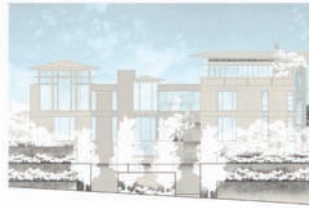
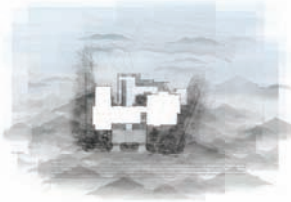




MICHELLE ARAB STUDIO



Michelle Arab Studio's Panvest One | Taipei, Taiwan conceives of the house as a mountain and its surrounding landscape as a shifting cloud in direct relation to its unique natural environment.

New Edge: New Blood

Refreshing reminders from ten young firms on keeping your competitive edge

By David Spiker AIA

In 2008, I helped curate an exhibit of twelve young design firms called "New Edge: New Blood" at AIA Seattle. This year we revisited the concept and found ten firms that are challenging the status quo. We included landscape architecture practices to recognize the collaborative approach that is critical to a successful built environment.

In these two years, the world changed for most design professionals in the United States. The Great Recession, as it's now called, arrived with a vengeance, hitting a large portion of the western world (Asia, unlike in the nineties, has been relatively spared). Most architectural firms have seen a downturn in client interest, actual projects, and fees.

The Northwest is often slow to feel the upticks and downturns of global economics, but by 2009, the recession

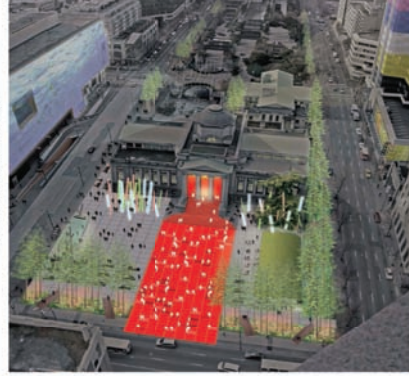


Graypants makes products and designs that challenge their clients' perceptions of possibility. Their Scrap Lights are made entirely from discarded, corrugated cardboard that they cull from local businesses in Seattle.

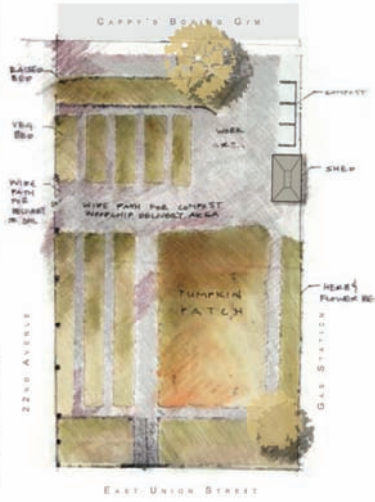
GRAYPANTS



ALLEYCAT ACRES



HAPA COLLABORATIVE



ABOVE: HAPA Collaborative's Vancouver Carpet and Canadian Navy Memorial are award-winning projects that provide dynamic public space in Vancouver and Ottawa.

AlleyCat Acres creates community-run farms on underutilized urban spaces in order to reconnect people with the process of food production.

had arrived. For local practices it has meant furloughs, reductions in employee hours, and layoffs. Many firms have downsized or consolidated. Several of the city's major design firms have seen principals leave to establish their own firms, create new liaisons with other groups, or settle into senior positions at other offices. Other firms have let many of their senior staff go. I recently spoke with Hugh Hochberg Assoc. AIA, of The Coxe Group, management consultants for design professionals, who asked me somewhat rhetorically, "Where are these architects going? What are they doing?" This reconfiguring indicates the volatile state of our profession today.

What are the younger firms doing? How are they competing and surviving? Such offices face the added complication of high-end offices going after smaller work.

Projects that many larger firms would have looked down upon several years ago are now receiving dozens of RFQ and RFP responses. Everyone is running harder to stay in place.

Here are ideas from firms shown at the AIA Seattle NE:NB exhibits

Use your time valuably: Analyze targets and focus on what your firm does best. Spending a lot of firm resources and capital on chasing projects you have little chance of getting is not going to prepare you for a leaner, meaner future. Christopher Patano AIA of Patano+Hafermann Architects said, "P+H looked at the slow economy and limited prospects and decided to open a new branch office in Idaho. We are working on bringing high-performance, modern design to that market. Idaho is ideal for our energy approach, with plentiful solar hours and geothermal sources throughout the state." Jim Burton AIA of Blip Design has focused on Passive

IMAGES COURTESY OF CAST ARCHITECTURE



CAST Architecture's Gallery in Crissy Field, San Francisco is the heart of a proposed public sculpture park and features integrated p.v. skin, rain water harvesting, as well as a rooftop vegetable garden.



