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BOOKS

Designing Public Consensus: The Civic Theater of Community Participation for Architects, Landscape Architects, Planners, and Urban Designers, by Barbara Faga, FASLA; New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2006; 288 pages, \$70.

Reviewed by Jeff Hou

COMPLEX PUBLIC PROCESS has increasingly become the “inconvenient truth” of contemporary urban design and planning. Conflicts, uncertainties, and competing interests, intensified by media scrutiny, cultural differences, and a multitude of increasingly sophisticated stakeholders, often result in delays if not stalling of projects. Although some participatory techniques are now broadly used in a variety of settings, they are often insufficient in dealing with the new level of complexity in the public arena, which requires new perspectives, knowledge, and sensibility on the part of professionals. It is in this context that *Designing Public Consensus* is timely and informative.

Written by Barbara Faga, FASLA, of EDAA, the book presents a series of case studies that delves into the complexities of contemporary public process. The approach is compelling and refreshing. Rather than generic topics and a listing of universal dos and don'ts, Faga uses narratives of actual projects to highlight and contextualize the specific advice. Her approach reflects a central theme of the book that “every public and every process is so different as to confound any general approach.” The differences require professionals to familiarize themselves with a wider repertoire of techniques and develop a more acute sensitivity toward the nuances of public process.

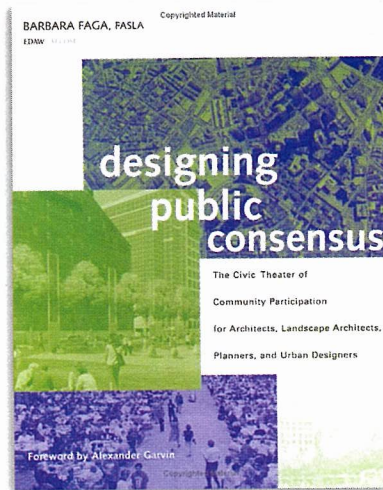
The cases chronicled in the book include some of the most contentious, complex, and high-profile projects in the recent history of American cities. They include the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site after 9/11, the Wharf District Park in Boston, and the public process to revamp the zoning regulations in Chicago. Both corporate projects and civic undertakings are included, such as Disney's America—shut down by antigrowth advocates—and the Vision 2010 for Youngstown, Ohio—a collective visioning exercise for a Rust Belt city. To highlight the growing trends of globalization, cultural diversity, and new technology, the cases include a community improvement project in a Brazilian *favela*, a design workshop in a multicultural neighborhood in San Francisco, and projects that use the latest communication technologies to engage the public.

With testimonies from actual players as well as experienced professionals, the narratives provide a vivid sense of the reality and messiness of public process in the selected cases. Readers can learn from failures and costly mistakes as well as effective tactics and inspiring stories. As the book demonstrates, public process has gone beyond just public meetings or participatory practices in a narrow sense. It involves understanding and navigating the local politics,

building alliances and partnerships, working with the media, communicating with diverse audiences, managing uncertainties, and delivering outcomes. It requires an investment of time and energy, an open mind, and a willingness to collaborate and be proactive.

Recognizing the continued evolution of public process, the book doesn't seek to come up with the last word on the subject. Indeed, some of the topics in the book are in need of further exploration. For example, while rejecting “design by committee” and the traditional mode of design practice, the book doesn't offer alternatives other than recognizing the intersection between creative process and public process. In the case of the World Trade Center site, Faga points out that it is the public that rejects the bland commercialism in the initial proposal. However, she also suggests that public process is not the right setting for producing “bold” or “edgy” designs. The ability of the professionals to engage the public in the creative process remains a challenge and an issue that lies beyond the scope of the book.

With its engaging narratives and practical advice for working with clients, media, politicians, and the “fractious public,” *Designing Public Consensus* is an invaluable resource that will help professionals become more effective in navigating the volatile landscape of public process.



Jeff Hou is an assistant professor of landscape architecture at the University of Washington in Seattle whose research and practice focus on involvement of marginalized communities in planning and design.

A World of Her Own Making: Katharine Smith Reynolds and the Landscape of Reynolda, by Catherine Howett, FASLA; Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007; 396 pages, \$39.95.

