

EVENTS

DETAILS INSIDE for all events, p. 9

ALUMINUM BY DESIGN: JEWELRY TO JETS

Opens March 20

Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum
In conjunction with the exhibit:

- The Dymaxion Dwelling Machine
April 5, 6:30 pm
- Building with Aluminum/Albert Frey
April 30, 6:30 pm
- The Airstream
May 17, 6:30-9:00
- Aluminaire Study Tour
April 28, 10:00-3:00

REDEFINING SUBURBAN STUDIES

March 30-31, Hofstra University

US/ICOMOS 2001 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

April 6-8, Philadelphia

PERCIVAL GOODMAN EXHIBIT

Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery
Columbia University. Ends March 31

IAN BOYD WHITE

Reconstruction and Scientific
Humanism After 1945, April 11, 5:30 pm
Princeton School of Architecture

WOMEN DESIGNERS IN THE US: 1900-2000

Bard Graduate Center. Ends April 8

GIO PONTI: A METAPHYSICAL WORLD

Queens Museum of Art. Ends May 20

MORRIS'S MIAMI

April 26-28, Miami Study Tour
Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum

DOCOMOMO/NY MONTHLY MEETINGS:

First Thursday of every month
6:30 pm at Polshek Partnership or
Gruzen Samton Architects.
E-mail docomomo_ny@hotmail.com
to confirm date and location.

CHATHAM TOWERS: MODERNISM AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

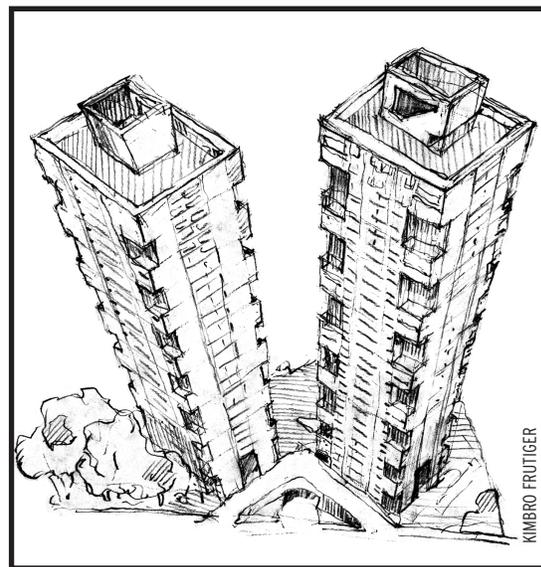
Housing has been both a first step and a final difficulty for Modernism. Its beginnings in villas for the wealthy and apartment blocks for the workers took decades to gel into anything that could be "sold" to the middle classes. Chatham Towers offers an architecturally and socially informative example of the moment in America when it looked like that sale could finally be made.

Chatham Towers, built 1964-65 near lower Manhattan's Foley Square, is one of New York City's few postwar apartment buildings of distinction. The architect, Kelly & Gruzen, typically adopted new styles only after their first emergence, smoothing them out and emphasizing their more sensible and conventionally appealing aspects. At Chatham Towers, this "softening" turned out to be a marketable approach to the angsty intensity of 1960s design, yielding a concrete and glass complex that is striking but not lacerating. With its raw concrete and late Corbusian flourishes at the base and penthouses, the Towers are often described as Brutalist. However their monumental geometry seems just as inflected by Louis Kahn, and their mannered details by the refined late Modernism then being practiced in Boston (TAC, Benjamin Thompson). Further, the visual sincerity prescribed by Brutalism is entirely lacking—the poured-in-place concrete is expressed alternately as volume or plane to meet the demands of the overall sculptural form, and the notched corners are clearly a picturesque mannerism calculated to look good.

"...A MARKETABLE APPROACH TO THE ANGSTY INTENSITY OF OF 1960S DESIGN."

However artificial, the effect of this refinement was to successfully position Chatham Towers as "other" than most of New York's previous modern housing blocks (either low-income projects or overpriced real estate, depending more on location than actual appearance). The attention to proportion and detail gave the whole complex a humane quality that served to advance the goal of its developers: to demonstrate that decent middle-income urban housing could still be built.

Chatham Towers' historical value is due as much to the circumstances of its development as its design. The project was undertaken by the Association for Middle Income Housing (AMIH) in response to financial incentives provided by the Federal Housing Act. AMIH hoped to



set a direction for desirable affordable housing and briefed the architects accordingly. That Chatham Towers was seen as a forward-looking social artifact as much as an architectural one is borne out by a contemporary article in *Progressive Architecture*, which focused on the mechanics of federal programs and urban living more than design. This article says nothing about the possibility that bourgeois aversion to Modern style itself could be a significant factor in the lack of mid-range Modernist housing—it would be several years before that issue irrupted. Still, reading between the lines, Chatham Towers' accomplishment in challenging this resistance is notable, especially since it seems to have been consistently well-regarded over the past 30 years.

Several technical innovations introduced at Chatham Towers demonstrate the degree of invention felt to be necessary to recapture the high ground in housing. These were the first New York high-rise buildings with interior partitions entirely of gypsum board, rather than plaster—certainly a milestone in the city's construction history. The exterior windows are a Swedish design that incorporates a venetian blind between two panes of glass with rounded corners that allow the gasket seals to run unbroken. Surprisingly, the integral window blinds have proved to be repairable and are still in use.

Currently, Chatham Towers is close to its original con-
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IN THE MARKET?