GREY DESIGN STUDIO

ABOVE: Grey Design Studio specializes in resin lighting, furniture, and prefab structures for a global clientele.

House. He said, “As past President of the Seattle Chapter of the Northwest EcoBuilding Guild, I helped lobby to bring the Passive House Institute US (www.passivehouse.us) to Seattle for consultant trainings.” He became a Certified Passive House Consultant and serves as President of Passive House Northwest (www.phnw.org) and on the board of the National Passive House Alliance.

The new social networks: Those of us over a certain age will turn up our noses here, but remember, no one under 30 reads a newspaper or listens to NPR. Blog, blog, blog away. The material is not vetted, but it is honest, up to date, and might help find some real work for you or your office. CAST Architecture has maintained a blog since 2009 at www.castarchitecture.com/blog/. Matt Hutchins AIA of CAST Architecture said, “The blog is an informal way to get the word out about recent work and events and to inform the public about various causes that we have taken up, such as

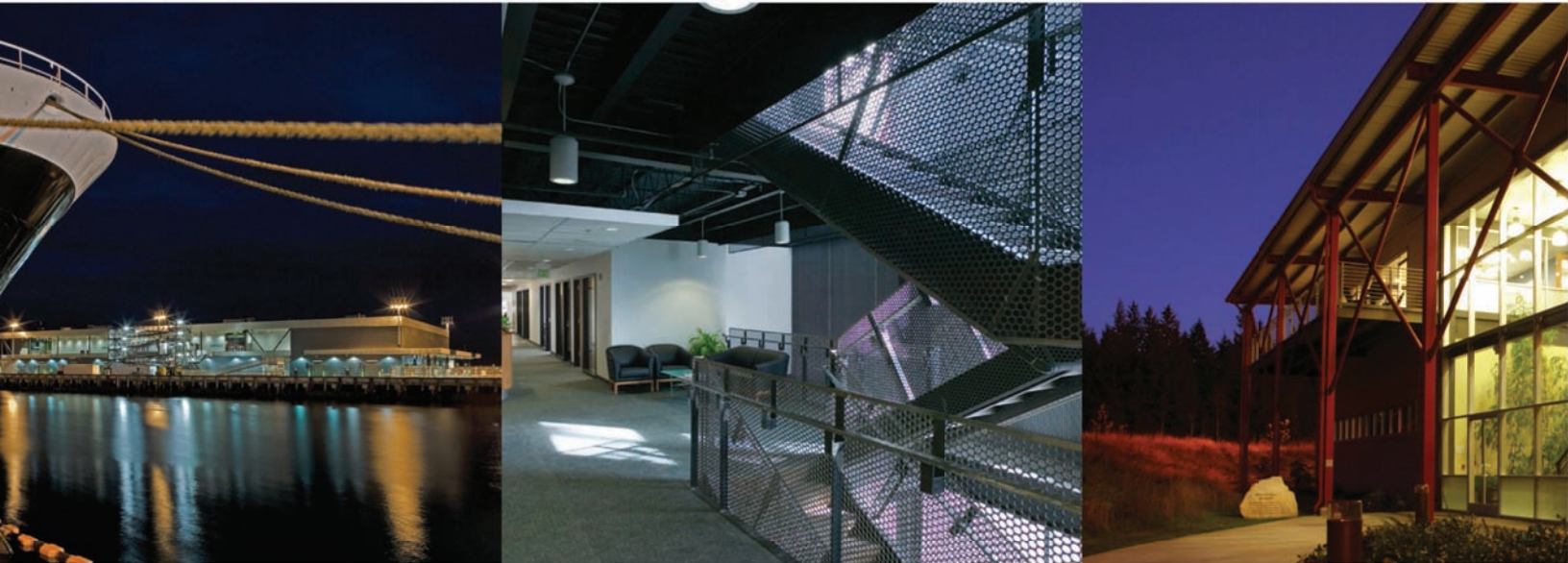
passing the new Multifamily Code, Backyard Cottages, and pro bono design work in general. We also use it to talk about green building topics such as the Living Building Challenge, Passive House, etc. When I meet new clients now, often they have been to the blog and say that it helps them to get beyond the pretty website portfolio to understand the values that drive us as architects.”

