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## Places

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On the Waterfront

## River Renaissance and Waterfront Awareness



These Forum pages were produced under an agreement between *Places/Design History* Foundation and the American Institute of Architects. They report on the AIA Committee on Design's (COD) 2007 conferences in Miami and Minneapolis. Michael Ross, FAIA, served as AIA COD Chair in 2007. Roberto Espejo was the Conference Chair in Miami, and Tim Carl, AIA, was the Conference Chair in Minneapolis.

In 2008, the COD conferences will take place in Detroit/Cranbrook (April 3-6, 2008) and Copenhagen/Denmark (August 31-September 3, 2008). The venues were chosen because they are important centers for the design of everything from automobiles to housewares. During the conferences we will meet with designers in many different fields to explore how their understandings of design may reinvigorate our roles as architects. An AIA COD Ideas Competition for the design of a home within an automobile will be held before the April Conference, and will be open to all.

For more information about this and other AIA COD programs, go to [www.aia.org/cod](http://www.aia.org/cod).

This year marks the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the American Institute of Architects. All year, events have celebrated American architecture and attempted to offer a blueprint for the country's future. Commensurate with this theme, the Committee on Design (COD) focused on the rejuvenation of American cities on the water, organizing two design conferences and an ideas competition to examine the creative interface between waterfront redevelopment and architectural place-making.

Historically, rivers and coastal waterways were the liquid highways of American commerce, carrying people and goods from the heartland to the coasts, and across the seas to Europe and Asia. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, waterways were essential to American business and culture.

In 2007 the AIA COD presented a tale of two cities: Miami and Minneapolis. While different in many ways, they have parallel histories: both cities were centers of commerce in the early twentieth century; both had waterfronts that later declined and

deteriorated; and both are now bustling cultural centers driving a design and development renaissance in the twenty-first century.

What convergence of factors made this possible? One could name enlightened political leaders, active AIA component presidents, dynamic cultural institutions, and informed and generous donors. But talented, risk-taking architects have also helped catapult Miami and Minneapolis into the forefront of design excellence.

Miami today is a true cultural hub, home to migrants from Cuba, Central and South America. The city is fast paced, colorful, raw and new: think *Miami Vice* (the movie and the TV series) and the Miami Heat basketball team. Minnesota was settled in the nineteenth century by farmers from Scandinavia—hard-working, god-fearing people: think *Fargo*, the movie, and Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic*. But don't forget the state was also the birthplace of Bob Dylan, Prince, and the Target Corporation. It may be cold in Minneapolis, but the city has a long history of embracing the visual and performing arts.



## Miami Waterfront

From these geographically and demographically disparate places we are seeing an explosion of design and a celebration of the arts on the water's edge. Transforming a decaying industrial waterfront into a vibrant cultural gathering place requires time, money, and the passion and commitment of visionary political leaders. One such figure, Miami's Mayor Manny Diaz, welcomed us at City Hall and outlined his ongoing efforts to transform the

**Previous:** The Guthrie Theater has transformed the Minneapolis riverfront as a place. Photo by Margaret McCurry, FAIA.

**Above:** Aerial view of the Carnival Performing Arts Center on Miami's Biscayne Bay waterfront. Photo by Paul Morris, courtesy of Morphoto and the AIA.

city. These include the "Miami 21" overhaul of the city's zoning code to encourage development, the creation of an art and culture complex overlooking Biscayne Bay, and a landmark sustainable design program to make the city one of the greenest in the country.

The art and culture complex will be situated in Bicentennial Park, master-planned by Alex Cooper of Cooper-Robertson. The park's concept brings together flora, fauna, and water works to create a major public space to be framed by the Miami Art Museum (MAM) and the Miami Museum of Science (MMS). Terry Riley relocated from New York's Museum of Modern Art to serve as Director of MAM and help achieve this vision. Both he and Gillian Thomas, President of MMS,

believe design innovation should be a key criterion in architect selection. Riley has selected the Pritzker Prize-winning Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron; Thomas has selected Grimshaw Architects of London. Now the challenge will be to create individual works that respect and complement each other. We will watch with keen interest as the process unfolds.

While in Miami we had tours of the new Federal Courthouse, led by Laurinda Spear of Arquitectonica; high-rise mixed-use complexes by Kohn Pederson Fox and Chad Oppenheim; and the Carnival Performing Arts Center by Cesar Pelli. We also learned about the history of Miami on a boat tour with Paul George, Ph.D. From the water, we could better see the evolution and growth of the city



and appreciate the contrast between Miami Beach's Art Deco District and the stunning new American Airlines Arena by Arquitectonica.

