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Jack L. Nasar
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INTRODUCTION

> My work is not about convenience – it is about art. I am not suggesting that people should necessarily live in art – I don't live in art – and I'm not suggesting people ought to live in my architecture – Peter Eisenman, architect (p. 66)[57]

Budgeted for $16 million, the design for the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts at The Ohio State University (OSU) ended up costing almost three times as much. The university architect told me that this design by Peter Eisenman and Richard Trott had "more than the normal amount of startup problems." Robert Stearns, the first director of the center, described it as "expensive to operate . . . (with) serious problem in its use."[196] Within six years of the opening, OSU had to spend an additional $1 million to fix roof leaks. OSU also expects to allocate $5 to $10 million more for a renovation to correct lighting problems interfering with the main function of the facility. The building has had a flood. Yet, the Wexner Center design resulted from a design competition, in which five teams of internationally known architects submitted designs, and a panel of experts selected the Eisenman/Trott design as the best. Critics raved about the design. It won a prestigious award from *Progressive Architecture* magazine, which also devoted an issue to the building.

What is going on here? The Wexner Center illustrates a common phenomenon. The competition-winning building, praised by architects and critics, does not work; and the citizens, whose tax dollars paid for much of it, do not like it.

Millions of people experience architecture and competition architecture daily as occupants or passersby. The public nature of architecture makes it distinct from art, music, literature, or theater, where the audience can freely choose the experience. The public has to live with the buildings. Architecture and design competition architecture should agree with and function for the public. Good design can captivate the viewer, convey meanings about a place, and evoke delight. Too often competition architecture leaves the typical observer baffled and disappointed. (Signature architecture – buildings by famous architects – has a similar outcome.) The reaction highlights a split between two kinds of

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meanings: the high-brow artistic statement intended for the appreciation of other artists and the everyday meanings seen by the public and occupants.

For thousands of years, elite patrons turned to artists to create public symbols. The patrons decided what was uplifting for the public. Although in the U.S. monarchs or popes no longer make those decisions, we do expect someone to make them. In a democratic society, the decisions should come from the people and for the people. This does not occur for competition architecture and for much public architecture. To encourage freedom in the artistic statement, public clients relinquish responsibility to a competition jury and architect. They accept the prejudice that elite judges should select the design and present it "to the public for its enlightenment." (p. 269).[45]

Architects, like other professionals, value peer evaluations with criteria removed from the interests of the client or public. They see architecture primarily "in sacrosanct terms of art" (p. 36).[58] They give the aesthetic standards of the relatively small audience of their peers priority over popular meanings and function for the end user. For much of the twentieth century, modern architecture rejected historical ornamentation and popular meanings as dishonest and bourgeois. Postmodern architecture came to the forefront briefly with an argument for returning to historical forms, but research shows that the public saw no difference between modern and postmodern designs.[90 172] Then came deconstructivism with a revived elitist position – the intent to offend the bourgeois sensibility. The public continues to see the resulting buildings as dysfunctional, hostile, and meaningless.[36 60] This separation of the professional values from those of the public relates to a general phenomenon in academic circles. Theory determines practice, as does deconstructionism in literature, where only professional critics can read certain works or understand their value. Architects, however, have a public responsibility. They require a license to practice. Architecture must consider and have accountability to the public. How can one balance the different perspectives and still get designs that appeal to and work for the public and everyday occupant?

In this book, I present a process for achieving that end. I delve into the importance of meaning and the differences between what appeals to the public and designers. In examining the conflict between these two kinds of meaning, I also touch the broader issue of the clash between democratic and elitist values. In a democracy, design decisions about public architecture should heed citizen reactions. In several studies of Eisenman's competition-winning design for the Wexner Center, I demonstrate and test a democratic method for forecasting meanings conveyed by buildings to the public. This book uses the

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Wexner Center competition as a vehicle for presenting my approach to design competitions.

The method – *prejury evaluation (PJE)* – involves the scientific study of popular opinion about design entries prior to the jury deliberations. PJE fits into a broader cyclical and scientific framework for design, that has three phases.[25 48 316] *Programming* develops a detailed and comprehensive document (called the program, specs or brief) that specifies the project requirements. *Design review* analyzes the plan in light of the program and research to make informed predictions about likely outcomes. It tries to catch and correct faults before they occur. For competitions, PJE represents an important part of design review. *Postoccupancy evaluation (POE)* systematically evaluates the functioning of the facility for the occupants and visitors after building completion and occupancy.[156 231] The information from each phase can improve the performance of the existing place. Used as *predesign research (PDR)*, it can also improve future programs and design reviews.[25 48] This book adapts the framework for managing building appearance and meaning to the public. One develops a visual quality plan (or guidelines for appearance); one forecasts likely public meanings through PJE; and one evaluates the appearance of the completed project to the public in a POE.

Design by Competition has three parts, each of which adds to the picture. Part One provides a background for understanding design competitions. It introduces a central concern: Preliminary evidence shows competition buildings – highly public entities – as flawed for the occupants and passersby who regularly experience them. Although competitions attract publicity, as did the Wexner Center, publicity does not necessarily translate into a successful building. Architects and juries of experts misjudge public response, tending to focus exclusively on the artistic statement and rejecting popular meanings. Not surprisingly, design competitions and signature architecture often yield controversial buildings, disliked by the public. The increased reliance of public bodies around the world on design competitions and the increased costs associated with them add to the magnitude of this public policy concern. Part One discusses these aspects of competitions. It describes potential pros and cons of competitions and presents examples of competition successes and failures. It concludes with two empirical studies of how well competition architecture has stood the test of time, in the eyes of critics, architects, and nonarchitects.