Learn new skills: This is obvious; but architects, like all artists and practitioners, get rusty at their craft. Study what you don’t know. Take your own photos, enhance your presentations, polish up your portfolio, keep your website up to date. I make this last point because I’ve seen many sites that haven’t been refreshed in years. Yet clients always go to the web first to find out who you are. Jonathan Junker Assoc. AIA found he enjoyed creating marketing materials for Graypants and telling the firm’s story so much that Graypants now helps other local businesses with branding

COATES DESIGN



Ellis Residence is a LEED Platinum home that builds on Coates Design’s reputation for energy-efficient design solutions that merge modern aesthetic values and sustainable lifestyles.



Patano + Hafermann works in a highly collaborative manner to design projects that utilize available site resources and progressive building technologies to create structures that use as little energy as possible.

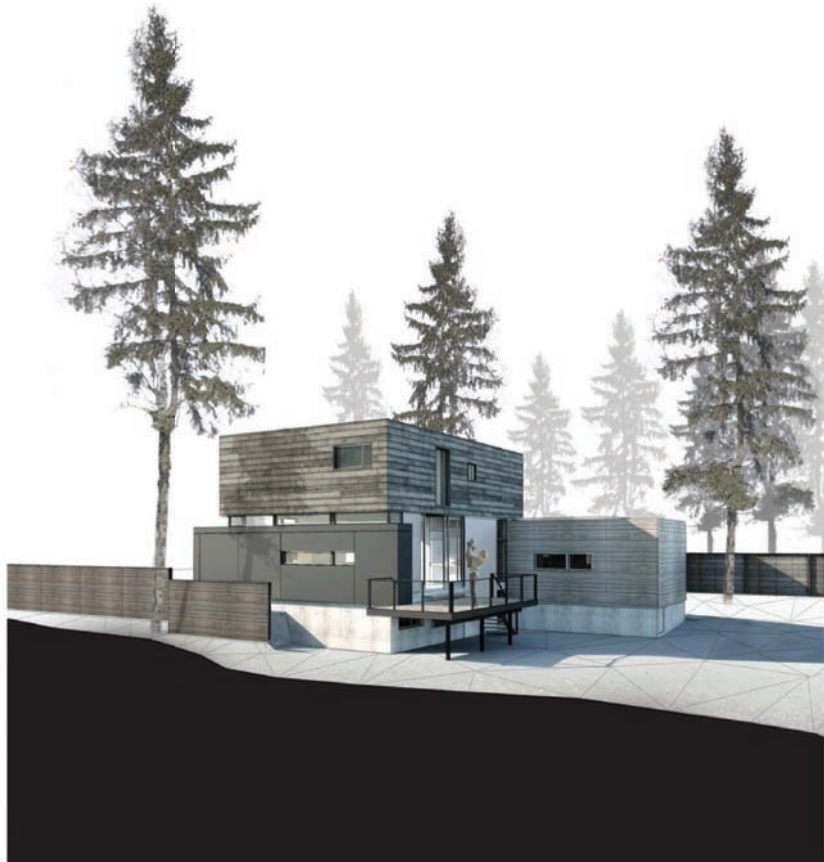
from logo design to ink-free laser-cut business cards. He said, "Small businesses especially have responded robustly to the economic downturn by being extra creative, and there's a wonderful willingness to collaborate and share ideas right now."

Finally, two of the firms from the 2008 New Edge: New Blood exhibit have done an excellent job at seemingly ignoring the recession and moving past it. BUILD LLC has created an inventive and focused blog (www.buildllc.com/blog) with top ten lists and a terrific sense of humor. Several of the comments in this article owe a big thanks to BUILD.

Hybrid is showing us how to do prefabrication by actually building projects, instead of just talking about them. They are managing the construction of one partner's modular house, which was featured in an article in the December 8 issue of the *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce*.

I'm looking forward to seeing what the next two years bring. ■

David Spiker AIA is an architect and urban designer in Seattle.



BLIP DESIGN

ABOVE: Blip Design specializes in remodels and additions as an environmentally responsible and cost effective manner of building that emphasizes reuse and discourages razing and building new, thereby saving energy and natural resources.

Right: MWWorks' Box Loft combines simple forms and a limited palette to convert an outdated single-story home into a bright open loft. It fits carefully into the existing footprint to make the most of limited resources.

MWWORKS