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2008 DESIGN AWARDS

The Value of Good Design

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Recently, something good has been happening in Georgia. Good design has won a few for a change. The Buckhead Library in Atlanta by Mack Scogin Merrill Elam (Scogin Elam & Bray) seems for the moment to be safe, saved by an outcry that was clearly led by the architectural community. This is all the more remarkable when you consider that the building was highly controversial when it was built...excoriated by Buckhead leaders like ex-Atlanta mayor Sam Massell, who didn't appreciate the building's avant-garde design. The building remains controversial in the minds of many because it doesn't conform to conventional ideas of aesthetics, and architects tend to appreciate it more than some others. Nevertheless, even in the face of the controversy, many lay Atlantans got behind the conservation effort and convinced public officials of the value of the building.

The Crum and Forster Building in Atlanta, a wonderful neo-classical (1926) expression by Atlanta architects Ivey & Crook, scheduled for demolition by its new owner, Georgia Tech, now seems sure to be the object of an adaptive reuse rather than demolition. This building might be considered easier to love than the Buckhead Library, at least by some, but it was not many years ago that the wrecking ball would have fallen on such a building without the architectural community having the slightest influence.

Through most of the latter half of the last century, efforts to retain our architectural heritage were almost always doomed by the developers and civic leaders who saw no value to protecting the historic and architectural fabric of our cities. Savannah might be the



best-known exception, and there, it took extraordinary civic leadership to stave off what might have been a devastating loss of great historical buildings.

So, what does this all have to do with our own design awards programs? I'm not sure, but it seems to me that current preservation efforts are resulting from an increasing general concern with and demand for excellence in design. We architects have had a lot to do with that by helping to inform our friends, clients, and the public in general about the value of good design. Our design awards programs are part of that process. We evaluate design and celebrate quality, and then we publicize it, talk about it, focus on it. Design awards are one weapon in our arsenal. They allow us to focus attention on design and to share our passion with others. This can only be good for architecture and for the communities we inhabit. ❖