critical job. We ought to look forward to our ideals and aspirations and not to our fears. It is only through dialogue, often debate, that we can achieve the balance.

Certainly there are means of design that can ameliorate the presumed dichotomy between security and openness. But these are going to be very difficult issues to resolve for a very long time in our future, particularly in federal buildings when there are threats. I would hasten to say that society is at risk not only in federal buildings but also in public libraries, schools, and streets. We only need to look at other countries in the world to understand that security can't be imposed at certain locales. We can't have a completely secure society. So I worry about an overreaction in terms of security. What we do at one place may be effective in that instance, but security is a more global problem. We are not, obviously, going to solve the problem of an insecure world at the building level.

The public is becoming more interested in issues involving the environment and the scarcity of resources. Many parts of this country have recently dealt with drought, the use and reuse of water. There's also a resurgent interest in the public realm. People are asking, for example, what makes a good street, what makes a livable community? How do individual buildings contribute to a greater collective wellness? We should expect the federal government to be a leader in continuing the dialogue that presently exists. It shouldn't tell the public what's good, but help the public understand what their choices are and the consequences of each of those choices. As the country's largest facilitator of new construction, GSA has a responsibility to lead that effort. Another area in which GSA has a major role to play is in the workplace, the ordinary office environment where a person comes to work and sits at a desk to perform tasks in a productive way. So GSA has a responsibility to the workplace, from looking at the urban fabric to the light on the desk, and everything in between. It's important to realize that there are many other agencies within the federal government as well as state and local governments. The real critical task of GSA is to set the precedent for design excellence for other levels of decision-making so the program truly does become a force in the mainstream of American civilization.

Being part of GSA's Design Excellence Program has certainly has been enlightening. I think it affects everything I do because I've learned so much from my experiences. I hope that I have been able to raise the level of consciousness of some of the key decision-makers and the end users of these buildings. I hope that I've helped architects achieve what they want to do by defending their ambitions and creative spirit, or helping them to understand other ways of looking at the problem. I believe my greatest success has been creating the understanding that's requisite to creating good design.

Our federal buildings should be surprising. They should be something that make us look twice...lift our spirits...sing...give us something back...speak to us.

– Laurie Hawkinson, GSA National Peer

Chapter 2

Setting a New Direction

After conducting several successful pilot programs, GSA established the Design Excellence Program in 1994 to commission the highest quality architecture expressive of its time. This goal has been achieved over the past decade through various methods of selecting a lead designer. They include the evaluation of design portfolios, interviews of short-listed architect/engineer teams, design competitions, and shorter, more intensive competitions called charrettes.

Helping to steer GSAs selection process are distinguished private-sector architects and other professionals in related disciplines ranging from landscape architecture and urban design to art and engineering. These "peers" are invited to evaluate design portfolios and competition entries. Once a lead designer has been selected, peers participate in reviews of design and art concepts during the development of the buildings.

Every two years, GSAs Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service appoints 130-150 peers, based on recommendations from the Chief Architect. This group makes up the National Register of Peer Professionals. The voices in this chapter represent the diverse range of peers who help GSA ensure that its decision-making is focused on design excellence. They include women and minority architects, young practitioners, academics, and avant-garde designers who are opening eyes to new architectural possibilities within urban and suburban settings. As outsiders, they explain, peers are able to raise important concerns about context, regionalism, and other design issues that insiders may be reluctant or unable to address.

In this chapter, the peers relate their participation in architect/engineer selection panels and design reviews for GSA projects across the country. They discuss their role in competitions and charrettes, noting pros and cons for participating architects. Several outline how they advocate for quality design while building consensus with federal judges and other clients on selecting architects for courthouses and other facilities. As a result of peer participation, one architect notes, the reputation and the influence of GSAs Design Excellence Program is spreading within the design professions and the private sector.

VISION+VOICE

AMY **WEINSTEIN**

RAY **HUFF**

LAURIE **HAWKINSON**

KAREN **BAUSMAN**

JOSEPH **VALERIO**

AMY **WEINSTEIN**



I have learned so much from my involvement with GSA projects. It's been a joy to have that opportunity and I've enjoyed the engagement with designers and clients. Among the most enjoyable was a design competition for the new federal courthouse in Nashville, Tennessee. It was GSA's first charrette competition. Six well-known architects had one day to come up with a schematic concept for the Nashville courthouse. They didn't know where the site was until the morning of the charrette, so there was no way they could prepare in advance. Each team of architects worked in a separate room off a hotel conference area. It was a lot like being back in architecture school. The architects were intensely competitive and secretive about what was going on in their rooms. Occasionally, they'd come out for a break, and it reminded me of studio time. The winner of that competition was Michael Graves, who is now under contract to design the courthouse.

The one-day charrette format does favor architects who already have their own mature style for projects, the ones that have a personal vision. You can always tell which buildings are theirs. With only one day to assemble the program for a federal courthouse on a site never seen before, it's a lot easier to end up with a finished product at the end of the day if you already have your personal statement. For architects who don't do that, for whom each project looks totally different, it's pretty hard to start fresh at 7 a.m. and by 6 p.m. come up with a mastered solution for a complex program like a courthouse. So the charrette does favor certain types of architects. As

a result, GSA may be losing creative talent that requires a slightly slower design process.

As a practicing architect, a non-GSA voice, I play a very pragmatic role in the architect selection process. Having put together similar submissions, I find myself pointing out strategies on the part of the applicant, often pulling attention away from the fact that they don't have a certain kind of experience and that type of thing. I have been able to show a strong correlation between a GSA's project and an architect's experience, which may not immediately be seen as applicable to the project being considered. I've been able to point out if an architect can do this project and they've done that project and that one, then they can do a big chunk of the project under consideration.

For larger projects such as courthouses and office buildings, it's important to have five projects under your belt. I don't know if that's a magic number, but because these projects are large and complex, you really don't want an architect to be at the bottom of the learning curve for these building types. The border stations are small enough that the requirement of five projects could be reduced. But even then, it's important for the federal government to commission architecture from architects who aren't learning through mistakes on a GSA project.

On several projects for federal agencies, I worked as the design architect and teamed up with a larger firm. For some of the projects, it was very successful but for others, it wasn't. It all depends on the individuals at the firm and the way the contract is structured with the client. It's important for everyone to recognize that the architects who can focus and turn out the level of quality and creativity of architectural design are not your typical architects. For a designer to be able to work with a large firm, it's important that the large firm have architects on staff that really understand how to do quality architecture. It's very difficult to produce a beautifully crafted courthouse in a firm where the staff specializes in laboratory design. A large firm can mask that reality and not be truthful in the process of revealing exactly who would be assigned to work on the courthouse.

I've always found the peer reviews to be very collegial in terms of the critique and the discussion. I've never felt that the design architect was defensive and anything other than welcoming comments and ideas, because that's a really important part of the design process, which is an iterative process. It's a process of starting with an initial concept, drawing it up, stepping back, looking at it, revising it, stepping back, and revising it again. Eventually, it evolves into the final form.What is so valuable about the Design Excellence Program is that it forces additional steps in that iterative process because outsiders are brought in. The architect and GSA stop for a moment while the peers introduce fresh ideas and share their insights about what has already been designed. That allows the team to then go back and look at the project again. It usually improves at every single step.

GSA's Design Excellence Program has made extraordinary efforts to make the A/E selection process more transparent to architects who haven't already done federal projects before and involve new talent. In the old days, everyone just assumed that working with GSA would be a nightmare. Now they're very, very excited about submitting for federal projects. But the process is still pretty opaque. I've had conversations with people who are in the process of applying and submitting portfolios, and it isn't clear to them what exactly GSA is looking for. Some outreach efforts might be helpful. They might include a video or a Web site from GSA answering frequently asked questions about the process. Outreach to the architecture schools is also important. If we want to promote new young talent, students have to understand how the government works to get them interested in GSA as a future client.

The promotion of design as a valuable part of federal architecture needs to come from the top. The Design Excellence Program needs to remain in place for us to avoid the pitfalls of the 1960s and 1970s. Right now, our ability to express the values of our democracy is being severely challenged by security issues. The brutal battle between designers and security experts is negatively affecting what architecture says to the general public. It could get worse if the Design Excellence Program doesn't continue.

Our buildings can be both open and secure if we approach security from the standpoint of design. A lot of people involved with security at GSA and other government agencies tend to think that if the bollard was ten inches further away from the building, less damage from a truck bomb would happen. But that kind of thinking really gets in the way because it results in barriers everywhere when they are not necessarily called for in many situations. Once again, we've done all this perimeter security work at federal buildings and we're about to do a whole lot more, but 9/11 was caused by airplanes that came from the sky. You can't design for everything. Having more barriers is not necessarily going to thwart an attack; it just means that it'll come from a different direction.

Recently, I organized a one-day security design charrette for Little Rock, Arkansas, where a federal courthouse, a new annex to the courthouse, and a federal office building occupy three continuous blocks. Timothy McVeigh had actually considered this site as his target, as opposed to the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, because with one truck bomb, he could take out both a federal courthouse and a federal office building. Apparently, he decided on Oklahoma City instead because of the access to highways. So there was a real heightened sense of the need for security in Little Rock. GSA had hired a local firm to design perimeter security, truck bomb barriers, that type of thing. What was so striking was that this firm apparently had not had access to the wealth of design work on security that has been done over the last five years. What was being proposed in Little Rock was totally inappropriate because it

was an image of a federal building as a castle. The message was "stay out" and it was the wrong way to go. It seems that new ways of thinking about security design haven't filtered down yet, and it's an area that could be worked on.

GSA has done an excellent job in commissioning really exciting public architecture and then getting it out there for the public to see through their awards programs. As a culture, we need to add architecture and design to the lower school curriculum. If Americans grow up thinking that design is important, they will naturally respond to it and create a market for it. However, GSA should not be commissioning the avant-garde. Our federal government is not avant-garde. It's a complex mix of conservative and liberal ideas, but it's no longer avant-garde. It probably was in 1776. Federal architecture should reflect a certain monumental presence. That suffers if it's done in an up-to-the-moment latest thing, which often becomes passé within two or three years. The federal government shouldn't be projecting an image that is passé. In order to avoid that, its architecture should be one or two steps behind the avant-garde.

One of my specialties is designing new buildings in historic contexts. Basically, I ascribe to what Philadelphia architect and planner Denise Scott Brown calls second-glance architecture. At first glance, it fits into the historic context. At second glance, though, it's clearly built in 2003, not 1903. The challenge is to fit the form and the colors to the context, and clearly design a building that is new and reflects the way we build today.

Art should be integrated into architecture and can often times be part of the architecture. But my understanding is that GSA's Art in Architecture Program seems to always move toward plop art, where the art is set in front of a wall designed to be a backdrop. There isn't that close integration of art and architecture that was evident in the buildings constructed in the early part of the 20th century. One way to change that is to have the architect propose an artist and how they would work together. The artist would be part of the architect's team, much like the landscape architect.

GSA also needs to consider the interaction between the federal government and the city in which they are involved. Being from Washington, DC, active in local planning efforts, and a peer reviewer of GSA Design Excellence projects in the city, I find there is a Chinese wall between federal and city planners when it comes to fitting federal buildings into the city without impeding its natural life. That includes retail at the ground level, mixed-use projects, and open and free access for pedestrians. Older federal buildings used to fit beautifully into the city. They didn't necessarily have ground-floor retail, but the buildings weren't that large and there were stores right near them. New federal buildings are much larger with security demanding that the public be kept out, so they've become a real problem for sustaining city life. That's a real missed opportunity. Post offices used to be little gems of public architecture, and they are now being converted into museums, as in Nashville and elsewhere. Many of the ones built in the last 30 years should be torn down and replaced; they could use the help of the Design Excellence Program. It's a great program that has totally transformed public architecture.

