

## **ARCATspecNEWS No. 6 - Early November 2006**

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### **TEACHING STUDENTS SPECS**

Teaching specs at Harvard! This fall Toshiko Mori, Chair of the Department of Architecture at Harvard University, invited me to teach a course called Architectural Specifications in their Graduate School of Design. The course hadn't been taught before at Harvard, but she wanted students to have the opportunity to take courses which bridge the gap between academia and practice. Students have a chance to preview classes before they sign-up, and I guess I made the grade as 19 graduate students registered.

Would students in the Masters of Architecture program be interested in specification writing, product selection, navigating product websites, CSI Masterformat, green specs, specs and BIM? Half-way through the semester, the answer is a resounding YES! In one interactive class, each student wrote an outline specification section using the ARCAT outline spec - which opened a pandora's box of the reasons for selecting one material or option over another. It's very heartening for me to know that newly-minted Masters of Architecture graduates will have some of the tools they need to communicate with the specwriters and building professionals they'll meet as they enter practice.

### **EDUCATION AND PRACTICE FORUM**

And then this past weekend there was a unique Education and Practice Forum at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, held to celebrate Harry Cobb's 80th Birthday. Practitioners, professors and several hundred students poised for a discussion on Architectural History and Theory, and on Technology and Culture. A panel of legends presented their views: Harry Cobb, Rafael Moneo, Mack Scogin, Jorge Silvetti, Toshiko Mori, Gerry McCue, Guy Nordenson, Peter Eisenman, Michael Hays and Jeff Kipnis.

Should design be driven by culture or theory? Will architects be necessary for function-driven buildings like hospitals and prisons? Do engineering and technology threaten architecture with annihilation? Are we at the end of an era in architecture, with the new avant-garde not yet apparent? What is the authentic use for brick?

Every project must have a form-giver. Rafael Moneo cares deeply that design be informed with the cultural knowledge of the people who will use the building, and worries that architecture is at risk of collapsing into the 'every-day.' Peter Eisenman believes that merchandizing theory is killing architecture and prevents the 'close attention' that used to be at the heart of architectural design. ("How can a designer punctuate their architecture if they can't punctuate a sentence?" - Eisenman) Harry Cobb stated that architecture must be value-based, not knowledge-based; and that a complex world creates more, not less, design opportunities. Guy Nordenson views architecture as a synthesis of sustainability, the urban fabric and technology. Toshiko Mori believes that it is irresponsible for architects to sit back and ignore sustainability in their designs.

And what about the spec writer? At least one of the panelists mentioned the specification writer as part of the design team, and the importance of selecting and using building products appropriately. As used by the engineering firm ARUP, "Total Architecture" means every member of the team must add value to the architecture of the project. Jump on board, the profession is getting really interesting!

## HOT TOPICS AT BUILD BOSTON

FYI, with 225 seminars being offered at Build Boston in mid-November, the hottest of the hot topics for architects are: BIM in architectural practice, the Construction Outlook for 2007, Building Science, Specs for the Exterior Envelope, Harvard's 12 LEED projects, Innovations in Smart Growth Housing, Architectural Photography, Sustainable Design, and the new Massachusetts Building Code. Registration for the seminars is at an all-time high!

## SCIP MEMBERS OFFER SEMINARS

Need a speaker for an in-house office seminar on specs, Masterformat or building products? Contact a member of Specifications Consultants in Independent Practice (SCIP) at [www.scip.com](http://www.scip.com). Many members regularly put on in-house seminars at no cost. (And don't get the website wrong by typing [scip.org](http://scip.org). That's the Society for Competitive Information Professionals (ie spies))

## THE NO. 1 MASTER SPECIFICATION

Speakers at the recent CSI Academies and our firm's research confirm that the most widely used Master Specification in the United States is the 'Office Master.' Despite the availability of commercial master specifications systems for governmental and private work, the ubiquitous Office Master leads the pack. While the Office Master is really just a compilation specs from recent projects, frequently out of date, and has no gatekeeper, there are four reasons why its used: Commercial master specification products are expensive, the 'office

master' is readily available in electronic form, the architect/specwriter knows what products are in each section, and finally - the project hasn't been built yet and nothing has gone wrong because of the spec.

## PERFECT MATERIAL FOR PREDICTING WEATHER FOUND



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