Reviewed by Judith B. Tankard

A WORLD OF HER OWN MAKING: *Katharine Smith Reynolds and the Landscape of Reynolda* is a somewhat disappointing book. On the one hand it is a biography of the remarkable woman who was the wife of the tobacco magnate, R. J. Reynolds, and on the other, the story of the design and building in the early 1900s of Reynolda, their 1,000-acre estate in North Carolina. The flow of the narrative is complicated by a surfeit of secondary information. Long digressions, rather than a few pithy paragraphs, on subjects such as the New Woman of the New South, the college that Katharine attended (but mysteriously dropped out of before graduation), the overly familiar impact that Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson made on garden design polemics in general, Wilhelm Miller's trip to England, World War I, and so on are not only distracting, but their specific links to Reynolda are not always clear. Reynolda, in fact, is not introduced until page 123.

The key players in the book are Katharine Smith Reynolds, the

intelligent and well-educated patron who envisioned the immense project; R. J. Reynolds, whose successful business dealings amply underwrote the project, but who otherwise remains a shadowy figure; and Thomas Warren Sears, the brilliant young landscape architect who helped create the magical setting for Reynolda. Katharine was only 22 when she married R. J., a distant cousin who was five years older than her mother. R. J.'s considerable wealth fueled Katharine's imagination for developing a model community that included an experimental farm, an estate, and a workers' village in Winston-Salem. The era's concerns for scientific farming, education, rural beauty, and health all came to a head in Katharine's project. Katharine wielded an unusual amount of power and freedom in conceptualizing and implementing her dream, and while some applaud these achievements from the standpoint of being a woman, one wonders why her success needs to be gender specific.

The family home, a Tuscan-columned “bungalow,” was built in 1912 by Philadelphia architect Charles Barton Keen. Katharine initially hired Buckenham and Miller, a firm of engineers, to produce a master plan, in part because she had admired their work at Duke Farms, the 2,700-acre property in New Jersey. She ultimately found Louis Miller's proposals uninspired and replaced him in 1915 with Sears, a graduate in landscape architecture from Harvard and an early member of ASLA. Sears's plan for the formal garden, discussed in some detail, included four floral parterres, bordered walks, pools, and pergolas (the outlines of which still exist today). The overall effect was expansive and luxurious, but whether the design owed anything to Edwin Lutyens and Jekyll's ideas is questionable. It would be interesting to know what books Katharine had in her library (such as those by Jekyll, Robinson, and Blomfield) and the role they may have played in her ideas about Reynolda.



work at Reynolda. Had it focused more tightly on the actual design and building of Reynolda and the development of its landscape, rather than on an extended biography of the client, the resulting publication would have been more successful.

A wealth of archival images of the estate, in addition to new black-and-white photographs by Carol Betsch, greatly enhances the book. A number of images taken by Sears provide more clues to the estate's development and features that are not specifically addressed in the text. It is a pity that there are no color photographs to capture Reynolda's storybook white buildings with their soft green roof tiles or the mature landscape setting today. The author, Catherine Howett, FASLA, is a distinguished educator, historian, writer, and noted authority on Southern landscapes. She writes with confidence and ease, but one suspects that her prodigious research on Reynolda and Sears was not well served by the publisher.

Judith B. Tankard is a landscape historian living in Massachusetts.

NOTEWORTHY

BRANCUSI'S ENDLESS COLUMN ENSEMBLE, edited by Ernest Beck; London: Scala Publishers Ltd., 2007; 80 pages, \$15.

THIS SLIM, FULL-COLOR volume profiles a modern art sculpture ensemble that was listed by the World Monument Fund (WMF) as one of its 100 Most Endangered Sites in 1996. The book profiles Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi and his creation of the ensemble to commemorate a World War I battle that took place in the Romanian town of Targu Jiu in 1916. The second part of the book discusses the modern restoration of the sculptures. This success story for WMF is meant to be the first book in a series.

TREES OF THE CALIFORNIA LANDSCAPE, by Charles R. Hatch, ASLA; Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007; 540 pages, \$60.

IF MICHAEL DIRR were to produce state-specific versions of his *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, the California edition might look something like this—that's how exhaustively Charles Hatch, ASLA, has chronicled the trees of his home state. Unlike Dirr, Hatch doesn't include shrubs in his tome, but it's packed with useful information and illuminating drawings and photographs. Anyone who practices in California, or intends to, should have a look.

THE SILVER TANAGER, by Jere French, FASLA; Chuckmuckla, Florida: Trent's Prints, 2007; 311 pages, \$12.95.

THE AUTHOR, a landscape architect who has made a number of expeditions into the rain forests of Central and South America, has penned this novel about a foray into the Amazon rain forest in search of a rare bird species. The risks are high, the danger great from deadly snakes and insects, Shining Path guerrillas, Indians, and sinister elements of the expedition itself. The biologist who tells the story must solve a murder—or become the next victim. French hopes that “landscape architects who read it will come away with a lesson or two worth remembering.”