AMY WEINSTEIN, PRINCIPAL OF WEINSTEIN ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS IN WASHINGTON, DC, WAS APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 1998. SINCE THAT TIME, SHE HAS SERVED AS A COMPETITION ADVISOR FOR DESIGN CHARRETTES FOR U.S. COURTHOUSES IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE; AND AUSTIN, TEXAS. WEINSTEIN ALSO PARTICIPATED ON PEER REVIEWS FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA; DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION HEADQUARTERS IN WASHINGTON, DC; AND THE METZENBAUM U.S. COURTHOUSE IN CLEVELAND, OHIO. WEINSTEIN IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

RAY **HUFF**

GSA's Design Excellence Program is valuable in that it brings design professionals in various disciplines together to foster design excellence. Serving as a peer on selection boards and design charrettes has introduced me to a side of architecture I don't typically see. Being part of that process has helped me to understand the workings and the ambitions of the Design Excellence Program and has made me an ambassador for this wonderful program.

The selection of the portfolios is really an interesting process because that's where you don't have architects involved. You are only looking at representations of their work. It's a very difficult process because you are really trying to mine all of this information and figure out who might be best equipped to bring a voice to this project, whatever it may be. Recently, I was invited to participate in the selection of an architect for an historic preservation indefinite quantity contract for GSA's Pacific Rim Region. Curiously, although I practice in Charleston, South Carolina, I am not a preservationist. What was interesting for me, primarily, was the opportunity to look at how an architect presents himself or herself to a selection group. What are the things that really command attention and distinguish some work from others? The important role that I played in that process was to ensure that small, disadvantaged firms had an advocate, so that they could compete against larger, more established practices. I was quite passionate and insistent that we closely look at these firms. When someone brings a certain commitment to those ideals, that voice resonates through the process. I think I was very successful in that regard because we ultimately selected a woman-owned firm for a very important part of this historic preservation delivery project. Bringing those voices to the selection is one of the things that the peer process does. It says there are other ways in which we can engage the architectural community and have a broader representation.



My experience in charrettes includes examining the security provisions for a particularly vulnerable federal facility in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. The facility is immediately adjacent to a very busy thoroughfare, which is adjacent to the harbor, so its vulnerabilities are quite significant. It's also at the bottom of a very hilly area, so it has a lot of issues related to that. After talking to the folks who represented the various interests there and getting familiar with the place, we began to see opportunities to not only provide security but significant architectural enhancements to that facility. One of the U.S. Marshals had a myopic way of looking at security, and it was interesting to watch the transformation in his thinking. He really came around to understand that our design could accomplish his security needs in a way that's compatible with the architecture.

One of my contributions to that process was an understanding that the security enhancement was not simply a landscaping proposition but an architectural proposition. The voice of an architect brings something that a landscape architect's doesn't and conversely. The team's synergy made for an excellent set of proposals for that facility where we can significantly increase the protection of that facility without providing the sort of obvious security elements.

Right now, we don't know where we are heading in terms of our personal freedoms and protections in light of terrorist threats to America, which are very real. We have to negotiate that. It's a very malleable condition at this point. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan said so brilliantly that we can't subordinate architectural ideals to the threats, that somehow we've got to rise above them. At the same time, we have to protect our citizens and our environment.

GSA's Design Excellence Program has done a remarkable job in the short time that it's been in existence. We are beginning to see some of the spillage from GSA's initiatives into the private sector, which is very good. I'd like to see more spillage into other agencies of the federal government.

I think it's a matter of time. When you change a culture to understand that good design is significant to how we think of ourselves, that's not something you're going to do overnight. So GSA's Design Excellence Program is laying the foundation for very important work.

If you look back, say, seven, eight, or nine years ago, a lot of the prominent firms interested in good design didn't look to the federal government as a potential client because it was not receptive to the issues of good design. That has changed dramatically. Part of it is due to the downturn in the economy. Architects turn to the government when there's not a lot of private sector work. What we are seeing now is that GSA projects are very desirable commissions.

They are attractive for a number of reasons. They are very engaging, very demanding commissions, which most architects enjoy. The fact that the Design Excellence Program is trying to encourage the civic spirit of design is another major draw for a significant number of architects.

Engaging some of the most outstanding practices in America has elevated the awareness of what's possible. That's been a very strong positive for the program. At the same time, this is part of the program's weakness because there's a tendency to select elite, prestigious firms. The Design Excellence Program could be a victim of its own success. What GSA needs to do is to target opportunities for emerging firms and younger practices so it acts as an incubator for these practices. It's a kind of double-edge sword because the elite firms set the vanguard. We have to look at balancing established and emerging firms engaged to do public sector work. There's an awareness of this at GSA, and it is now trying to cultivate the younger architectural practices as well as the more established firms.

To encourage emerging voices, GSA should get rid of the requirement for a firm to show five built projects in its portfolio. It's the old Catch-22. You can't get the work, so you won't have the experience having done the work. GSA could change that by encouraging alliances among practices that don't have the portfolio of specialized experience and those practices that do. Perhaps one of the requirements could be some collaborative experience in working with another firm. The whole notion about project experience is often over-played. A good designer can address complex projects without firsthand experience, particularly if he or she is surrounded by a very strong team well versed in the building type. That would then remove a real hindrance to engaging smaller, less experienced firms to join GSA's arena of architects.

Should public art be an applied condition or an integral condition to the architecture? I don't think there's any one answer. In some instances, it's appropriate that art is an applied piece that is simply brought in and plunked down. In other instances, it ought to be integral. The percent-for-arts program in America has a history of mixed results. It's such an important ideal for our society, but we need to think of how it could work better.

Sustainable architecture, clearly, is foremost on everybody's agenda. GSA needs to take a lead role in defining the "green" building as good architecture that embraces environmental principles. That's something that we have not seen enough of, quite frankly. Sustainability should be a natural component of design excellence much like the way GSA integrates security measures into architecture.

Civic architecture embraces a changing process because the temperament and the climate of society change. The representation of cultural values changes and evolves in many ways over time. So architecture must respond to that in many ways. In the early period of federal architecture, you saw a particular style that embraced certain ideals. Later in the 1960s and 70s, that began to change dramatically and federal architecture became about expediency, building less expensively. But history is a continuum and you can't simply eliminate all of the architecture of one period in our history. You have to find examples that represent that period in a very positive way. They are part of a continuum that we have to respect. If nothing else, they provide an opportunity for teaching us lessons about how we engage our environment.

Often we think of preservation as a static condition, but it is anything but that. Preserving a building might mean, in fact, some change to that building that enhances its life and value. We can look to Rome and other Italian

cities, for example, on how we might do that. They have been very successful in protecting the integrity of the existing architecture while bringing in more current uses.

We're now seeing a movement back to incorporating quality within the architecture of the federal buildings. Quality of construction, quality of ideas, quality of siting, these issues were embraced by early federal buildings and lost for a time. We're now re-establishing those values. Critically important to federal architecture today is the issue of style because we live in a society driven by the media, driven by images and a kind of superficiality. So there has to be some way in which we embrace principles of quality and the human experience, and express those in a way that really reflects the ideals of our culture and not just the image of our culture.

There are some excellent models for how that's done. For example, the Mayor's Institute on City Design is a tremendous program in introducing decision-makers from municipalities to the principles of good design. It also looks at the fact that good cities are good economic opportunities. Finding ways to create a quality built environment are couched in economic terms that decision-makers can understand. There are so many successful examples of cities that have used good design to their advantage. Pittsburgh, Charleston, and a host of cities have been reborn and are using that as a way to encourage other municipalities to look at themselves. We need to foster an understanding of what works and what doesn't work in terms of our cities. A federal presence in our community is important to that. It represents, in many instances, the most significant civic and architectural presence in the community. That has to continue to ensure that communities demonstrate how important civic buildings can shape cities in positive ways.

There have to be significant examples of federal architecture that the public can understand and engage with in some fashion so they can appreciate the value of good design. It's part of the American system, too, to build major urban developments according to market driven economics, which tends to foster mediocrity. So changing how we develop our communities and raising the American public's expectations have to start at a more structural level. But we shouldn't underestimate the American public. We fool ourselves if we think that we can do that.

PRINCIPAL OF HUFF+GOODEN AND A PROFESSOR AT CLEMSON ARCHITECTURE CENTER IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, **RAY HUFF** IS BOTH AN ARCHITECT AND AN EDUCATOR. HUFF PARTICIPATED IN THE ART IN ARCHITECTURE SELECTION PANEL FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA; AND A SECURITY CHARRETTE FOR THE RON DELUGO FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S. COURTHOUSE IN ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS. HE WAS APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 2002.

LAURIE **HAWKINSON**

I became acquainted with the Design Excellence Program when I was a peer on the architect/engineer selection board for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, for which Thom Mayne won the commission. I felt I had an important role to play as the only outside architect in the selection process because I could help communicate to the clients how the architect and architecture may help make their project speak.

It's important for the architect who is presenting to have an architect who can help the selection board understand what's being presented. Sometimes architects like to show their work in the most extreme ways. The kinds of photos we like do not always communicate our work in the best way. The NOAA building is partially underground, which made the project very interesting but difficult to read. I was able to help to explain the goals that were trying to be achieved so we could have a more fruitful discussion.



There was an important question that came up at one point when I asked how many satellite dishes were going to be included. The answer was that there could be 18 or 20 dishes. All of a sudden, that becomes a very big thing to deal with as an architect. It became important to help the client see those architects who could interface with this program in a very unique way.

One of the ways to help the NOAA selection board understand Thom's work was to explain how he could seamlessly embrace all of the satellite equipment and technology that was part of that really intricate program. When the discussion about the dishes came up, we realized that he was the person who could really do this project.

Thom had done a large project in Europe and the amazing Diamond Ranch School in Pomona, California. It was a really interesting point in his career to get this job, which was much larger than his previous projects. There was confidence that Thom and the associate architect he joined with could do the job. And even though Thom's firm is in California and the project is in Maryland, he had done a project in Austria, so we didn't see it to be any kind of a leap at all.

During the peer review of Bob Stern's U.S. courthouse in Richmond, Virginia, we walked around the site. That was really important because you have to understand the context in order to speak at all about a project and be helpful. It was interesting how we all came to the same conclusion, even though we were architects from different parts of the country. We realized where the project should be and which direction it should take at that very early stage. It was also interesting because my architecture is very different

than Bob's, although I have tremendous respect for his work and the intelligence that he brought to that program. So, I also learned a lot.

Every project is different and every project always goes through some kind of crisis. My partner Henry Smith-Miller always says, they love you and then they hate you and then hopefully they love you again at the end. That's one way of saying there's always a moment in a project that's too expensive and then you have to roll back. Peer reviewers can help decide about what should be cut. They bring fresh eyes to the process. The key is to bring reviewers into the process when they can be the most useful.

The peer review process is really important. I would have never applied for a project if I had not been a peer because when I see that government Request for Proposal, my eyes glaze over. It says A/E firm and makes me feel that I am not the person for this contract. But as soon as I sat on the A/E selection for NOAA, the whole process opened up to me. I realized that GSA is looking for a lead designer. So it was a huge eye-opener, and I've tried to be an emissary and communicate this to peers of mine and encourage them to apply for GSA projects. The process is not a big mystery nor cumbersome at all.

