

The 1999 P/A Awards



An overture for a new century

This year, on the brink of the millennium, the P/A Awards offer proof that modernism has weathered a generation of growing pains, and is all the stronger for it. "Modern" implies more diversity than dogmatists of years past could have imagined: Today no one can claim a monopoly on good design. The array of projects shown here, selected by a jury of five (right), emerged during two days of judging that saw remarkably little dissent. Eclecticism prevailed over orthodoxy: Most were as comfortable with Shim-Sutcliffe Architects' "sophisticated hut"—a boathouse with a heavy timber wrapper—as they were with a cantilevered steel-and-glass office tower by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The reductive yet craftsmanly esthetic of a wood boathouse by Vincent James Associates shared space at the jurors' table with Sharples Holden Pasquarelli's museum, whose undulated glass facade evokes the sensuality of the human body.

Many but not all of the ideological and stylistic debates that once polarized the profession have become less divisive. Explicitly traditional work remains—as it has been for years—a tough sell to the P/A Awards jury, which often considered the historicist work they reviewed more nostalgic than rigorous. But when they encountered projects that both sustain and reinterpret traditional construction, they had no fears that rigor might succumb to sentiment: The roofs on Andrews/LeBlanc's vernacular houses—architectural scuppers—embodied, at least rhetorically, the functionalist credos in which each juror had been schooled. These heroically scaled downspouts seemed to validate the architects' foray into tradition. In other projects, the jurors showed that figurative plans, if not elevations, have earned legitimacy in modern design. They praised Office dA's proposal to convert an obsolete defense plant into a new town center with figural spaces scaled to suburbia's car culture.

None of the prizewinning designs are utterly new. They need not be: Several of the best projects—at once inventive and multivalent—are recombinations of modernist elements. Office dA's house in Bilbao, Spain, is exemplary, a synthesis of the 19th century's pochéd figural rooms and the free plan pioneered in the early 20th century. Thomas Phifer and Partners' house in the Hudson Valley is another noteworthy hybrid: Like the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, it is a lucid structure of steel and glass, yet its massing, a pavilion on a plinth, borrows as much from beaux arts classicism as it does from Miesian country houses.

Buildings like these do not overhaul modernism; they mine it. Their architects plumb correspondences latent in the work of their precursors to propose combinations once thought untenable. Intelligent recombinations, such as this year's P/A winners, are the work of modernism's excavators—architects enlarging its foundation for the century ahead.

PHILIP ARCIDI

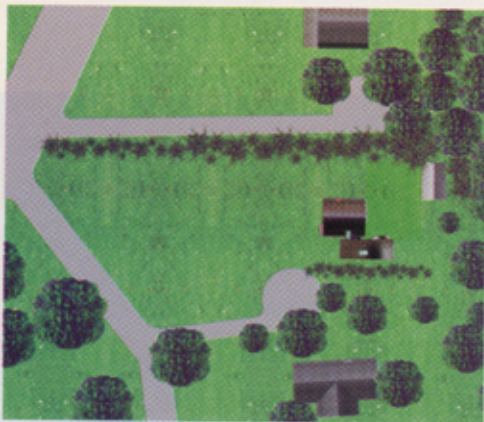
Rodolfo Machado

has been principal of Boston-based Machado and Silvetti Associates with partner Jorge Silvetti since 1974. Born in Argentina, Machado received his diploma in architecture from the University of Buenos Aires and later a master of architecture from the University of California at Berkeley. He is currently professor in practice of architecture and urban design at Harvard University. Machado has also taught at Carnegie Mellon University; the Rhode Island School of Design, where he was chair of the department of architecture from 1978 until 1986; the University of Virginia; and Yale, Princeton, and Rice Universities. Machado and Silvetti has received eight Progressive Architecture awards and citations, as well as three awards from the American Institute of Architects and in 1991, the First Award in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Cho Slade Architecture

Von Erlach House Addition

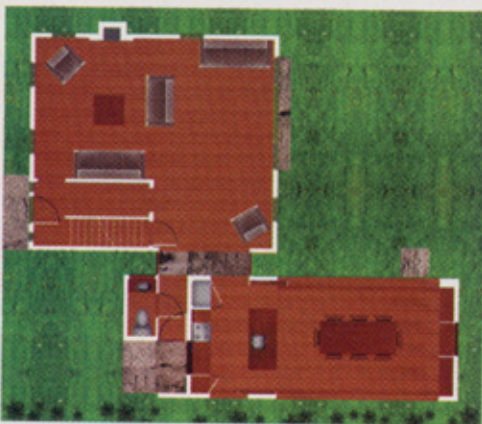
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Site plan



Second-floor plan



First-floor plan | 10'/3m

CLIENT: Alex and Sancha von Erlach
ARCHITECT: Cho Slade Architecture, New York City—Minsuk Cho, James Slade (principals)
ENGINEERS: Gilsanz, Murray, Steficek (structural)
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Rich Tupper
COST: \$130,000

PROJECT: Von Erlach House Addition, Shelter Island, New York

SITE: A two-story, 1860s shingle house on a 1.3-acre lot in a residential neighborhood used largely by vacationers.

PROGRAM: An addition to a weekend house. Dining area, kitchen, three bathrooms, main bedroom, and study in addition; existing house to be renovated into living area and bedrooms.

SOLUTION: Clad and roofed in cedar shingle, the 1000-square-foot addition is a two-floor box inflected to alternately emphasize and minimize the relation between inside and outside. In the plywood-finished, first-floor dining area, a west wall of sliding glass panels opens the interior to a yard; a north window frames a view of the forest; a waist-high east window restricts the view of the house next door. Upstairs, the addition comprises discrete rooms, including a study that captures distant views of water and a main bedroom whose coved gypsum-and-plaster surfaces accentuate its isolation from the household.

Tsien: The graphics are so startling. It's one of the few successful computer renderings, because it has a sense of humor about itself.

Machado: They're good.

Jiricna: I don't see that it's very funny. I find it quite heavy. Doesn't it worry you to have no elements that kind of fight each other?

Yazdani: But look at the existing building; it has tension. I wish the addition had left those curves behind.



South elevation



North-south section



East elevation

Fisher: Look what the architect does here; the floor bulges out and becomes a glass plate. In other words, it's a lighting device.

Machado: It's a window.

Fisher: You bring light up into the room. In New England you find a lot of houses that are slightly failing structurally; they have these walls that bulge out. This project has this echo of degradation to it, which I think is quite in keeping with old shingle-style houses.