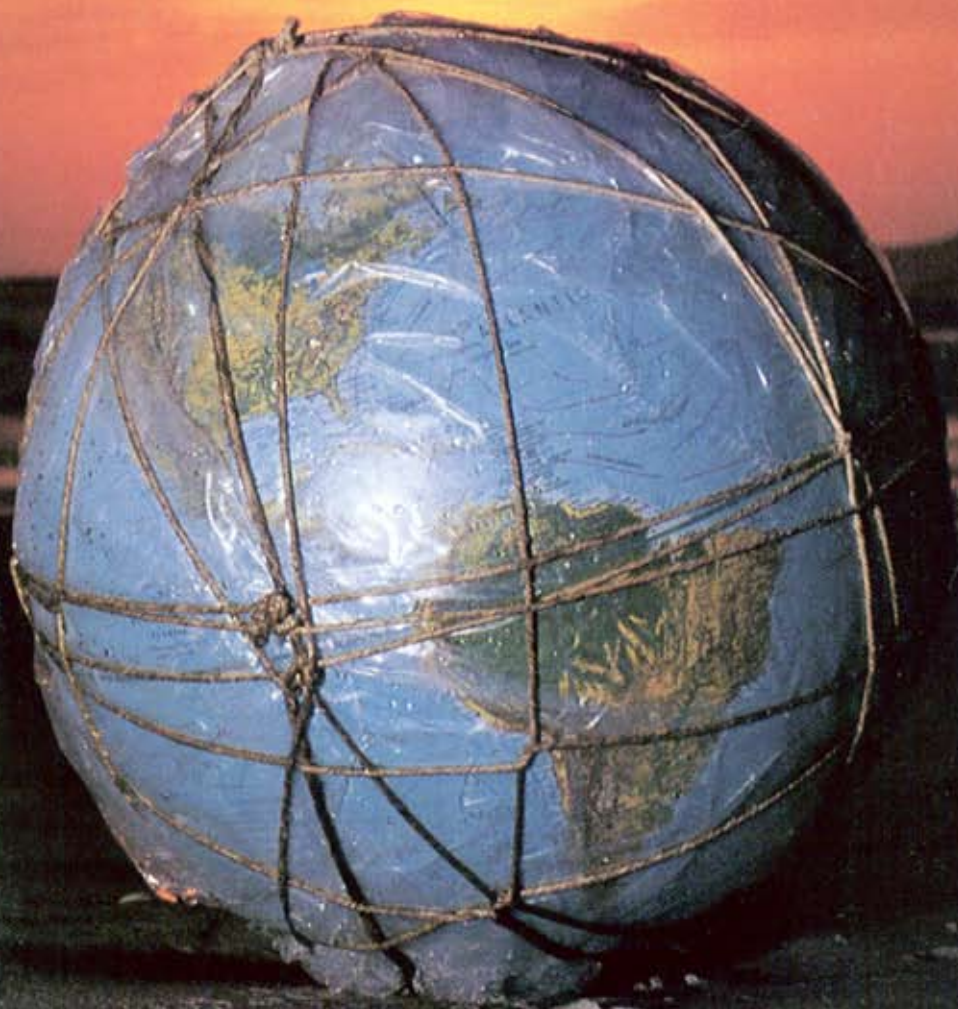


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\$2.50

PLANET OF THE YEAR

TIME



Endangered Earth



*Christie
1988*

BEST OF '88 BEST OF '88 BEST OF '88



A Compelling New Modernism

Avoiding ideology, the year's choices accommodate pizzazz and gravitas

Last summer's well-hyped Museum of Modern Art exhibit devoted to the anxious, determinedly unlikable architecture called deconstructivist was the signal design event of 1988. Not, as its enthusiasts hoped, because it galvanized the profession and fascinated the public, but because it was so anticlimactic, a bust. We have seen architecture's future, and its name is not deconstructivism.

Which is not to say that successful design has turned bland and safe. The best new buildings and products are lively and provocative even as they avoid ideological purity. The compelling modernism of the moment is lush, dreamy and concerned with appropriateness, not big, inhumane and cookie-cutter corporate; successful ersatz-old-fashioned buildings are lately tough and even somber, not merely quaint and pleasant. Hybrids abound, and modesty is a virtue. Tod Williams and Billie Tsien's Long Island pool house, for example, combines industrial materials and delicate details. The Clayton County (Ga.) Library delivers a high concept with a relatively low budget. The finest work, from Washington's restored Union Station to the sleek Ford Probe, accommodates both pizzazz and gravitas.