We look forward to the moment when our own projects are put through the peer review process. Fortunately, GSA selected our firm for border stations located in Champlain and Massena, New York. The border station is a really interesting program because it must welcome people, while securing the border. So it has these paradoxical qualities. How do you elevate that into something more than just the mundane? We have to look for creative ways in which to work with security issues.

Our firm recently went through a very interesting thing, the design charrette, where you go into a hotel room and work for 12 hours and then emerge with a scheme. I didn't go to the charrette. My partner Henry Smith-Miller went with our engineer and I picked them up afterwards, so I heard all the moaning and groaning about how a charrette makes you feel like you've gone back to school. What was interesting was GSA had decided that you could not use computers. Today, for an architect, this idea is really wild. Our guys found out that there was a copy machine in the hotel, so they kept running down with their sketches and blowing up the sketch so something that was very small ended up having this grainy quality that was about reproduction, but it worked really well. That was their ace in the pocket.

We have done quite a few competitions, and I would favor them over the charrette. The charrette is a very forced situation because it is not really the way architects work. You have to solve lots of problems and present something in such a short amount of time. It's like the architectural licensing exam, which was one of the most tortuous experiences I have ever gone through.

In a competition, you get a lot for your money. Architects put a lot more into competitions than we probably really should, but they give us more time to think about the project and to present something that is more thoughtful than a charrette. But like a charrette, you also have no opportunity to have the dialogue, the back and forth that produces the collaboration that is the project. But a competition does give the client an idea of what kind of direction the project might take and the thinking process of the selected team. The misconception about

a competition is that the client is buying the presented product.

A competition is a great opportunity for younger firms to work on a project, be paid something for it, and, even if they don't win, have a design that they can then show to somebody else. It's really great for firms that are trying to move to the next level of projects.

There's always been this issue in architecture of the chicken and the egg situation, if you haven't done one type of project, you can't get one. This is a horrendous problem. How can you get a courthouse if you've never done a courthouse? It's a huge problem for young firms because the programs for large courthouses are complex and the budgets are quite substantial. Nobody has the confidence that you can tackle this kind of program. There should be projects that can ramp younger firms up into getting some experience under their belt and be able to tackle the next level. Otherwise, it's impossible. The whole point of the Design Excellence Program is to get away from the courthouse architect.

There are different models for what a courthouse could be in different regions of the country. The new one in Las Vegas is a terrific example. It's a great model for younger firms.

The vanguard, or the avant-garde, is an unfortunate word because it's already passé the minute you say it. It's not about projects that look weird. It's about projects that are responsible and that are also forward thinking, enlightening, and enriching.

But it's really about the future, about building for our future, about what we are, we know, and what we don't know. So, and it's about excellence. It's about hiring the absolutely best people.

One of the questions about future buildings is to what extent will the federal government be able to embrace new technologies and fabrication techniques? A lot of them are coming from the aerospace industry, the military, and sports. Boats made of carbon fiber that are used in the America's Cup races, for example. Certainly with any project, even if you are using stone or brick, there's a risk. The materials have to get put together correctly and carefully. So I would hate to point a finger at new materials and say, oh, that's very scary. It's a process of working through the risks with the client.

And, of course, "green" architecture is huge. It's huge, but we have to remember that it's not just one thing. Because often when you say "green," there are certain misconceptions about it only being about materials. But we have to think of it more systemically. Green measures should be considered in planning and urban design because there are ways in which many buildings can share systems of water management, power, what have you. It's a field that has tremendous impact and ramifications for all of us.

At this point in time, "green" buildings are a little more expensive. But we have to look at lifecycle costs. We have to factor that in. So if we can think about lifecycle costs rather than just the cost of opening a building, then there's the payoff.

What's incredible about the world of architecture today is that architecture and art are so intertwining. Artists like James Carpenter, who is working with curtain walls and working with glass, are weaving their work into space. Those are the kinds of artists who are really interesting to work with. It's similar to working with any consultant, like an engineer. When you sit down at a table with these people with incredible expertise, it's a really wonderful moment when you get to talk about ideas together. So we have to think of art as something beyond plaza plops. Art is tremendously enriching to our lives and so is architecture. Together, they make our lives more interesting.

Our federal buildings should be surprising. They should be something that makes us look twice. That doesn't mean they are made out of any particular material or they look a particular way, but that they're dignified, responsible to users, keep the water out and all those kinds of things. But architecture has to do more than that. It has to lift our spirits. It has to sing. It has to give us something back. It has to speak to us.

GSA's Design Excellence Program is very important to young architects, old architects, and, of course, the users. We need to keep moving design forward and keep raising the level of design. It's critical to keep the money flowing to it. Don't turn off that valve.

LAURIE HAWKINSON IS PRINCIPAL OF SMITH-MILLER + HAWKINSON ARCHITECTS IN NEW YORK CITY. THE FIRM IS CURRENTLY DESIGNING U.S. BORDER STATIONS IN MASSENA, NEW YORK; AND LAKE CHAMPLAIN, VERMONT. A GSA PEER SINCE 1998, HAWKINSON WAS ON THE A/E EVALUATION BOARD FOR THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION SATELLITE FACILITY IN SUITLAND, MARYLAND; AND A GSA PEER FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA. HAWKINSON IS A PROFESSOR AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK CITY.

KAREN **BAUSMAN**

As a younger, more avant-garde voice in architecture, I feel that my presence as a peer on selection panels for federal buildings has been instrumental. My key contribution has been to bring the unique voices in architecture to the process. I try to make a distinction between firms that deliver a product and those that deliver a work of architecture. That's what design excellence is all about.

My work as a GSA peer has been a tremendous learning exercise in how design excellence comes into the federal arena. The first project I saw from beginning to the end was the Census Bureau in Suitland, Maryland, which at the time I believe was the largest capital project in the D.C. region. It was my job to bring certain portfolios back when they were taken off the table and give them a second and a third look. For GSA's Design Excellence Program, voices outside the box should be heard.

I do remember fighting very strenuously to get back one portfolio, which I really thought addressed the mission of the Census Bureau. I just fought and fought, hour after hour, to get it back on the table for discussion and, to the credit of the clients, they listened. I gave my impassioned plea, supported by others from GSA. Ultimately, the client looked at me and said, "Karen, no way." This gentleman represented a large constituency, thousands and thousands of Census Bureau employees. So I understood his position at the table as well. At the end of the day, the project went to a very large firm. Maybe that's what the Census Bureau really required because of the large scale of the project. But at least I opened everyone's eyes to the possibilities of those others on the table. They might not have gotten a chance if had I not been there.



After the selection was made, we all walked the site with the clients and gave them our view of how we read the site. It was complicated in that it's a flat site and there was a lot of parking required, so the landscape had to be molded. And of course, the clients had never been involved in that kind of process before. They had to read the land and understand the implications of this structure in that landscape. And it helped them, I believe, as they went further in the project to understand what was at stake, both on the small scale and the larger scale of the landscape. I really saw them change through the process. At the very least, the Design Excellence Program is important in making end users into advocates of architecture.

As a peer reviewer, it's essential to visit the site. The first courthouse I was involved in was down in Mobile, Alabama. It was my first trip down to that part of the country, so I went a day ahead because I felt like I had to understand the context since it was really quite foreign to me being from the Northeast. So I walked Mobile for a day and really tried to understand what was at stake there—the relationship of high-rise buildings to low-rise, infill to open parkland, and the traditional architecture that has a special place in American history.

When I got to the competition, I was able to discern the projects I thought were beautiful—both programmatically and aesthetically—from the ones that actually work with the context. As it played out, that was very important. Like many cities of its size, Mobile is having problems with people and businesses fleeing to the suburbs and is now trying to repack the open, abandoned parcels at the center of the city. And GSA is a leader in trying to bring a population back through federal buildings and re-energizing the urban fabric. So at the end of the day, the infill won.

Competitions open up the dialogue about issues that have to deal with regionalism, urban infrastructure, and other issues that wouldn't be on the table otherwise. On one selection panel, I felt like there was a mismatch between the proposed building and its location in the city. The project could have been much more successful had the architect invested more time in the context. I thought that a competition would have taken care of that earlier so that you wouldn't get so far down the road.

Sensitivity to context was again absent in the process for another courthouse. The building could have been in any number of cities and any number of conditions. Not that the project wasn't successful. It functioned properly and looked beautiful, and the client was happy, which is important because they are going to be using the courthouse every day. But it's important that clients understand the context and what's at stake for them and their city. So there's not that feeling of old urbanism when the federal government used to come in, drop something and say, "that's it, we're here." You like it or don't like it. Cities are waiting for support and community involvement. It's essential to understand the community in which you're locating the structure. Since the Design Excellence Program is about the legacy of federal buildings in these cities, the competition process should be strengthened so that it's not only about just winning the project, and then putting it together, but really investing the time to understand the context. It's a step that should not be missed.

The issue of experience also became important during the peer reviews. For one project, there were some fantastic ideas, some brilliant minds at work, but the contracting officer said, "these projects are not built, so off the table." I thought that was a shame. GSA should support voices that don't have an opportunity otherwise. In Europe, the governments support younger voices and get them on the table and get them in the ground earlier. And they have a legacy of amazing architecture. As part of building on the success of its Design Excellence Program, GSA could do a small re-calibration in defining the lead designer. GSA could be more broad-based about its definition of the lead designer and tap the emerging voices within larger firms.

It's not a risk when you pair a young designer with a large firm with a depth of resources, like SOM [Skidmore, Owings & Merrill], HOK [Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum], KPF [Kohn Pedersen & Fox], and others. When a large firm with a proven track record of achievement receives a commission, then the firm should be required to involve the younger designers at all levels of the project. No design meetings should take place without them and their hand should be visible.

IT IS ONLY RIGHT AND TRUE THAT A GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND OF THE PEOPLE SHOULD SUPPORT EMERGING VOICES AND NOT JUST THE MEGA-FIRMS THAT HAVE ALL THE CONNECTIONS.

Design concept for the Census Bureau Headquarters, Suitland, MD

Another important factor to be considered is how a building performs—from its minutest detail to its overall organization and its relation to the context. To be specific, at the Census Bureau, we wanted to have a wood facade that saved the cost of heating and cooling by using sun baffling. The client said, "Well, wood deteriorates." And we convinced him that for pennies on the dollar you could redo these wood screens every ten years. The cost savings in heating and cooling over that ten years would more than pay for the replacement many times over. Thinking about the performance of the building as its reason to be makes all the sense in the world. It's about a high quality environment for the inhabitants. It's not even about what the building looks like.

The Design Excellence Program is just getting started. The single thing that GSA could do to continue to build on its success is to look at the European model and bring more unique voices to the table. GSA is supporting those unique voices now, but it's a little bit through the back

door. Sometimes a large firm is actually working off the voice of designer who broke the ground with an idea and that idea is filtered back into this mega-firm.

As an academician, I see a stronger relationship between with what's happening within the academy and out in the market place. It used to take 20 years to get the ideas gestating in the academy out into the built world. Now, it's 20 months. It's quite amazing. So I think that universities could take a leadership role. It's a really important step to get the academy into GSA.

Before I served as a peer, I really didn't know much about GSA, and I thought of myself as somebody who's always looking at what's happening, what's important. Since then, I see GSA everywhere. And now it has garnered that wonderful award from the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. That's enormous because people look at that award very seriously as predicting what's important in the future. So anything you can do to build on that awareness and success to me is essential. GSA needs to generate even more awareness of its efforts outside the design professions so that local constituents and their leadership support federal buildings.