### Minneapolis Riverfront

The great Mississippi River begins three hundred miles north of the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. It was the natural power of St. Anthony Falls that led to their birth in the 1800s. From 1880 to 1930 Minneapolis was the flour milling capital of the world. Today it produces no flour whatsoever.

For the last thirty years enlightened citizens, political leaders, and dedicated architects have been working to envision the transformation of both cities' waterfronts. In Minneapolis, the Mill City Museum

by Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle won a 2005 national AIA design award and brought attention to the possibilities of its waterfront. Mixed-use complexes and restaurants have also helped revitalize it, but the recent addition of the Guthrie Theater, designed by Jean Nouvel, has truly transformed it as a place.

Joe Dowling, Artistic Director of the Guthrie Theater, gave an impassioned and inspiring talk to COD attendees. He was joined by Tom DeAngelo, Executive Architect of the Architectural Alliance, and John Pfeffer, General Contractor of McGough Companies. Dowling, an enlightened client with a clear vision of the performing arts in Minneapolis, explained how the decision was reached to replace the original Ralph

Rapson-designed Guthrie Theater of 1963. The new structure would house three venues: a thrust stage (as in the old building), a more traditional proscenium stage, and a black box theater.

"We wanted an iconic building," Dowling explained. But, originally, he rejected Nouvel's idea of raising the three theaters eighty feet off the ground so theater-goers would gain views of the river. To convince Dowling, the architect rented a "cherry picker" to lift them to the suggested height. It was there, with just the two of them in the small

**Above:** The Bigelow Chapel was one of several highly refined works by lesser known regional architects on the tour. Photo by Michael Ross, FAIA. Inset photo by Photo by Paul Warchol.

mechanical basket and the river spread beneath them, that Dowling changed his mind. The resulting building is stunning both as a riverfront icon and a complex of spaces.

We also visited the Walker Art Center addition designed by Herzog & de Meuron (with John Cook of HGA as Executive Architect) and the Central Library by Cesar Pelli (with Tom Hysell of Architectural Alliance as Executive Architect). Both are extraordinary civic projects.

It was heartening that several smaller projects selected for National AIA Honor Awards were also on our itinerary. These included the Dayton House by Vincent James, the Streeter House by David Salmela, and the Bigelow Chapel by HGA (with Joan Sorrano as design team leader). This refined, carefully crafted work by Minnesota architects was as inspiring as the large cultural institutions designed by architects of international prominence.

### Interface with Academia

In both cities the program integrated academic and practice perspectives. Our Miami visit closed with a thought-provoking panel discussion led by Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Dean of the University of Miami School of Architecture. The discussion focused on the dichotomy between the city's decaying downtown and flourishing waterfront. Bringing cultural richness and dynamic design to all citizens and all neighborhoods also remains a long-term challenge in Miami.

In Minneapolis we closed with a panel discussion among regional architects, led by Tom Fisher, Dean of the University of Minnesota's College of Design. One participant was Ralph Rapson, Dean of the university's School of Architecture



from 1954-1984. Rapson influenced a generation of architects in the region, many of whom were present at the panel discussion. Still spry at ninety-two, Rapson challenged us to integrate planning with architecture and landscape architecture.

### Reflections on Design in Miami and Minneapolis

The "Bilbao" effect is working. Long-range planning has combined with dedicated, talented architects to produce designs that are becoming positive catalysts for change in the urban environment. Our explorations indicated this may be nowhere more apparent than on America's new urban waterfronts.

It is also reassuring to see that academic exploration and architectural practice are informing each other throughout the land. And while international architectural luminaries such as Frank Gehry, Herzog & de Meuron, and Jean Nouvel are creating individual works that attract most of the attention, regional talent is flourishing in

cities such as Miami and Minneapolis. One may hope that enlightened clients, visionary leaders, and talented architects will continue to collaborate to transform American cities.

Michael Franklin Ross, FAIA, Chair 2007 AIA Committee on Design, is principal-in-charge of the Los Angeles office of HGA Architects and Engineers. He has served as Chair of the AIA Los Angeles Design Awards and Chair of the AIA California Council Design Awards. He has contributed more than seventy-five articles to the architectural press, including work for *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architect*, *A+U Architecture & Urbanism*, as well as *LA Architect* and *arcCA*. His is also the author of *Beyond Metabolism: The New Japanese Architecture*, published by McGraw-Hill. He can be reached at [mross@hga.com](mailto:mross@hga.com).

**Above:** The cantilevered entrance to the Walker Art Center addition. Photo by Michael Ross, FAIA.

**Opposite:** View in and view out of the Walker Art Center addition. The original structure is at the back. Top photo from the new sculpture garden by Margaret McCurry, FAIA. Bottom photo by Tom Holden, AIA.