It is surprising nowadays when decent housing for the working class gets built. Boston's 50-unit Charlestown Navy Yard Rowhouses, designed by William Rawn, are virtually miraculous: cheerful, dignified, altogether grand-looking low-cost housing. The long, low brick structure culminates in a brilliantly fetching waterfront wing—cylindrical, two stories higher than the main body of the structure, with a copper conical top. Equally heartening is the graceful design applied to a humble fertilizer and hay-bale storage shed for a garden center in Raleigh, N.C. Local architect Frank Harmon unapologetically used homely materials (plywood, corrugated fiber glass) but observed lucid symmetries. A row of birthday-candle-like light bollards stands outside, handsome and functional.

A caretaker's cottage, a bathhouse, a lifeguard's tower: those were the modest requirements for Newcastle Beach Park in Bellevue, Wash. The buildings designed by Jones & Jones architects of Seattle manage to be sensible without being banal. They are charmingly appropriate to the region (wooden board and batten exteriors, exaggerated overhanging eaves) without being simply Hansel-and-Gretel-ish. Ann Mullaney's new information kiosks on Paramount



THE 20TH CENTURY UNLIMITED Washington's 1907 Union Station was one of the last magnificent blooms of a florid premodern age, left to decay for a generation. Architects Benjamin Thompson and Harry Weese and their partners balanced accurate restoration (a 200-man crew recreated original colors and gold leaf) with economic realities (shops and restaurants were tucked in).

Pictures' Melrose Avenue studio lot in Los Angeles are also admirably no-nonsense and low-key. They are neoclassical wooden booths with fine detailing, standing-seam copper roofs and all the glitz of a New England farmhouse. When a large corporation suppresses the instinct for overpolished aesthetics, hurrah for Hollywood.

The Sonin distance calculator is a practical device shaped wholly to its purpose. Toys, on the other hand, must maintain a precarious design balance: neither too whimsical and childish looking nor too sober and dull. Texas Instruments' Voyager, designed by the firm of Richardson-Smith, is just right—chunky and merrily colored enough for four-year-olds and glamorous and grown-up enough for eight-year-olds. Through an earphone, a child is quizzed on dinosaurs or the solar system, and through a cockpit-style microphone, he or she gives yes-or-no, true-or-false answers, to which the headset responds with explanations and more questions. The software cassette's big handle and wavy edge declare that it is modular, to be plugged and unplugged. Like all good design, the Voyager elegantly explains itself.

—By Kurt Andersen



WHEELS OF FORTUNE A decade ago, between the clunkiness of K-cars and the flabby ostentation of luxury cars, adults had almost nothing American they could enthusiastically drive. That has changed, thanks largely to Ford. The sleek Ford Probe is the sexier but still decorous sibling of the Taurus. The Probe's aerodynamics is the official rationale for the retractable headlights; indulging the aging-baby-boomer urge for a sports-car gimmick, of course, had absolutely nothing to do with it.



HOW NEAR, HOW FAR Unlike many computerish gadgets, the handsome Sonin is authentically useful. Produced by Sonin Inc. and Pentagram Design/L.D.Works, the sonar device, when pointed at a wall or ceiling, calculates the distance (up to 250 ft.) instantaneously. The swiveling, rolltop-desk-like lid is also an on-off switch.



SPEAKING VOLUMES With its corrugated-steel exterior and wild cubist geometries, the Clayton County Library is the kind of municipal building you'd expect to find only on a drawing board. Yet there it is in suburban Georgia. Architects Mack Scogin, Merrill Elam and Lloyd Bray designed what they call a "K mart for information," part industrial-strength Pee-wee Herman, part scrupulously planned service facility. This is practical, fun-loving avant-gardism.



ARCHITECTURE OF THE FIRST WATER These days, the New York City-based team of Tod Williams and Billie Tsien is designing some of the most original, restrained, precisely conceived buildings in the U.S. Like much of their work, this pool house for an estate on Long Island, N.Y., is severe; the interior is granite, the floor-to-ceiling windows are set in an aluminum grid. But artful details make it serene, not mean. The slender, paired columns are both industrial and delicate, and give scale to the long, narrow room. It is an impeccable space, Miesian in the best sense.