In my work for GSA, it has been tremendously exciting to bump up against practitioners with large practices and see how different and how amazingly similar the process of architecture and design is for us all. GSA supports that bumping together so that you can get someone with a small atelier wrestling with someone with a worldwide practice. To bring all of our expertise to bear on a project is the tremendous success of GSA's Design Excellence Program. Any way that you can keep the artistic, entrepreneurial spirit bumping up and energizing architects and projects will do wonders for the continuing success of the Design Excellence Program.

KAREN BAUSMAN FOUNDED KAREN BAUSMAN + ASSOCIATES IN 1995, A NEW YORK CITY-BASED FIRM THAT FOCUSES ON CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN URBAN AND EX-URBAN AREAS. BAUSMAN TEACHES AT THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING, AND PRESERVATION, AND IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME. APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 2000, SHE HAS SERVED ON IN SEVERAL SELECTION PANELS, COMPETITION JURIES, AND PEER REVIEWS, INCLUDING THE ARCHITECT/ENGINEER SELECTION AND CONCEPT REVIEWS FOR THE CENSUS BUREAU HEADQUARTERS IN SUITLAND, MARYLAND.

JOSEPH **VALERIO**

Whether it's applied to the selection of an architect or the design development of a building, the peer review program is really remarkable because it brings an outsider into a process that all too often gets too wound up in the culture of an organization. Any organization, not just GSA, benefits from this approach. The peer is a bridge between the Public Buildings Service staff and the outside architect, who both see the peer as an ally.



So quite often, we act as a marriage counselor to get both sides to work constructively together when there is a communication problem. Sometimes in my own practice, I wish that an independent peer reviewer were at project meetings because it's difficult to communicate with the client at times. An outside individual brings no vested interest to the process. He or she can get the architect and the client to talk and exchange information in a way that adds real value to the success of the project and the quality of the building.

For instance, I brought a different perspective into the discussions during the architect selection process for the federal courthouse in Jackson, Mississippi. The only other person independent of GSA was the chief judge from that district who sat on the selection panel. My main value was to provide a very independent opinion. We had about 70 submissions for the courthouse and had boiled that down to five short-listed firms, all of which made very good presentations. When it came down to a decision, the chief judge favored one firm, which I didn't think was the best qualified. I remember saying everything logically I could say. And during this entire process, the judge was advocating for this other firm. Finally, I said to the judge, "if you believe this firm is the right one, we should choose it

because all five finalists will do a very admirable job." When I said that, the judge looked at me and asked, "Joe, do you really believe in this firm?" And I said, "I made all my points. I firmly believe in this firm." He said, "Fine, that's the one." As an outside peer reviewer, I got involved in the process and achieved a level of understanding with the judge. None of the other GSA people could do that. And interestingly, the judge has gotten along famously with the firm that we selected. The process is going very smoothly. Personally, I feel very satisfied with that outcome. The architect has worked out very well in that project.

It's unusual being put in a situation where you're reviewing other architects' work. It was rather surprising during the selection process that two architects from Chicago were on the short list. I will never forget when Adrian Smith from Skidmore, Owings & Merrill walked into the room and saw me sitting there. It was certainly a surprise to him. As long as you don't bring your own agenda to the selection, then the process works. I kept this in the front of my mind during that process, reminding myself that I wasn't designing the building. What I was really trying to do was help GSA select the right architect for this particular project.

In recent years, GSA has engaged in a selection process that often includes a competition among architects. The competition process can be a remarkable one that has value for GSA. The reason for that is when you're selected to be the architect for a project, your relationship with the client has just begun. You don't know the client very well. This is the point when architects should be at their most creative, but at the same time, they're trying to gain an understanding of the client, trying to relate to the client, trying to connect to the client. The competition process breaks all those bonds. It sets up a situation where each architect is given the same information and is left alone to come up with a creative concept. And sometimes you can go off in the wrong direction. But for the most part, what winds up happening is a pure, unadulterated, creative response to the program and the site that you don't get through the traditional hiring process. I'm not suggesting that a competition is a cure-all for creating great architecture, but it does create a dynamic that can be extremely valuable for the client and the public at large.

In 2002, I served on GSA Design Awards jury and we looked at a surprising range of projects, from major new federal office buildings and courthouses to the First Impressions Program, which is an effort to tune up the lobby areas of some federal buildings. What was very interesting was the remarkable quality of the work that was being developed for GSA at all those different scales. We saw some truly fascinating work that would clearly stand up to any professional jury. The work of one particular program, however, was questionable. That led to a very intense discussion among the jurors and the representatives from the Public Buildings Service about what needed to happen to improve the quality of design in that particular program. So we not only reviewed the quality of the work but also engaged in a discussion about how to improve future work under specific guidelines. That's never happened in any other jury that I have ever been on. It was remarkable.

As a peer, one of my experiences was reviewing the security improvements to the Federal Center in Chicago, which is a seminal work of architecture and urban design by Mies van der Rohe. During that review, there was a very lively discussion about balancing design and security. The dense urban location of the Federal Center is very different from a suburban building, where security features can be disguised because there's more space. Our effort was to try to make security as transparent as possible so that you would have safety provisions but not create a walled community. Looking at the completed project, I think it is possible to provide secure workplaces for federal employees, yet avoid that sense of a fortress.

GSA's Design Excellence Program is now ten years old. So GSA is at a point where it can look back on a lot of successes. But it also must look forward to the next five to ten years. And I think it should fundamentally do more of the same. What I mean is that the Design Excellence Program has found the key pressure points where the design process can be improved and the quality of federal architecture can improve. But there's still work to be done. One issue that confronts GSA is the diversity of the architects who work for the federal government. There is a tendency to favor larger firms with big portfolios of completed projects. I would argue that if you actually looked at the seminal works of architecture in the United States, the true landmark buildings, very few of those projects were produced by large firms. They tend to be produced by small to medium-sized firms. I'm not suggesting that large firms shouldn't get any of GSA's commissions, but I think it's incredibly important that the Design Excellence Program encourages diversity.

If GSA could contribute more to the process of forming teams around the lead designer, then diversity would improve. During the selection process, the lead designers should be given more information about the types of teams that they may want to pull together to be successful in the second round. Ideally, five to seven short-listed lead designers should come in with teams that are fabulous.

Though our firm is relatively new to dealing with GSA, we've learned a lot of interesting lessons through the peer review process. Before I served on the architect selection panel for the federal courthouse in Jackson, we were short-listed for a border station in Montana. In hindsight, I realized that we had not put together a good project team for the second phase of the border station. As a medium-sized firm of 40 people, we didn't understand the process. So between the first phase and the second phase of the selection process, more needs to be done by GSA to coach the lead designers on the type of teams that would make their submissions more attractive.

In the future, GSA also needs to focus on the buildings they lease. This is an area where it is a more difficult task to bring good design into the project because an independent entity is developing the project for GSA and that entity is the one that's actually signing the check and building the building. There's a huge amount of construction that is fundamentally being financed by lease agreements with GSA.

Looking back over the Design Excellence Program, I would say that the major strength of the program is recognizing that when you have ten architects designing the same project, you will get ten different buildings. You will be able to rate those projects from one to ten. There's going to be a very good one and one that's not very good. Most of the quality-based selection processes assume that if architects have the same budget, the same schedule, and a similar level of qualifications that the output is going to be equal. The Design Excellence Program does not make that mistake. It recognizes that the talents of certain people are particularly appropriate for certain projects and that if you have ten different architects designing the same building, you are not going to get the same value from all ten architects. As peer reviewers in the selection process, our role is to try to identify a designer who, given a budget and a project schedule, will deliver the highest value to the federal government and, in turn, to the people of the United States. There are differences in what different architects bring to a project, and the Design Excellence Program tries to identify those differences. It boldly states that there is a tangible and measurable difference between what one firm and what another firm might bring to a project. And that is very valuable.

One of the questions raised by the program is whether the federal government should be in the business of trying

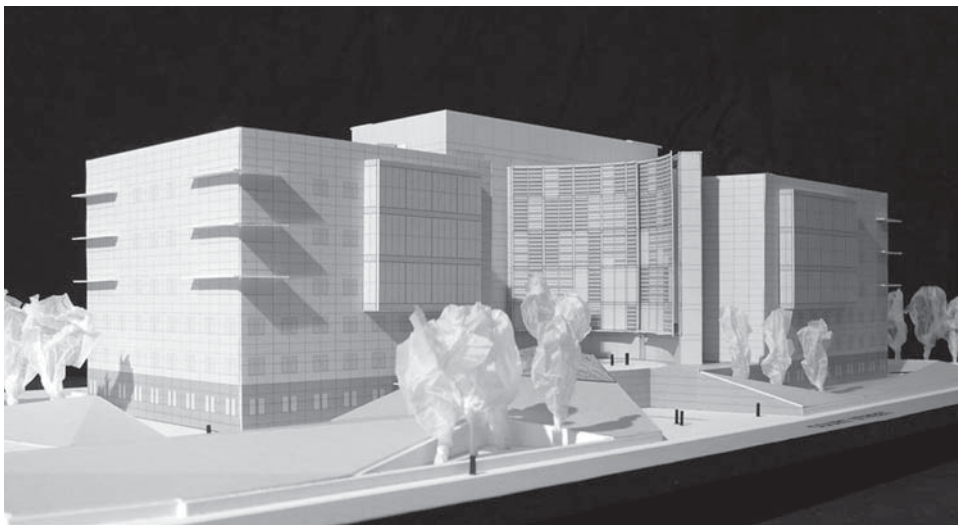
to promote the highest quality design and the highest level of creativity. I think you have to answer that question in terms of every federal building representing an investment of money, time, and the talents of federal employees. The intention of the Design Excellence Program is to ensure that those buildings create the greatest value for the federal government. That is a very important objective that is completely justifiable. Design Excellence is not a program for the sake of art. It really tries to deliver the greatest possible value for the same investment of time and money.

The federal government is engaged in a variety of building projects in many different locales, from cities to ex-urban areas throughout the United States. I think it is extremely important that the federal government support the growth and development of our urban centers. Our government can be a catalyst to revitalizing urban areas where you have a tremendous amount of infrastructure already in place. The new federal courthouse in Rockford, Illinois, is an excellent example where GSA is leading the charge to redevelop a whole zone of downtown Rockford through its investment in the community. In suburban locations, it's important that GSA lead the charge in developing "green," high-performance buildings so that these new projects don't put a load on an infrastructure unprepared to support such intense development. Innovative transportation strategies and conservation of natural resources are extremely important to consider in these locations.

There's a small percentage of the public that thinks of federal office buildings as large filing cabinets where you store a lot of paper and a lot of people. Some citizens see that awful 1970s federal architecture, which was very gray, very dull, and very deadening, as a symbol of a government that isn't very thoughtful or forward thinking. Now there is a growing understanding that the federal government needs to be creative in the use of our tax dollars. The vast majority of citizens will applaud GSA for the Design Excellence Program as long as the project budgets have not been inflated to accommodate good design and good design is resulting from simply using the money that was going to be invested anyway.

The public does not fully understand the value of design or the importance of good design in federal architecture. I am pleasantly surprised by the efforts made by GSA's Public Buildings Service to communicate the goals of the Design Excellence Program to the broader public. That's probably not something that GSA can do all by itself. Educating people about the importance of good design in reducing energy consumption, conserving water, and improving productivity must involve various public and private institutions on a number of different levels. Everyone across the board, whether inside GSA or outside GSA, needs to do more to help this educational effort.

