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GENERAL INFORMATION: INFO@ARCHPAPER.COM
EDITORIAL: EDITOR@ARCHPAPER.COM
ADVERTISING: DDARLING@ARCHPAPER.COM
SUBSCRIPTION: SUBSCRIBE@ARCHPAPER.COM
REPRINTS: REPRINTS@PARSINTL.COM

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WHY AIRBNB SHOULD HELP SAVE AN ICON

If I had to guess, I would say that it has been forty years since Columbus, Indiana, was the hot topic of cocktail conversations at design-related get-togethers in New York City. In those days, it was the supercharged patronage of industrialist J. Irwin Miller and his relationships with designers like Eero Saarinen and Alexander Girard that spurred a wave of innovative and provocative architecture in the small Midwestern town. Columbus, with a population of 45,000, has a Robert Venturi fire station, a John Johansen school, a park by Michael Van Valkenburgh, and several buildings by Eliel and Eero Saarinen, including the younger’s iconic Miller House.

However, Columbus is once again in the spotlight. *Exhibit Columbus* is an ongoing initiative that launched September 29 with a symposium that will set the stage for a large public design exhibition in 2017. Exhibit organizer Richard McCoy, with the assistance of local patrons and leaders such as president of the Wallace Foundation Will Miller, designer Jonathan Nesci, architect Louis Joyner, educator T. Kelly Wilson, and archivist Tricia Gilson, has built a local movement and amassed a group of world-class designers—Aranda/Lasch, Baumgartner + Uriu, Rachel Hayes, Höweler+Yoon, IKD, Ball-Nogues Studio, Johnston Marklee, Jonathan Olivares Design Research, Oyler Wu Collaborative, Plan B Architecture & Urbanism, and studio:indigenous—that are competing for the inaugural Miller Prize, an unusual head-to-head competition where ten teams will make site-specific installations for five sites in Columbus. Five will win the battle and build their proposals fall 2017.

All of this attention has once again launched Columbus into the design consciousness. Many people are excited to see what the 2017 exhibition will bring. In parallel, there is another incredible opportunity in Columbus that could build on this momentum.

With renewed interest in the town, which thrives off of architectural tourism, the hospitality industry is booming. Notably, however there are few Airbnb properties. A cursory search for a weekend in October returns only three listings, none of which are downtown where all of the action is. This matters because young tourists are looking for more exciting lodging options than a regular hotel. What would alternative lodging look like in Columbus today?

There is a venue that would be perfect. The Cummins Occupational Health Association (COHA) was one of the most innovative buildings in Columbus, but it is now under threat because its owner, Cummins Inc., has no use for it. Originally completed in 1973 by Hugh Hardy of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, this late modernist, high-tech building is one of Columbus’s best-kept secrets. Its colorful, highly expressive exposed building systems celebrate building technology with mannerist exuberance. The spacious open plan is choreographed by a ramp that animates the space and was a revolutionary new way of building healthcare facilities in the 1970s. However, this ramp may render it inflexible for healthcare-related adaptive reuse in today’s world.

So what is the appropriate new life for COHA? One possibility would be lofts or student housing. While the town may not have the market for this typology, there might be another solution. If Airbnb bought the building, it could turn it into a cluster of rentals (like a hotel) that would be rentable on Airbnb, and could piggyback off of its collaboration with Japanese architect Go Hasegawa in the Japanese village Yoshino. This project, Sugi No Ie (Yoshino Cedar House), acts as both a rental unit and community center for visitors and is owned by local community groups, thus giving back to the town and offering a community-based experience for travelers.

In this model, the town would own the space, and rent it out on Airbnb. Proceeds could benefit the Heritage Fund, which is invested in the preservation of the architecture through Landmark Columbus. Airbnb would be helping to preserve modern design.

The COHA building is perfect for this model. It needs a patron, and there is no cut-and-dry reuse for it. How cool would it be to stay or live in a radical, 1970s doctor’s office? Artists or designers could get long-term rentals, while visitors could stay for the night. It would take a visionary company like Airbnb that values design to revitalize this space into one of the world’s best design destination hotels. The company would be a hero. Let’s hope it can make this dream a reality.

MATT SHAW

NICE GRID!
I just wanted to tell you that the “Relational Water Landscapes” grid in the current issue (AN05_10.12.16) is ingenious. A brilliant way of putting so many disparate projects in context.

FRED A. BERNSTEIN,
NEW YORK, NY

HOLY TRINITY!
Trinity Church Wall Street, located in New York’s Financial District, has released its proposal for a new Parish Center at 74 Trinity Place. Designed by New Haven-based studio Pellli Clarke Pellli, the building will rise

to 26 stories and will offer offices, a gym, a cafe, a gallery, and a children’s area as well as spaces for education, performances, and community activities.

The Parish Center will be at the building’s base and the first nine floors will accommodate most of the programming. The remaining

AN UPDATED FLOODPLAIN MAP MAY CAUSE ISSUES FOR WATER STREET’S NEW DEVELOPMENTS

KEEPING AHEAD ABOVE WATER

Since the June approval of the controversial Water Street Upgrades Text Amendment, which opened up 110,000 square feet of underused, privately owned public space (POPS) for commercial use in exchange for community benefits, a snag has emerged: This same area is now included in the 2016 New York City Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) and developers will be held responsible for making sure new structures comply with the updated building requirements.

The Water Street Upgrades Text amendment applied to 17 buildings in the area enclosed by Pearl, South William, Fulton, South, and Whitehall streets. While opponents to the amendment believed it favored developers overmuch—it turns these POPS into more than 2.5 million square feet of potentially rentable space—it’s now looking less that way. In early October, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released new requirements for areas affected by flooding, expanding the number of areas needing flood insurance and requiring additional building specifications.

It is important to note that there are many areas in New York City, and in numerous other cities, that will be affected by the updated FIRMs—which have been in the works since 2008. The previous FIRMs were issued in 1983, and, over the past 36 years, the elevations identified as being in flood hazard zones have shifted across the United States. After receiving the new FIRMs, Mayor Bill de Blasio looked to the American Society of Civil Engineers, which develops the standards for many of New York City’s building and construction rules. The society recommended that New York City adopt the flood regulations issued by FEMA.

“The need for flood-proofing has been long understood,” said Jessica Lappin, president of the Alliance for Downtown New York. “What people are waiting on is clarity as to what the approved standards might be. Property owners along Water Street will make their own decisions about whether to take advantage of the changes once the impact of the regulations is clear. We do not think the costs of even the most demanding resiliency standards will deter anyone who believes the fundamentals of the plan make sense for them in the long term.”

Currently, the most obvious issue is how property owners will reconcile the new building requirement that storefronts must withstand floods as high as 12 feet with a previous law that specifies storefronts must also be made largely of glass. An easy solution would be to use aquarium glass—but the material’s high cost may deter developers from building. Might we suggest a new downtown aquarium? **OLIVIA MARTIN**

stories will be used for commercial purposes, supplying 160,000 square feet of office space. Building plans are currently pending approval. Groundbreaking is currently scheduled for early 2017, with completion due for 2019.