

Welcome

This year, 2008, the Xth International DOCOMOMO conference will take place in the Netherlands where almost twenty years ago DOCOMOMO was formed. The theme of the conference is "The Challenge of Change", and the conference will mostly take place in Rotterdam in the restored Van Nelle Factory, reinvigorated as a 'design factory'. The theme reflects the need for DOCOMOMO International and its members to revisit and reassess the role and goals of the organization.

In more practical terms, we continue to use our website to update you with news on DOCOMOMO events and activities as well as our advocacy efforts. Links to the websites of our chapters where most regional news is reported are also provided. Finally, we have upgraded the site to allow for the on-line payment through PayPal of dues and the purchase of past journals and DOCOMOMO publications.

— Theodore Prudon
President, DOCOMOMO US

Boston City Hall Plaza: A Modern Space for the City Upon a Hill

Hailed by critic Ada Louise Huxtable as "one of the best urban spaces of the 20th century," Boston's often reviled City Hall Plaza faces an uncertain fate. Designed by Kallmann, McKinnell and Wood between 1962 and 1968, the last concerted effort to improve this centerpiece of "the New Boston" fell victim to post-9/11 inter-govern-



The building was constructed using mainly poured-in-place and precast Portland cement. Boston City Hall, Boston, MA. (photo: Chris Brazee)



View across the plaza at night. Boston City Hall, Boston, MA. (photo: Chris Brazee)

mental disputes. In 2006, Mayor Tom Menino announced his intention to sell both the plaza and building to the highest bidder. Over recent months, the monumental City Hall itself has received wide spread support. The Boston Landmarks Commission voted to accept a petition for study (although landmarking is subject to mayoral veto), and a Determination of Eligibility by the far sighted Massachusetts Historical Commission surfaced. In 1991 MHC had determined that City Hall is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and had commented that "the plaza is a significant component of the building."

City Hall Plaza is the latest transformation of the slopes of Boston's colonial city; the succeeding two centuries leveled the hills and filled the coves to form the Boston we know today, including the Plaza's setting. On the Plaza's west, tremendous earth-moving shaved 65 feet off a four-acre mount for Pemberton Square, and nearly as much from Beacon Hill just beyond. To the east, Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market were developed on harbor fill in two separate endeavors eight decades apart. Such extraordinary reshaping of the terrain suggests the challenge—and the precedent—for those in the 20th century who planned the new center for the "City Upon a Hill."

Although it is only a small piece of the 56-acre

Government Center, the 9-1/2-acre plaza occupies the key location, identified in Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960): "Potentially it [the city hall site, historically Scollay Square] could play an even more striking visual role as the central point of the old head of the Boston peninsula, the hub of a whole series of districts...the node of such important paths as Tremont, Cambridge, Court-State, and Sudbury Streets...." The prescriptions for the government center design competition, established by I.M. Pei and Partners' 1960 master plan, retained these roads and opened unexpected views to major landmarks: Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market, Old North Church and the Old State House.

Pei's plaza site essentially excised this fragment of the historic city, defined by existing or rebuilt roads and structures and by thin new buildings along two edges. A half-dozen blocks of solid "ground" became an open "figure," to use the urban design parlance most often applied to



Detail view of the building's sculptural volume. Boston City Hall, Boston, MA. (photo: Chris Brazee)

Nolli's famous map of Rome. But where the prototypical figural space on that map, the Piazza Navona, recalls the ancient "outdoor room" maintained by the surrounding urban "poche," in Boston the new Plaza's boundaries reflect the arbitrariness of the historic urban layout. The north edge plays outward as the former Hanover and Sudbury Streets did; its west side bulges inward in front of the hill; and the 19th-century row to the south sweeps away along old Cornhill Street's path. The resulting space has a non-sheltering, centrifugal character, opening at its corners. KMW "bulked-up" the new City Hall in order to hold down this space more effectively.

In response to the sloping hillside site, KMW crafted a huge warping terrace of brick. High at Cambridge Street and at both sides, it cascades down 20 feet around the building to Congress Street, stopping partway down for an amphitheater and stage on the north. The Plaza rolls right into and through City Hall, where it wraps down one level and up another, as a transposed, symbolic hill for the city. From Dock Square below, one sees the new City Hall astride this three-tiered mound.

cont'd on pg. 10

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Rehabilitation of Bunshaft Designed LBJ Library in Austin



Overall view of LBJ Library. The complex includes the 3-story structure and fountain. University of Texas-Austin, LBJ Library, Austin, TX.
(photo: Catherine Gavin)



Detail of library plaza through construction. LBJ Library, Austin, TX.
(photo: Catherine Gavin)

The 2007 rehabilitation of the University of Texas-Austin's Lyndon Baines Johnson Library designed by Gordon Bunshaft aims to balance conservation with material replacement and new landscape design. Completed in 1971, the library's travertine and terrazzo base has been plagued with material and design performance issues that began shortly after construction. Moisture penetration due to the porous stone and thin building envelope was exacerbated by the intense sun exposure in Austin, which regularly heats the stone to temperatures above 140 degrees. The heavy loads on the plaza also contributed to systematic structural failure which caused the interior spaces of the base to close.

Overland Partners' rehabilitation includes the completed restoration of the tower and ongoing plaza renovations. The tower's travertine required cleaning due to staining from the failure of the sealants, crack repairs, and armature replacement. The stone panels were in good condition overall and only a handful were replaced in kind.

In conjunction with the rehabilitation of the interior spaces of the base, the plaza is being removed to install new waterproofing and larger drains and to reslope the surface. The proposal has evolved over the last two years from the intrusive introduction of an amphitheater to a design by Hargreaves Associates that replaces the three reflecting pools on the east side of the library with small knolls of native plants and trees. All of the original travertine and green terrazzo pavers will be replaced with granite pavers approved by the Texas Historical Commission. Preservationists in Austin note this as a compromise that generally retains the integrity of the original design despite the loss of original material and the single plane of the plaza. The project is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2008 in time to commemorate the legacy of Lady Bird Johnson as well as the centennial anniversary of former President Johnson's birth.

—Catherine Gavin

Boston City Hall Plaza *(cont'd from page 3)*

The Plaza is at its best hosting ice cream and chowder fests, political protests, concerts and sports celebrations. It accommodates tens of thousands, drawn from throughout the region for gatherings that number among the country's most memorable urban events.

It is at the everyday level that the Plaza falls short. Critics observe its inadequate response to the climate, the absence of mid-scale structures and spaces, too little nature, and an overall lack of activity. While design improvements can address such faults, city and federal policies must be supportive and coordinated, which has not always been the case. For instance, KMW's proposed rathskeller was rejected. The subway station was kept in a distant corner. Commercial vendors were banned; a new hotel, nixed. The recessed fountain was shut off, then covered over. Maintenance

has been insufficiently funded. A City Hall designed to welcome the public is now barricaded for security.

Nevertheless, with improvements such as those proposed by the Trust for City Hall Plaza, the Plaza could find continued validity as a great modern space. It opened a crowded, once failing city with a powerful new symbolic center. It became a grand civic forum. It exposes vistas in a city that was characterized by a lack of visible connections. And it symbolically re-creates Boston's defining topographic feature, the hill-sides that greeted the first settlers and became the raw material forming the "City Upon a Hill."

—Gary Wolf