A GSA PEER SINCE 2002, **JOSEPH VALERIO** SERVED ON THE 2002 DESIGN AWARDS JURY, PEER REVIEWS FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS; AND THE CHICAGO FEDERAL CENTER PERIMETER SECURITY CHARRETTE. VALERIO IS A FOUNDING PARTNER OF CHICAGO-BASED VALERIO DEWALT TRAIN ASSOCIATES AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS COUNCIL OF CHICAGO.



Design concept for the U.S. Courthouse, Jackson, MS

When public architecture works best, it connects to the region that it's in. It makes a place that is archetypal and has universal meaning, but it is also grounded in the site.

– Thomas Hacker, GSA National Peer

Chapter 3

Developing An Appropriate Architecture

Tapping our nation's most creative talents, the Design Excellence Program has been responsible for the selection of architects for several hundred federal projects worth more than $10 billion over the past decade. These commissions range from major renovations of existing facilities to new border stations, courthouses, laboratories, and office buildings in all regions of the country.

In this chapter, five of the architects selected for recent projects address the challenges and the rewards of designing and retrofitting federal buildings for the 21st century. Among the projects discussed are U.S. courthouses in Los Angeles and Seattle; federal buildings in Oklahoma City and Portland, Oregon; and two border stations in Washington State. Voiced by architects of these varied projects are common concerns that consistently arise during the Design Excellence process. Chief among them is the diversity of contemporary expression, rather than a single "official" style, sought for new federal architecture. Several architects reflect on the means to achieve this goal, including sensitivity to site conditions and regional traditions, and debate the need for the government to embrace the design vanguard. They also explain the role of large federal buildings as potential catalysts for physical and economic improvements within cities and communities.

Another requirement now faced by the architects participating in the Design Excellence Program is the increased need for security in public buildings. As related in this chapter, designers are integrating protective measures into the building fabric, landscape, and streetscape so security becomes a seamless part of their designs.

Design innovation, sustainability, and integration of art into new public architecture are also discussed in this chapter. As several voices note, the public should be able to look at a contemporary federal building and recognize the dignity, pride, and ideals of our democracy.

VISION+VOICE

CAROL **ROSS BARNEY**

JAMES **CUTLER**

THOMAS **HACKER**

RALPH E. **JOHNSON**

WILLIAM **BAIN**

CAROL **ROSS BARNEY**

We do a lot of federal work. GSA does a better job of building public architecture than any other agency we work for. It's fun to work for GSA because they ask us to develop more than one design solution and that's how we work. We try to determine the acceptable edges of a design problem, meshing our ideas with the owner's ideas. Then we'll present three equal ideas and push the owner to the absolute edge of those ideas. So we're never too disappointed by what the owner selects. We're usually pretty happy about it.

Participation by the owner is really important. That has made GSA a good client for us, both through the peer process and the number of different users that are involved. Our Oklahoma City Federal Building is extremely interesting because it exists at so many different levels. The funds to build the building were legislated within weeks of the 1995 bombing [of the Murrah Federal Building]. It was a motherhood-and-apple-pie type of movement. The need to rebuild was in the national psyche, and it had to do with the strength of our nation and our ability to recover. To deal with that as a design issue is an unprecedented opportunity.



When we started designing the building in 1997, it was one of the few projects dealing with ideas of defensibility. But there are other levels to the project, too. Oklahoma City is a city that is struggling to rebuild its downtown, like a lot of second-tier American cities. People there had lived through a really hard economic period. The downtown had a lot of surface parking. So the project presented the opportunity to bring some economic life to that city. Spending federal dollars brings that responsibility with it. You have to look at the project's total infrastructure and, in some cases, rebuild the cities.

Working with the people who were involved in the bombing was an extraordinary experience. I try to be a scribe when I go to Oklahoma, especially when I'm working with Oklahomans who were victims of the bombing, because recording that event and making a building that they can work in now is so important. And it hasn't always been easy. For example, an architect put forth the thesis that our floor plan looked like what was left from the bombed-out Murrah Building. You can imagine the conflicts that we had to deal with. They were actually invigorating. Though there never was complete consensus about the design, I think people will like the building.

One of the fascinating things about the project is that we started the job and then stopped it for a number of reasons. One was land acquisition, which sometimes stops a job. The other was getting final approval from Congress during the year [1999] of the impeachment trial. Nothing happened then. That allowed the project to grow with

what's needed in the building. There was thinking about having amenities and having the right place for people to work. So the building changed.

When we started working on the Oklahoma City building, the guidelines for security were still being written. At that point, GSA had standards and the Department of Defense and the Department of State, which had their own buildings bombed, were working on new standards. There was some divergence between those. So, from the very beginning, we worked with security standards that were changing, even as we finished the building. Our building is state-of-the-art, but it's state-of-the-art for what happened in Oklahoma City in 1995. If exactly the same incident happened again, our building would survive. It wouldn't collapse progressively, and there wouldn't be the tremendous loss of life. Right now, GSA's security standards are written so as to prevent loss by bombing. We've dealt with what we know. In large part, security is psychological. It's really important that people feel safe because if you don't feel safe, you're not going to do your work. You're not going to interact with the government. That ruins the functional basis for doing a building.

A federal building's security risk is determined by its role in the national mission and by its history. That is why the risk of the one in Oklahoma City is so high. But in the future, only some federal buildings will receive the treatment that most are getting now. The reason is that security is expensive. It is hard to do. There's a premium on the structure and the materials. The sites have to be more generous and protected. The bollards alone at Oklahoma City cost millions of dollars, so when you think about the site, where you are trying to be as cost-effective as possible, it's hard to accomplish some of the requirements.

One of the things we are very proud of in Oklahoma City is that we didn't spend a whole lot of money to

Oklahoma City Federal Building, Oklahoma City, OK

accomplish security, but it wasn't easy. Our building is being finished at under $200 per square foot, which is very good for modern office building construction.

We've taken materials that say "secure" and tried to express how beautiful they are. So the building is poured-in-place concrete that's celebrated as a material. We've also used galvanized steel, a very basic form of that material. We hope that people see the beauty that you can bring out of common materials, because that might be part of the answer to security.

Because of what we learned at Oklahoma City, I've become the security queen. Some of my other interesting assignments have been security charrettes in Chicago, Albuquerque, and Salt Lake City.

One of the great things that's happening with the Design Excellence Program is that the care that is expected on major projects is filtering down to some of the smaller ones, such as child-care centers. To improve the process even further, I would extend the same care to the interior spaces. I realize that federal agencies are assigning leases and as a landlord GSA can never quite tell a tenant what to do and what not to do, but the line needs to be drawn a little more firmly. For example, in Oklahoma City, we designed the new federal building to meet a silver rating from the LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] program. However, during construction, a major design feature—day lighting control—was eliminated for cost reasons and because the tenants didn't understand it. Sometimes in office buildings, the tenant doesn't understand why the improvement is being made and what its benefit is to them. And since our firm is not involved in the interior fit-out, the reasons for the improvements are never really explained correctly. We did a lot of research about workplace productivity and about sustainability, and some of it was lost as the tenants moved in. Meanwhile, the manager in Oklahoma City was saying if I don't give

private offices with luxurious fit-outs to this tenant, then I'm not going to get them as a tenant. Do you want a vacant building that's wonderful or do you want a full building where you've made some compromises? I am sympathetic to his viewpoint. But that line needs to be drawn.

GSA is fostering innovation by attracting new and emerging talent to the Design Excellence Program and has gone about it exactly the right way. They have engaged architects in discussions about emerging talent that is respected and qualified. The next trick is to make sure that the emerging talent is actually selected for some jobs and that's always been hard to do in government. We always joke in our office that QBS, which stands for Quality Based Selection, actually means Quantity Based Selection. The more that you have designed a building type, the more likely you are to get selected for that type. So selecting emerging talent is really hard.

As a peer, I helped to select an architect for the border station in Sweetgrass, Montana. That was the first time I had ever been on the other side of an interview, and it was fascinating to see what architects presented about themselves. We picked a small firm that had not done any GSA work before, and the design was quite nice. The real way to attract emerging talent is to build good work. Doing good design is only half the architect's responsibility; the other half is the client's responsibility. So if you are going to be successful, you have to find clients who will be interested in the quality of work.

Some people say government buildings need to be totally functional. They ask, why would you spend my tax dollars on anything except what's needed? I think that that is tremendously shortsighted. The idea of Mies van der Rohe designing the Chicago Federal Center in the 1960s, for instance, was really pretty radical. But the design turned out to be prophetic because everybody else in the world has an office building like it, too. It set the standard.

The messages that our public buildings carry are really important ones. The payoff is not just immediate but also affects our culture and our history. We, the people, deserve good buildings. We deserve the best buildings. We deserve buildings that have durable, fine materials. Our buildings should be about our aspirations, not just about our day-to-day existence. Federal architecture is going to be one of the most important forces in architecture and the effect that architecture has on culture. I don't think there's any avoiding it. So the next question is how responsible can we be? I think the Design Excellence Program is a step in the direction to do it right.

CAROL ROSS BARNEY DESIGNED THE OKLAHOMA CITY FEDERAL BUILDING AND THE U.S. PORT OF ENTRY IN SAULT STE. MARIE, MICHIGAN. APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 1996, SHE IS THE DESIGN PRINCIPAL OF ROSS BARNEY + JANKOWSKI, BASED IN CHICAGO. ROSS BARNEY'S WORK AS A PEER INCLUDES SECURITY CHARRETTES FOR THE FEDERAL CENTER IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS; AND THE U.S. COURTHOUSES IN ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO; AND SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH. ROSS BARNEY IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

JAMES **CUTLER**

Our firm is extremely interested in understanding the nature of the place where we're building, the institution we're housing, and the materials that we're going to use. We want to thoroughly understand them so that we can choreograph the experience for anybody who enters our building. We want to reveal, as beautifully as possible, the place, the institution, and the materials.

That philosophy is reflected in the two projects we've done for GSA. One is a border crossing between the United States and Canada [in Oroville, WA]. The project became interesting and exciting when we were told that we were working not only for the American government, but also for the Canadian government. It's a rather large project for us but started off quite small until both governments got involved. They wanted to do a prototype for the whole of the northern border. So we had to satisfy both the political and the technical needs of two different bureaucracies and two different cultures. It took four or five years of programming to get through the hurdles of the bureaucracies. During that process, we came up with a design that we've been told is a seminal building in re-examining the way you cross the border.



Typically, when you cross any of the borders of this country, you're greeted on either side by duty-free liquor stores, stars-and-stripes hotdog stands, and cigarette shops. They have very little to do with the power and dignity of any country. They have more to do with its commercialization. In designing the project, we studied the complex traffic patterns, security needs, truck offloading, and the myriad of things that a border station has to do. After we figured all that out, we used our knowledge to reveal the landscape. So instead of bringing people straight across the border, we turned them 90 degrees to the border so they were parallel to it. By turning people, we could frame each side of the border's neutral zone with architecture. When people turned, they had a view up to the Cascade Mountains or down into Lake Osoyoos and back into the Cascades again. So when you entered the country, you saw the grandeur of the landscape. The place where the two cultures meet is revealed in a line that goes into the horizon. The border is intended to be a visible bump, a little steel pyramid that runs continuously into the horizon in both directions. It's a fine, small line separating two cultures on a vast and broad landscape.

