



Not good enough for Government work

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I have mentioned in this column that the AIA is working with Mayor Bloomberg's office to introduce a design excellence program for interiors, and in particular for workplace design. Over the past few months we have assembled a stellar team consisting of representatives of four firms: Perkins+Will (my own firm), Mancini Duffy, Gensler, and HLW. It has been an interesting collaboration because it requires firms who normally are competing against each other to cooperate and to trust each other. One of the first things that have become apparent is that in order to participate we have all had to put our own proprietary information together to make a meaningful presentation. This has caused some difficulties; firms amass intellectual capital, both in their methodologies for working and in the actual content of the work itself. Sharing this with others is a risky proposition, and yet for the most part we have managed to get beyond that in order to accomplish the larger goals of helping to improve the physical environment for city workers.

An interesting byproduct of this has been to see how similar our approaches are, and how we are all seeing similar trends in the industry. The workplace is becoming more compact, more adaptable, more sustainable, more wired, and more open. Corporate America is on a trajectory that has been pioneered by some early adopters, and that is now becoming the norm for large scale users.

In tandem with the effort to bring design excellence to interior projects for the City of New York, the Center for Architecture in Manhattan opened the show, Architecture: Inside/Out, on Wednesday, September 19. The show brought together many examples of interiors that moved seamlessly from inside to outside and back, and many of them illustrated the trends that we have uncovered in our work on the design excellence initiative. The exhibit, curated by Lois Weinthal from Parsons, showcased work from the United States, Japan, Spain, Canada, and England, and it cuts across project types to include examples of retail, hospitality, institutional and workplace design. Some of the projects have been published before, but the photos and text had been focused on the exterior design, whereas here the emphasis is on the interior. What makes these spaces special transcends national boundaries and project type. Common threads are creative uses of natural and artificial lighting, innovative thinking about color and materials, sustainability, and a fresh approach to technology.

The show also has associated programming: on Saturday, October 27 there will be a symposium (also at the Center for Architecture) that will include two panels. The first will look at the different disciplines of architecture, interior design, and interior decorating. We thought about calling it "Turf Wars," because there are tensions inherent in the ways in which each field regards itself in relation to the others. As someone who is an architect who practices interior design, I understand in a very personal way the ins and outs of some of these collisions between factions. The second panel ("Cross Dressers?") will include practitioners who feel comfortable in more than one discipline. Some of them, by blurring the distinctions between fields, end up working in a landscape that is

completely new and distinct.

Although many members of the AIA practice interior design, I believe this is the first time that we have had exhibits and programming with interior design as the sole topic at the AIA headquarters. I am looking forward to both events, and hope that I will see you all there!

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