New Resource for Modern Houses and Furnishings:



Emodernhomes.com, an internet marketplace for realtors and sellers of Modern—and alas, “contemporary”—properties, is now online. The site provides images and descriptions of residential properties from all regions of the country for browsing buyers or the simply curious. Emodernhomes.com has only been live since January and the listings are not extensive. However, as awareness of the site spreads it should become a valuable resource for this niche market. The site also provides listings of architects, interior designers and furniture stores aligned with the Modern period.

A small warning: the site is realtor-driven, so along with the bona fide Modern movement work from the correct decades by known-quantity Modernists and their peers are some contemporary homes from the 1980s and possibly 1990s, that realtors are labeling “Modern” and even “International style” simply because they don’t have gables and columns with capitals. Don’t let this deter you. They are easy to spot and take only a second to scroll by.

The site is a spinoff project of *Echoes* magazine publisher Wm. Scott Cheverie. *Echoes* is an architecture+lifestyle magazine covering mid-century Modern style and design launched in 1992. For information about *Echoes* visit www.deco-echoes.com. This site also features an online store for furnishings and books, back issues and interactive classifieds perfect for locating that elusive Eames chair or Russell Wright gravy boat.

Movie Review...continued

soothe his anxious partner. How true. There are always forces ready to dismantle or exploit the successes of civilization for their own purposes: real-estate speculators, Hollywood and the US Supreme Court majority. *Men In Black* is entertaining but annoying. Watch it, then pass the neuralizer.

—Jeff Miles

Chatham Towers...continued

dition, although visible exterior patching demonstrates the difficulty of preserving cast-in-place concrete. The balcony interiors are subject to excessive staining, and some have been painted white. Ongoing work is focused on maintenance of degraded, aging materials, and should not have a detrimental effect on the complex’s public appearance. Of course, Chatham Towers’ legacy was supposed to extend far beyond this

one project to provide momentum for a new era of quality urban housing, and AMIH did go on to develop the trio of I. M. Pei-designed towers on West Houston Street. In the end, however, the potential for widespread Modernist housing for the middle class was frustrated by political changes and by the spread of the nostalgic populist design of the suburbs into urban architecture.
—Kimbri Frutiger

SPRING EVENTS...IN DETAIL

Aluminum by Design: Jewelry to Jets. Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institute, presents the first major museum exhibition to explore the role of aluminum as a catalyst for innovative design. March 20–July 15, 2001. National Design Museum, 2 East 91st Street. For information: (212) 849-8380 or www.si.edu.

The following educational events will be held in conjunction with the Aluminum by Design exhibition:

The Dymaxion Dwelling Machine. James Ashby, Restoration Coordinator, Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village speaks on the restoration of R. Buckminster Fuller’s dream home—a major work-in-progress—within the context of Fuller’s visionary work and ideas. April 5, 6:30 pm

Building with Aluminum. This lecture celebrates the innovative designs of Albert Frey and explores the history of aluminum architecture, from the 19th century to the present. Lecture by Joseph Rosa, author, *Albert Frey, Architect*; Curator, Carnegie Museum of Art. April 30, 6:30 pm

Panel Discussion: **The Airstream.** Designed to “make real an enduring promise of high adventure and far-away lands,” the Airstream trailer has become an American icon. Join us to pay tribute to the culture, history, design, and future of these legendary leisure vehicles. Includes a tour of vintage and prototype trailers, a private exhibition viewing and a reception. May 17, 6:30–9:00 pm

Study Tour: **Aluminaire House**, Long Island. Enjoy a rare opportunity to

explore this modern masterpiece—designed in 1931 by Albert Frey and A. Lawrence Kocher and saved from demolition by the New York Institute of Technology. The tour speaker will be Michael Schwarting, chair, Department of Architecture, NYIT, Central Islip. April 28, 10:00–3:00.

Also from Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum:

Study Tour: **Morris’s Miami.** Experience Miami Beach through the “too much is never enough” architectural lens of Morris Lapidus (1902–2001), recipient of an “American Original” National Design Award. Participants will stay in Lapidus’s luxurious Eden Roc hotel and visit his many Miami landmarks, including the Fontainebleau, Sans Souci, and Americana hotels, the business district of Lincoln Road, as well as exclusive visits to private residences and collections. April 26–28.

For complete details, fee and registration information for all Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum programs call (212) 849-8380.

Redefining Suburban Studies: Searching for a New Paradigm. This inter-disciplinary symposium has sessions that include “Rethinking the Crabgrass Frontier” and “The Ranch House in American Suburbs.” Kenneth T. Jackson will be the speaker at the banquet. March 30–31. Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY. For information: (516) 463-5669

Percival Goodman. An exhibition of the architect’s drawings and photographs of his work from the Avery Architecture and Fine Arts Library collection. Miriam and Ira D. Wallach

Art Gallery, Columbia University. Ends March 31.

US/ICOMOS 2001 International Conference. Managing Change: Sustainable Approaches to the Conservation of the Built Environment. The broad range of issues includes development, design, and technology. April 6–8 at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. For information: www.icomos.org/usicomos

Iain Boyd Whyte, Reconstruction and Scientific Humanism After 1945, a lecture at Princeton University School of Architecture. April 11, 5:30pm

Women Designers in the USA: 1900–2000. An exhibition at Bard Graduate Center, 18 West 86th Street, NYC. Ends April 8.

Gio Ponti: A Metaphysical World. A retrospective of the work of the Milanese architect, the show will look at all aspects of his career. Ponti is best remembered for Pirelli Tower in Milan, designed in the 1950s. During the same period he designed the interiors for Alitalia’s New York office at 666 Fifth Avenue. Queens Museum of Art. For information: (718) 592-9700. Ends May 20

A Century of Design III: 1950–1975. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ends May 27

On the Job: Design and the American Office. National Building Museum (Washington, DC). Ends August 19

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