The peer review of our border crossing had wonderful value for me. It was great sitting in a room and having other architects saying, "Brilliant, fantastic, that's great. Make sure that you keep that landscape part in there." The whole

idea was that you were going to go through a dense orchard first because the government owns quite a bit of land around the border. Beyond the orchard, on either side of the neutral zone, were to be Lombardy poplars so that from a mile and a half away, you'd see a row of trees that would mark the border. So you'd pass through a really dense orchard, pop out through the poplars, and be in the neutral zone. And your view would be blocked to an east-west view looking along the border. It would have just been stunning. The Canadians liked it. All the architects on the peer review loved it. But that didn't mean anything to GSA and U.S. Customs. A guy from GSA said, "people can hide behind trees that are four inches wide. I want a clear field of fire." So the Americans were fundamentally interested in whom they could shoot. I'm not kidding. If someone is coming to shoot you across the neutral zone, then it should be clear. So we designed a field of fire in the neutral zone. We also incorporated a shooting range because Americans are required to shoot off 50 rounds a month for target practice. The Canadians don't allow guns in their country. So we had to design a place where the Americans could go to a locker, take off their guns, lock them up, and then go to the other side of the building. We also had to change the detailing of the primary inspection lanes, the booths for the inspection guys, to put bulletproof glass in them. But what good is bulletproof glass if the guy is getting out of the booth to inspect? The $250,000 spent for three booths with bulletproof glass didn't seem like an appropriate use of money. I mean you have to be reasonable. I don't think Canadians are terrorists. We're in a very paranoid time right now. It's too bad. I imagine the pendulum will swing back the other way a little bit. But we know how to deal with it.

We're now doing our second building for GSA, rehabbing the Edith Green/Wendell Wyatt Federal Building in Portland, Oregon. Sera Architects, a big institutional firm in Portland, asked our firm to join them as the designer. There was to be some rehab work and security upgrades on the ground floor. My initial response was that the project sounded uninteresting. It's a concrete-and-steel, boring box that has no civic presence. But I had the firm send me the technical drawings and noticed that the structure is an old Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill building. SOM had done a takeoff on a Marcel Breuer design with three-foot-thick concrete panels on the skin of the building. Those panels took up space around the inside perimeter that was totally unused. And the skin was badly insulated. Environmentally, the building performs terribly in terms of energy loss and gain.

I realized I could remove the concrete panels and put a new skin around the building edge that could be designed to capture heat in the winter and shed heat in the summer. If I could actually use the sun to manipulate the climate control of the building, I could do something interesting. Then I figured out that GSA could pick up an additional 18,000 square feet by changing the skin. And by changing the skin, we could yield an economic return of almost $150,000 a year in energy savings. We could do work that would change the way people saw high-rise buildings. So we were short-listed for the project. During the presentation, I explained that we wanted the east wall to have sunglasses on it to reflect low sunlight. We wanted the south wall to be a double-glass wall so that it completely blocks heat in the summer, but in the winter, we'd use the heat to preheat the air in the building and save energy costs.

We've proposed a very powerful change to the building on the western side that will be unlike any building anyone has ever seen. The building will be alive. We're going to plant a 250-foot-high wall with deciduous plants that will change color in the fall. The plants will block off the sun in the summer because the major heat gain will occur on the building's western and southwestern sides. In the winter, the leaves will fall off and there will be an energy gain again. So I'm basically using nature to help manipulate the energy costs of the building.

I'm also thinking of turning the green walls into giant fins on the building because of the angle of the sun. The fins could block light and you'd still see out. The idea is to make big, sculptural elements, almost like giant trees.

Security experts try to think of every possible thing that can go wrong. They tell you everyone should live in a bunker underground because that's safe. In lieu of that, we had to come up with scenarios for detection and observation so the bulk of the security will be non-intrusive visually to the people using the building. We proposed wire-mesh "trees" that wrap around the whole building like great square funnels. The funnels will capture water and send it into planters that will then feed the plants growing on the wire-mesh trees. We want to focus all of the security and observation in those trees.

Not only do we have a detailed design, but all my consultants, everybody from the landscape architect to the structural and mechanical engineers, know how this project will perform in terms of its energy consumption. We know what kind of plants to put in. We know how to construct the building and how long that will take. We have gotten together with a contractor and figured out how to minimize the impact on tenants. So we really have the project sorted out. I'm really pumped about it.

In addition to showing the dignity and power of the federal government, public architecture should reflect our national policies. Because of its sheer spending power, the federal government has the ability to twist the future direction of architecture on a moral and ethical level. I'm not sure that it should have the power to establish the direction of styles or forms, which are, in the long run, irrelevant. More important are the broader trends of history. And the broader trend of history will be a future with too many people, scarcer resources, and a more highly stressed ecosystem. If we don't want that in our future, then the federal government should start to move the culture away from that incipient disaster. So GSA has a real responsibility to foster a culture of conservation and an awareness of our interdependence on this planet.

We want the Edith Green/Wendell Wyatt Federal Building to be not only technically "green," but also emotionally green. By that I mean all of the technologies, tricks, and devices used to achieve energy efficiency and resource conservation should be apparent to the public. When people look at the building, they should say, "that is cool, that is interesting," and, at the same time, understand the federal government's environmental policy. Anybody in the world is going to be able to read the power and the love of the planet in our building. You'll be able to see how the whole thing works in using the sun. It will be totally apparent how parts of the planted walls block the sun and how they allow better vision when the leaves drop off in the winter. The building will be constantly changing relative to the seasons and the sun. We will make it so clear that it will blow people away. From what I've learned in life, I'm certain of this. Every major decision I have made in my life has been how I felt about something. I don't think we do things on a rational level. We do something because we're moved emotionally. When you're moved emotionally, when a building stuns you, you remember it. If you don't feel it, it doesn't do any good. Some of the new federal courthouses are dignified, but they're pretty cold. So GSA should be doing buildings that move people. Public architecture shouldn't be cold to stay current, but should be visually powerful and moving. Hearts are way more important than minds.

AS PRINCIPAL OF CUTLER ANDERSON ARCHITECTS IN BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WASHINGTON, **JAMES CUTLER** DESIGNED THE U.S. BORDER STATION IN OROVILLE, WASHINGTON; AND THE RENOVATION OF THE EDITH GREEN/WENDALL WYATT FEDERAL BUILDING IN PORTLAND, OREGON. CUTLER WAS APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 2000 AND HAS WORKED ON THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS PROGRAM FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI. HE HAS TAUGHT AT THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY.

THOMAS **HACKER**

All great architecture is public architecture. If the architecture isn't public when it's begun, it becomes of interest to the public because of its greatness. The most significant architecture in every society has been public architecture because we gain our identity and strength from the interactions with groups of people, from family groups to community groups. The meaning and the strength that we have really come from that collective as a society. And architecture needs to serve that. To me, the greatest dilemma facing contemporary architects is the need to make architecture that is knowable, readable, and understandable by the public. It wasn't very long ago when architects had a style to work within that everybody accepted as a public style and there was no argument about it. There were arguments about whether to do a Gothic or a Roman-style building, but there was an understanding that those styles represented public meaning. We don't have that now. One of the problems confronting GSA is that public meaning got blown away in the 1950s and 1960s. After the Second World War, public architecture in the classical style was no longer accepted. But you can't go back to the classical style. We've seen some disastrous attempts to do that and they've failed. This era is confusing because as architects we don't have a language that conveys public meaning. It used to be that you'd walk down the street, and you could identify the public library, museum, or courthouse. Now you see a building that looks like upside down blocks, and who knows whether it's a museum or courthouse. As architects and as clients of public architecture, we need to find ways to give contemporary buildings the kind of meaning formally, materially, and spatially that earlier buildings had without depending on the wrappings of style to do it. It's our responsibility to find ways to make that kind of universal expression. That's a very big challenge for contemporary architects and is what is important in my own work.



My border station is on the Pacific Highway in Blaine, Washington. It must project a public meaning, but it also has to be highly technical and function-driven. A very large number of the people who pass through the border station are either in a truck or an automobile. The only people who really go into the building itself come through on buses or need to do some paperwork because they're getting a visa or something like that. So it's not the typical public building in a town that you walk into. But, at the same time, we wanted to make a building there that represented something that was archetypal about public architecture. I believe that as human beings we respond in a fundamental way to certain basic forms and spaces. From my own research, I have found that some really simple archetypal forms are repeated over and over again in the history of architecture, like a kid drawing a house. They include a gabled roof with a pediment front and colonnaded

entrance. I started to find that I could go to any culture and find this same set of forms expressed in different materials but always very clearly articulated. As architects, it's incumbent on us to understand the kinds of archetypal forms and structures that evoke the feeling that you have when you go into a really powerful or moving space. Some contemporary architects, like Frank Gehry, have done that. So I'm not talking about trying to reinvent classicism.

In our Washington border crossing, we were trying to create a sense of dignity based on the history of that landscape. When public architecture works best, it connects to the region that it's in. It makes a place that is archetypal and has universal meaning, but also is grounded in the site. In Oregon and Washington, for example, the early courthouses were formal like Greek temples but made out of wood clapboard in a way that was very indigenous.

In designing our border station, we looked at the forms of the indigenous landscape, from gable-roofed Native American long houses to the big wooden and corrugated metal barns of local dairy farms. These are really beautiful structures, and we wanted to make a building that drew on some of their historical forms.

So our building has long, overhanging corrugated metal roofs. But the architecture is very abstract, and it's taken to a whole different scale from the tight, earth-hovering barn form. The big light monitor at the top is broken away from the roof, and there's a big floating element that expresses the energy of the road. One of our peer reviewers suggested using wood because it's so powerful and important to the economy and the building practices of the Northwest region. That was really exciting for me because a lot of our architecture is very wood oriented. We laid out big wood panels in a monumental way, so the border station almost becomes a metaphorical statement about the history of building in the region. Inside, there's a very big and proud space to send a positive message about the entrance to the

United States. Unfortunately, there's a lot of pressure to control that entrance because of security issues. I just heard on the radio today that they stopped a truck with drugs or something in it coming through that station. So the need for security is real. But there are also thousands of people who pass through the station and are really excited about coming to the United States, a number of them for the first time. So I wanted the place to say, "hey, come on in here," and made a really bright, light-filled room that is a welcoming place for them.

What the Design Excellence Program has done for the quality of public architecture in this country has been extraordinary. One of its most important aspects is the peer review process in promoting better architecture. There's no question about that. Value is added to the projects because they get good criticism. The peer review has great value in the community of architects because it gets people together who might not otherwise get together. They share ideas all under the aegis of the GSA Design Excellence Program with the common understanding that it has importance. The program also helps promote better work beyond GSA. As a peer, when I go down to San Antonio, Texas, to look at Lake/Flato's work, Ted Flato and I become colleagues at that point. We go out to lunch together. We talk about other work. I go back to my office energized about work that might be for the University of Oregon library or theater or whatever. The quality of architecture throughout the country is promoted in a broader way than just in the projects for GSA.

The peer review of our border station was very stimulating. We were able to push a new direction. The design shift had to do with the basic problem of how you route the traffic in an efficient way. Almost all border crossings have land and geometric restrictions because traffic flow has to be the primary element of site planning. The issue was how to structure the buildings and create the appropriate form for the movement of cars. The big structures were not to house functions for people inside, but were placed over the car lanes because if you're in line for any length of time, and often there are lines, you can't be out in the open. So the main long-span structures shade people in cars as they move through. At the same time, new security protocols were being developed for border stations because of 9/11. So everything stopped. The project was put on hold.

