

DESIGN PERSPECTIVES

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Architecture" 1 & 4

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Architectural Photography Icon,
Visits Oklahoma 1 & 9

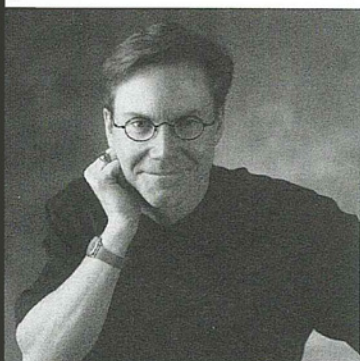
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"A(n Otherwise) Great Year for Architecture"

By BRIAN L. FREESE, AIA
EDITOR

2008 was a great year for architecture in Tulsa.

From April through September, three highly acclaimed Midwestern architects participated in our lecture series entitled "*Hiding In Between: The Architecture of Middle America*", organized by the Young Architects Forum (YAF) of the Eastern Oklahoma chapter. The series was open to the public.

The lectures started in April with **Chris Krager**, of KRDB in Austin, Texas, presenting his firm's work and working methodologies to the chapter. Krager's firm specializes in a design-build dual discipline, and has cranked out an impressive portfolio of handsome modern residences and commercial buildings, as well as smaller residential developments of affordable housing. Krager lamented that today's architects are disengaged from suburban development where our involvement is so desperately needed, and instead the profession's focus is on architecture for the upper economic stratum. His presentation illustrated the possibilities of designing homes that are architecturally distinct yet attractive and affordable to a larger sector of the population. Inexpensive materials and simple shed forms were a common thread in his work.

Randy Brown, FAIA, from Omaha, Nebraska, visited us in July and showed his body of work – a provocative blend of modernized Midwestern forms and edgy Los Angeles chic – revealing his dual influences of the simple farmland structures of his home state and his years in the west coast architectural Mecca of L.A.

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His polished, hip digital presentation accompanied by funky urban electronic tunes was the epitome of cool. Also a constructing architect, Brown urged architects to reclaim our role as builders as well as designers, giving us greater control over the realization of our creations.

In September, Arkansas native **Marlon Blackwell**, AIA, shared his iconic modern interpretations of indigenous Midwest rural buildings. His work is notable for its highly sculpted and hard edged forms layered with meticulously detailed slatted wood screens and exposed supporting structure. His very informal deportment and self deprecating humor personalized his presentation of beautifully crafted homes and buildings. He opened with a story from his childhood (apparently true) in which he and his fellow high school wrestling teammates were prodded by their coach to take on a trained bear, one at a time. He, being the smallest on the team, was the last to wrestle the bear, and the exhausted bear, shall we say, defiled our esteemed architect. We were relieved to learn it had absolutely no influence on his professional development.

This lecture series was a great experience for those who attended and a great success for our YAF members. It was achievement enough to interest these three celebrated architects to travel to our relatively obscure chapter to share their accomplishments. The greater success was that the lecture series delivered the intended message with crystal clarity: that Midwest America is a unique and relevant place requiring uniquely appropriate solutions in the design of its built environment. The buildings and places we design and construct should respond to the unique climate, geography, current culture, and history of *our* place – the Midwest. Once considered irrelevant by the (mainly) east coast architectural intelligentsia, Midwest architects are now beginning to enjoy recognition and national press coverage equal to our coastal peers, largely due to our story of unique relevance being effectively told. This lecture series is one very effective way to tell our story here, in Oklahoma. Our greatest task is educating our clients to the same. Congratulations to our YAF committee for this excellent lecture series.

In October, Tulsa hosted the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** annual conference. The week long event offered multiple continuing education seminars, and a large number of tours around Tulsa and nearby communities to view the many historic buildings in northeast Oklahoma. Attendance was well over 2,000 from around the country and beyond, and by all accounts it was a huge success for Tulsa and eastern Oklahoma. Even though our chapter was not involved in its planning, our member architects were given many opportunities to learn, to see, to discuss, and to be involved in this great and rare event in our city.

Rounding out the year, on November 13, **Joshua Prince-Ramus**, Principal of REX in New York City (formerly OMA, the American branch of the Rotterdam-based Office for Metropolitan Architecture, founded by renowned architect Rem Koolhaas) presented his work to our membership for our 2008 Year End Event. In his presentation, Prince-Ramus staged a brutal attack on the prescriptive, budget-busting ornamental architecture constructed today, pointing a particularly accusing finger at our current celebrity architects. He posited that we American architects have rendered ourselves irrelevant in the development and construction industries by holding dear to our self-anointed role as artists. By doing so, we have robbed ourselves of our rightful role in working

with owner/clients in developing the project programs, goals and budgets, rather than being resigned as we are to receiving that information and then working against it. By inserting ourselves into the earliest project discussions, or if it is too late for that, revisiting and analyzing from our unique point of view the fundamental planning points of a project, we can positively affect the program requirements and consequently improve the opportunities for the architectural design solutions. His projects spoke for themselves. His buildings were beautiful, dominated by strong and sometimes unsettling geometries, and often glowing (and inexpensive) translucent materials. In all projects shown, his firm rather forced itself into an analysis of the project programming phase, and directed the player's conventional thinking towards new and better goals. Though at times overbearing, Prince-Ramus offered thought provoking points that challenged *our* conventional thinking, which is ultimately what we Midwest architects need most.

This was indeed
a great year for
architecture in Tulsa,
except for one thing.
*Where were
the architects?*

At all AIA presentations, the attendance of architects was dismal. We were outnumbered at least four to one by our YAF members, much to their dismay, I might add. *What's up with this?* Have local practicing professionals become so complacent and incurious that we are no longer interested in learning from others unless under the duress of acquiring continuing education points? Here we had a handful of well known architects in town throughout the year, each of whom has achieved a notable level of success in our profession, and their presence was barely acknowledged by our local architects. The lack of interest among our professionals was both palpable and embarrassing. What might this suggest about the quality of work we are producing in our neighborhoods, our city, and our state? Might our disinterest in expanding ourselves and our own potential account for the general lack of understanding and interest among our locals about architecture? This may seem a small matter to many architects, but I am afraid our absence at these events, like silence, speaks volumes.

If I were giving out grades,
I would say to our
Young Architects Forum,
well done, A+.
And to our architects,
we earned an F,
and we need to talk.



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Facilitate unity, fellowship and education among
members; promote the value of AIA architects;
and educate the public on the importance of
good design and its contribution to
the quality of life.

THE MISSION OF THIS PUBLICATION
To communicate, advance and explore
the profession's contribution to the quality
of the built environment.

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