The greatest weapon we have as a society is to remain open, period. If we lose the sense of openness, the places filled with light and life, and the freedoms that we have, then we will have lost the war on terrorism. The dilemma is to be strong enough to stand in the face of those dangers and take prudent measures to protect human lives without losing the sense of freedom, openness, and interaction in the public realm.

The great public buildings throughout history have completely incorporated art in a way that is fundamentally part of the architecture. Art is the most profound expression of human and societal meaning that we have. It is no accident that the greatest treasures from any culture are artworks because art has the ability to communicate a message that is universal. Architecture is art as well. It is a vehicle for art. Architecture was called the mother of the arts because it was the body within which the art was projected. That's true of the Gothic, Italian Renaissance, and other great periods of architecture. One of the most exciting aspects of contemporary architecture is the fusion of art and architecture. Part of the reason that we can't agree on a style is that we're in an age of individualism. Artists are no longer doing triptychs over altars and the kinds of things that are part of the societal need for the expression of spirit and meaning. They're doing studio work. So there's more difficulty getting an artist and an architect to put their individual sensibilities together and make something that is community-oriented.

We've had fantastic experiences in our office working with artists, but we get them involved really early in the design process, so that they're not coming in to decorate our buildings. Their art and our buildings achieve greater meaning because we start in the early stages and work together. Art makes architecture grow. It brings out qualities that might remain latent. The most exciting work that we're doing right now is finding ways to allow the universal expression of art to be truly a part of the architecture of the building. For a library in Portland, Oregon, for example, we wanted to create a wall mural at the entrance that would represent the connection between the hustle and bustle of culture and the tranquility of nature. So we asked a Northwest artist, Lucinda Parker, to do a painting there, and she did this fantastic painting of abstract seed and leaf forms. I was so moved by it that I asked her to design a pattern on the ceiling based on elements of that painting.

Often during the public process to select an artist, people in the community want something that's safe, predictable, and familiar. But art is most potent when it pushes you off the familiar a little bit and opens you up to worlds that you might not see. So I always ask and sometimes really push to be on the art selection committee and that's usually honored. Artists and architects should be accountable to the public so people have some sense of meaning and ownership in the work. Art and architecture give meaning to our lives, and we need to provide the public with work that has meaning for them and doesn't take connoisseurship to understand. The best way to get the public involved in their buildings is to give them an architecture that they can celebrate.

The federal government should be in the vanguard of design, but it shouldn't be driving the vanguard. The government needs to support the kind of flow of energy and meaning that's coming out of artists and architects, and society as a whole. GSA can promote really potent work. But it can't force it to happen or write the rules about what it should be. One of the added benefits of peer reviews is allowing us to communicate with each other about ideas in the arts and in architecture. Having people from GSA at those reviews, which happens most of the time, also promotes learning about what the vanguard is. The more GSA can keep in touch with that and know what's happening, it's much more likely that it'll be able to take advantage of that kind of potency.

If I had one agenda for GSA, it would be to increase the potency of the Design Excellence Program by involving younger people and do it in a way that it doesn't allow technical or security difficulties make us lose track of the spirit of public architecture. Design excellence is based on the sense that public architecture can have meaning for the people. That's what it's about. We are the people. That's what our government is based on. It's helped immensely to make buildings in this country that have that kind of energy in them. So don't let it go. Find ways of promoting and reinvigorating it. The people who are in charge of the Design Excellence Program aren't going to be there forever, so there needs to be a regeneration of its goals. That's the most important thing that GSA can do.

THOMAS HACKER IS DESIGN PRINCIPAL OF THOMAS HACKER ARCHITECTS IN PORTLAND, OREGON, A FIRM DEVOTED TO GIVING CIVIC MEANING TO PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE. HACKER DESIGNED THE U.S. PORT OF ENTRY FOR BLAINE, WASHINGTON. HIS OTHER PROJECTS INCLUDE THE MAIN LIBRARY FOR THE CITY OF ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA; AND THE CENTER FOR VISUAL ARTS AT SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY IN ASHLAND. APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 2002, HE CHAIRED THE DESIGN CHARRETTE JURY FOR THE U.S. BORDER STATION IN MASSENA, NEW YORK. HACKER IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

U.S. Port of Entry, Blaine, WA

Design concept for the U.S. Courthouse, Los Angeles, CA

RALPH E. **JOHNSON**

What initially attracted me to GSA was its interest in design excellence and support of innovation in architecture. Our federal courthouse in Los Angeles was the third GSA interview that I went through. The first was more than ten years ago for the U.S. courthouse in Omaha. I learned a lot from that interviewing process and eventually succeeded through the competition process for the Los Angeles courthouse. The competitions run by GSA are probably among the fairest because they are anonymous and limit the amount of information that is required. Four presentation boards are required, for instance, allowing you to get your concept through without requiring a lot of extra work. Even if you don't win, you're allowed to experiment and look at new ideas. That's why we do competitions.



In designing the federal courthouse in Los Angeles, we spent quite a bit of time analyzing the history of that city's downtown. We looked at the Paseo, the Bunker Hill area, and the areas where the original settlements were. We realized that the courthouse site is actually located slightly off the Civic Center, adjacent to the commercial downtown. So we saw the building as a bridge between the government buildings and the downtown, and as a gateway into the Civic Center along Broadway. This is the largest courthouse project in GSA's current building program. It has 54 courtrooms. How do you scale that down to the human being? We didn't want to create a high-rise where you'd go into an elevator opening into a courtroom. We wanted people to be aware of the totality of the building, regardless of what floor they are on, so we created a very large atrium. The atrium ties all the spaces together and allows the individuality of the courtroom to be expressed. So there's a connection between the large-scale civic symbolism and the small scale of the user.

One of GSA's priorities is the diversity of expression for federal architecture. That goes back to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's idea that there shouldn't be a single style. During the competition for the Los Angeles courthouse, we certainly explored a number of different ideas. We looked at approaches that were universal and drew from time-honored expressions of government buildings, as well as concepts that were particular to the site and more abstract in their references to government architecture. We looked at the typologies, the basic shapes and forms that relate to particular building types.

If you think of government buildings, you think of columns and rotundas, and we abstracted those elements in the building in a very interesting way. The solar wall is an abstraction of a classical rotunda and the judges' chambers reflect a kind of columnar portico. So there's an interesting play between tradition and innovation, which is very important, especially for government buildings.

The issue of security is very important to GSA, and it is very supportive in allowing the architect to look at innovative concepts. We have a variety of open spaces at the courthouse in Los Angeles. One is on a plaza that opens to the atrium that's raised off the grade level. We see the atrium as a secure public forum that's an extension of the street, even though it extends past the security system. So a major portion of the ground plane of the building is a continuum of the public realm. We were able to provide transparent glass walls to achieve that effect by looking at sophisticated methods of blast control. That led us to apply stainless steel mesh on the inside of the building to keep the transparency and the openness of the courthouse, but still meet the security requirements. It takes time to solve those problems, and GSA seems to keep an open mind about them.

Another GSA priority is sustainability, which also plays a big role in our courthouse project. Our notion was to use the building as an energy collector with a large solar wall. So we looked at urban issues as well as orientation and climatic issues in shaping the building. We also looked at day-lighting, not only as an energy-saving device, but also as a way of humanizing the building and making it more user-friendly. All the courtrooms are illuminated naturally. We also employed low-energy mechanical systems that allow for very high spaces without having to pump large amounts of energy into the building. Again, quite a bit of time was spent with the engineers on this project to develop structural and mechanical solutions for a building that's innovative and very energy-efficient.

We also have an interesting art and architecture program for the Los Angeles courthouse. The first phase of the art program was to convene a panel of art experts and judges, look at hundreds of different potential candidates, and then narrow it down to three artists. Then we got the artists involved in the earliest schematic design phase of the project so the art would become part of the architecture. We oriented them to the building concepts and suggested some locations for their work. All three are from Los Angeles and are at various stages in their careers. John Baldessari is an established artist who mixes photographic art with text. Liz Larner is a little more pluralistic and site-specific in her work, and Jorge Pardo is interested in taking functional objects and transforming them into art. Though some of the initial suggestions changed because the building evolved, the basic intentions stayed in place. John Baldessari is integrating art into one of the interior curtain walls of the building. There will be a panel illustrated with the statue of Justice, which will be composed of photographs of various federal employees to show the diversity of justice and the democratic process in an interesting way. The image will be paired with text, a common word in the judicial process, and then different ways of interpreting that. Liz Larner's sculpture will be a large, living art piece that will provide shade for the outdoor plaza. And Jorge Pardo is actually looking at the bollards, believe it or not. It will be interesting to see what he comes up with.

I'm also a peer reviewer and have been involved with the federal courthouse in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. As a peer, it's important to be in the architect's shoes and think about what he or she is trying to achieve, rather than trying to force my ideas on the architect. I try to strengthen the basic scheme and make it much more cohesive. Usually, it's a process of simplifying, limiting the number of ideas, and coming up with a much stronger concept. The person being reviewed can't be defensive but must keep an open mind and accept our ideas as positive criticism. From my own experiences on the Los Angeles courthouse, it can be a very helpful process. The peer review also is really a good way for the judges and the users of the building to see how architects work. It brings them into the process and gives them confidence that they're headed in the right direction. It opens the process and helps to create consensus.

GSA is already doing a pretty good job of engaging with the design community. That outreach could be helped more with exhibits of projects undertaken by the Design Excellence Program. Public forums could also be held in the cities where the federal projects are being built to engage the local community about related security and urban issues. As a public agency, GSA should act as a catalyst to get architecture into the public realm, where, obviously, building more buildings will create interest in architecture. The best test of public buildings is when people actually experience them. That's the best way of getting people excited about government architecture and where government architecture is going and where it can go in the future.

GSA could better relate federal buildings to the communities in which they are located by opening the process to local governments early on in a project. Sometimes there's a tendency to not involve city agencies. For example, in the Los Angeles courthouse project, we don't have a lot of meetings with city agencies. Maybe there's a fear that they might hold up the process. There could be an interesting middle ground where city officials could be brought into the process a little more, and the architect then could also understand more about the context through the people who are running the city.

It would be really interesting if federal buildings could include other uses because one of the down sides of any federal building is what it does to the perimeter and surrounding street level. We know what the problems are in

trying to do that. There are security problems because these are open uses and they have to be blast-controlled from the interior of the facility. Maybe there are ways of incorporating ancillary retail buildings that are linked to the main structure. It's certainly something for GSA to encourage in the future.

GSA has played a critical role in putting public architecture on the cutting edge of all architecture. It has allowed architects to look at what a 21st-century public building should be. It's very important that the federal government be in the vanguard of architecture because the private sector is much more conservative and shortsighted. Obviously, the federal government wants 100-year buildings. So issues of permanence and sustainability over time are more important for a government building than for a speculative office building, which is owned by a developer and then eventually sold.

One way of attracting emerging talent might be to relax the requirements for similar building types. The original intention of the Design Excellence Program was not to select an architect based on whether he or she did ten courthouses before. Now there's a requirement for five building types of the same scale. But a lot of younger firms may not even have five completed buildings, much less five buildings that relate specifically to the type of project. Sometimes, that's even hard for a firm like Perkins & Will to put together. And an emerging firm is going to have a harder time. By loosening that requirement a little more, GSA could get more diversity in terms of the architects selected for projects. It could look more at innovation and less at the literal experience of five built buildings.

The important contribution of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s was to provide a new look at what public architecture could be through the lens of current design. That is what's happening with the Design Excellence Program as well. It seems to be very similar to what happened in the 1930s in terms of providing a public architecture that's visible to people, that's very much about contemporary society, and pushing those ideas forward. The weakest period of federal architecture was in the 1950s and 1960s. Low-bid functionalism drove the day. We also lost many important historic structures. Obviously that's been rectified through the Design Excellence Program and GSA's sensitivity to rehabilitating historic architecture into useful buildings that can go on into the next decade.

Federal architecture should keep heading in the direction of where it's been going in terms of providing a diversity of expression and expressing an open democratic process. It should continue to address cutting-edge technology and design. It should respect the past and look to the future as well. I wish that GSA's Design Excellence Program could go on in all of government. I know some other agencies are picking up on the program, and hopefully, design excellence will become pervasive throughout the public realm.

RALPH E. JOHNSON, A PRINCIPAL AND THE DESIGN DIRECTOR OF THE CHICAGO OFFICE OF PERKINS & WILL, DESIGNED THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA. HE ALSO DESIGNED THE O'HARE INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL IN CHICAGO AND THE NATURE MUSEUM FOR THE CHICAGO ACADEMY OF SCIENCES. HIS WORK HAS BEEN EXHIBITED AT THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO AND THE PARIS BIENNIAL. JOHNSON WAS APPOINTED A GSA PEER IN 2000 AND IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

WILLIAM **BAIN**

Our federal courthouse in Seattle is a very special building in so many ways. It represents the federal government and, as such, has a great responsibility to show the government's strength and power. The building is a tripartite scheme. The tallest element, designed with lighter colored precast concrete in the center, contains the courtrooms. Beside that, to the north, are the judges' chambers, which are supportive of the courtrooms. On the east side of the building is a lower, curved bar that houses offices and support spaces. It's as if this element were someone's arm, inviting you in, protecting you, and giving you the impression that in this setting you're going to be given a fair trial.

The building has a definite hierarchy with the courtrooms being in the highest position. It's a very different approach than an office building, which is much more uniform. In a courthouse, different programmatic elements give the building distinction.



That's what makes this project exciting because there is a strong program and a strong message behind the building.

The federal courthouse is a little bit out from Seattle's central business district. It is an excellent location because the site is large and allowed us to have a one-acre plaza in front of the building. The entrance to the building is made through a grove of birch trees and is friendly, yet also provides security. Windows in the building actually allow you to see inside to relate to the transparency of our American judicial system. We thought that a protective cap enclosing the courtrooms in the tower would be appropriate and looked at many different options for the copper roof. Being a green color, the copper obviously relates to the green

landscape of the Northwest and the greening of the building. It gives the building character and some distinction on the skyline.

The courthouse is actually changing the core of the city. People are now beginning to see that it's a special building. They recognize that this is a building that is being done right. Our mandate was to construct a building that would last 200 years. And so we are using materials in the best possible way, while still being mindful of the budget. It's not just another ordinary office building. People are captivated by the plaza in front, the strength of the tower, and the cap on the top of the building. When we get a flag in front and the words "United States Courthouse" on the side of the building, people will begin to get it in their minds that this building is a very special representation of our government.

Commentary on our courthouse design from peer reviewers was very helpful. In fact, our two peer reviews went so well that I asked if we could have a third and GSA agreed. It was very good. The peers were also very helpful in convincing the clients that we were on the right track. The only frustration of the project was the delay in the appropriation [of funds from Congress] and the fact that we were actually selected but not notified for quite a long time. When we finally were notified, we were very happy, of course, but it had been quite a while since we'd been interviewed for the job.

The great thing about working with GSA is the people that are involved. We had an amazing array of really good people to work with on the courthouse. There's a common perception that people working for the federal government are not thinking individuals like those employed by the private sector and don't have the entrepreneurial attitude that might be necessary to do a really fine job. This is not true in any way, shape, or form of the GSA employees that we worked with. Through all the vicissitudes of a project, all the different stages, they were right there with us. The process was ideal.

As in any building project, the two key issues for us on the federal courthouse were time and money. Obviously, there was a quest to design and build the courthouse within the budget and on time. The budget was not a flexible item, it was a given. So instead of designing a building, estimating costs, and then figuring out what we had to cut, we really designed to the budget to begin with. We were able to really stay within it. We could have, say, used an expensive stone on the exterior instead of precast concrete, but I think you can also argue pretty convincingly that precast is a fine material and gives you more flexibility in shaping it in any way you choose. Another way we saved money was to come up with a design for the courtroom and the judges' chambers that was universal so that each judge didn't have his or her own courtroom, which would have taken up much more space. We were able to position the chambers so that more than one judge could use a courtroom adjacent to their chambers. That saved quite a lot of money.

In any federal building, security is a given. There is no question about that. It can be obvious or it can be hidden. In any case, security should be dealt with in a creative way. What we've tried to do at our federal courthouse is to deal with it in a variety of ways. For instance, each birch tree in the forecourt has a bollard on each side of the tree. The circumference of the tree trunk is not that big to begin with, but it will increase. The bollards and the tree patterns will form a maze through which you can't drive a vehicle.

Another security measure in the building is the pool in the entrance lobby, instead of a wall or something like that. You come through the electromagnetic detectors on one side but the other side is totally open across a shallow pool of water where you can see a mural and a seating area.

People need to be aware of security and shouldn't be surprised by it, but they shouldn't feel like they are in a bunker.

There was quite a bit of discussion about the cafeteria. The question was whether you had to go through security to get to it or whether you could come into it from the outside. Having to go through security is more onerous for people from the surrounding area who want to eat in the cafeteria. So the decision was made to make the cafeteria available to the public and put it in an area that's somewhat separate from the rest of the building. It helps to animate that corner of the block and I think it's going to be very successful. I love mixed-used buildings, but mixing in non-federal uses has to be done very carefully because a federal building has a presence about it and a responsibility to the public. Integrating a mix of different uses into a federal courthouse is more difficult because there are so many restrictions on circulation and accessibility within the building. It might be more appropriate for federal office buildings.

We've entered a fair number of competitions and have won a good measure of them because we're pretty careful about those we enter. A competition is wonderful for an exhibition building or a structure that has a very flexible program and needs to make a very strong impact. It's more difficult for a complex building like a federal courthouse because the competitors don't necessarily understand the program fully. They come in with a scheme that may look

good, but when you get right down to it, it might not work as well as another one that doesn't look quite as good. So then you have a tradeoff. It's easier to hold a competition among various firms that are selected based on their qualifications, discussing how they'd look at the project in a general sense, and then working with them closely through the evolution of the design. That's the way to get a good building.

The best way GSA can reach out to good architects is to have good projects. I've often said that you cannot get a good project without a good client. I really believe that. If GSA can make it very evident that it is a good client with examples to back that up, then everybody is going to want to work for GSA. There's a danger of eliminating a good firm or two if GSA requires the firm to have five projects in its portfolio and it only has three or something like that. Three projects might be a basic benchmark. After sorting through the portfolios, the next thing to do is to visit the firms' projects, visit their offices, visit their clients, talk to their consultants, and really do a thorough study to find out what they are all about.

GSA is doing a wonderful job with its Design Excellence Program. It's taken the program to a much higher level than anyone ever conceived ten years ago.

But not enough people know about it. The architecture profession should know more about it and there ought to be more exhibitions and more publicity of the program through newspapers, magazines, TV, and so forth. Start with the profession and go to the public at large because they really own the buildings.

During the Renaissance, people knew so much about art that everybody in Florence would see a new sculpture and they'd each have 15 comments about it. We've lost a great deal of that in our public perception of art and architecture. The best way to correct that is through candid and intelligent criticism of architecture. Music is easily discussed among many people—you read reviews of concerts the next morning and so forth, but people are more touchy about talking about whether architecture is successful because it's permanent and costs so much.

Selecting art for a federal building needs to be done right from the very beginning. For our federal courthouse in Seattle, we went through a fairly elaborate artist selection process with people from GSA, the local arts commission and the courts, myself, and others. The intention was that the artwork would be integrated into the building, not just applied to various spots. Like an architectural design jury, everyone on the selection panel kept talking until we agreed on the selection and so it's worked out really well. We've got some wonderful pieces, such as the large mural on the back wall of the entry portico and lobby. There's a large sculpture in the forecourt—it's huge—and a large, glass leaf sculpture in the atrium as well. Even the shallow pool that separates the unsecured from the secure areas of the lobby is an art piece. When you walk into the lobby, you see water coming over the edge. So it's really nice to have art integrated that way.

When you think about the buildings that have been built through history, the ones that people still want to see today are government buildings or iconic structures that

WILLIAM BAIN IS PARTNER IN CHARGE OF NBBJ'S SEATTLE OFFICE AND LEAD DESIGNER FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON. HIS OTHER PROJECTS INCLUDE THE GUAM JUDICIAL CENTER IN AGANA, THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET IN SEATTLE, AND THE WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY FINE ARTS BUILDING IN PULLMAN, WASHINGTON. BAIN IS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

U.S. Courthouse, Seattle, WA

are not built by private forces because they are so important. I'd hope that the same thing would occur 200 years after our federal courthouse is built. I'd hope that people would want to come and see this building and how it's held up over the years, in the same way that we want to see buildings in Paris or Rome.

Federal buildings should elicit respect for the federal government. There should be a good deal of pride in federal buildings. Americans who pay for them should be happy to see that they are fine buildings and that their tax money has been spent wisely. Pride and respect for the expression of our federal judicial system in a federal courthouse is really the foundation of our whole country. Without the law and order that's represented by the courthouse, we'd have a very different country. If GSA can continue to do the right work to create the right buildings, people are going to appreciate the federal government more. They will be happy citizens about the way their money is spent. That's the way to proceed.

Design Excellence is a holistic process that tries to meld every facet of a project from the selection of the best lead designer and contractor for the particular project to ensuring that the design is both inspiring and efficient, and can be delivered within budget.

– Edward Feiner, Chief Architect, U.S. General Services Administration

U.S. General Services Administration and the Design Excellence Program

Public buildings are part of a nation's legacy. They are symbolic of what Government is about, not just places where public business is conducted.

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is responsible for providing work environments and all the products and services necessary to make these environments healthy and productive for Federal employees and cost-effective for the American taxpayers. As builder for the Federal civilian Government and steward of many of our nation's most valued architectural treasures that house Federal employees, GSA is committed to preserving and adding to America's architectural and artistic legacy.

GSA established the Design Excellence Program in 1994 to change the course of public architecture in the Federal Government. Under this program, administered by the Office of the Chief Architect, GSA has engaged many of the finest architects, designers, engineers, and artists working in America today to design the future landmarks of our nation. Through collaborative partnerships, GSA is implementing the goals of the 1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture. In this effort, each building is to be both an individual expression of design excellence and part of a larger body of work representing the best that America's designers and artists can leave to later generations.

To find the best, most creative talent, the Design Excellence Program has simplified the way GSA selects architects and engineers for construction and major renovation projects and opened up opportunities for emerging talent, small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned businesses. The program recognizes and celebrates the creativity and diversity of the American people.

The Design Excellence Program is the recipient of a 2003 National Design Award, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, and the 2004 Keystone Award, American Architectural Foundation.

Index

Page numbers in *italic* refer to illustrations.

Buildings

GSA

U.S. General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
Office of the Chief Architect
Center for Design Excellence and the Arts
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405
202-501-1888

September 2004

U.S. General Services Administration