Part Two narrows to the methods and their application in evaluating the performance of the Wexner Center. It describes the way to develop a visual quality plan (or program) for meaning. It describes a PJE, examining popular reactions to the five Wexner entries, and it evaluates

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the PJE in postoccupancy studies that look at how well it, as compared to the jury, did in predicting public evaluations of the completed building. Part Two concludes with a comprehensive POE on how well the Wexner Center works for users and its intended purposes.

In the third part of the book, I formulate a model for running competitions. The model includes programming, a series of steps for managing the jury process, and POE. Part Three goes beyond competitions to discuss other ways to achieve a more democratic architecture. It formulates steps clients, communities, and citizens can take to improve the quality of their designed environment.

The text includes some technical details in sidebars. The appendices also offer technical details. The first appendix evaluates the usefulness, accuracy, and generality of the method used in the PJE. The second appendix reprints interviews with the benefactor and the architects competing in the Wexner Center about competitions and the Wexner Center competition. The third appendix present ancillary tables and figures of statistics from the various studies.

I started the research with one question. How well did one jury's choice reflect popular judgments of competition entries? The findings of that study led to another, which in turn led to another, and to the book you hold in your hand. I had no idea where that first study would lead, but each new finding added to a picture of a better way to deliver public buildings. That picture and this book rest on the premise that one can use scientific research to guide decisions about the meanings conveyed by designs. The cyclical process of programming, design review, and postoccupancy evaluation conforms with this view. It makes the details (or design hypotheses) explicit in the program, tests those hypotheses through systematic empirical observation in the design review, and retests them in the POE. This kind of scientific approach can build a knowledge base for evaluating and improving future designs and competitions for the public.

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1

THE WEXNER CENTER COMPETITION

Eisenman's competition winning design for the Wexner Center is: one of the most eagerly awaited architectural events of the last decade . . . a remarkable structure – Paul Goldberger, *The New York Times* architectural critic[82]

A masterpiece. – Philip Johnson, architect (comment at Wexner opening ceremony)

An amazing facility. – Stanley Tigerman, architect (comment at Wexner opening ceremony)

The design competition for the Wexner Center had a vague program, *ad hoc* criteria used by a jury weighted toward the arts, and a hands-off position by the client toward the designers. As a client, the university stressed publicity. Although each competition has its idiosyncrasies, the Wexner story illustrate qualities of many competitions.

In autumn 1982, OSU's Board of Trustees authorized the competition and provided $150,000 for it.[193] Richard Miller, a faculty member in the School of Architecture at Ohio State, headed the thirteen-member selection committee that identified the five final teams. Designs from his graduate studio in June 1982 helped spur OSU President Ed Jennings to proceed with a competition. According to Miller, the competition would select "the most fitting architectural form for the center" (p. 22).[153] From a list of eighteen state-approved architects, Miller's committee chose nine Ohio firms. It also chose twenty-seven out-of-state firms, seventeen of which answered the invitation to compete. Each out-of-state firm received instructions to team up with an in-state firm. Nine teams did so and submitted their qualifications and credentials. On January 12, 1983, Miller's committee selected five finalists:

Eisenman/Robertson (New York) and Trott & Bean (Columbus)
Arthur Erickson (Vancouver) and Feinkopf, Macioce & Shappa (Columbus)

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Michael Graves (Princeton) and Lorenz & Williams Inc. (Dayton)
Kallmann, McKinnell, and Wood (Boston) and Nitschke Associates (Columbus)
Cesar Pelli & Associates (New Haven) and Dalton, van Dijk, Johnson & Partners (Cleveland)

Each finalist already had an international reputation (see sidebar).

THE COMPETITORS

At fifty-one years old, *Peter Eisenman* had designed a handful of houses, but he had built a reputation of architectural theory challenging conventions through his magazine *Oppositions* and through books, lectures, and his Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), he had received the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in architecture and had held faculty positions at Cambridge University, Cooper Union, Yale University, and, at the time of the competition, Harvard University. He has degrees in architecture from Cornell, Columbia, and Cambridge Universities.

Arthur Erickson (age fifty-nine) won the competition for the Simon Frazer University, near Vancouver, twenty years earlier, and had designed the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 1970 in Montreal. An AIA Fellow, he received gold medals from the Royal Architectural Institute in Canada and the presidential award of excellence from the American Society of Landscape Architects. He has a bachelors of architecture from McGill University.

Michael Graves (age forty-nine) had designed more than twenty buildings, winning eighteen national design awards. He had won the widely publicized competition for the Humana Tower in Louisville, Kentucky. The Museum of Modern Art in New York City had exhibited his work in seven group shows. A Fellow of the AIA, he won the Rome prize from the American Academy in Rome, the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial prize in architecture, and was named the Interior Designer of the Year. He holds degrees in architecture from the University of Cincinnati and Harvard University and had taught at Princeton for twenty-one years.

Bernard Michael Kallmann (age sixty-eight) and *Michael McKinnell* (age forty-eight) had won the national competition for the Boston City Hall in 1962 and several design awards. McKinnell had studied under Kallmann at Columbia University. After the competition, they set up their office with Henry Wood in Boston. They both taught at Harvard University.

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Cesar Pelli (age fifty-one) had degrees in architecture from University of Tucuman (Argentina) and University of Illinois. He worked for Eero Saarinen and Associates and Gruen Associates before becoming Dean of the Yale School of Architecture and setting up his won office in New Haven. His Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles brought his name to national prominence. An AIA Fellow, he had received the Arnold M. Burnner Memorial Prize. More recently he received the Gold Medal of the AIA, and was named to the top ten list of living American Architects.

The university issued a program for the Wexner Center in January 1982.[192] A steering committee of thirty-eight university people met in small groups to develop the initial program. As a participant in these meetings, I noticed that the two facilitators, Jonathan Green (Director of the University Gallery of Fine Art) and Andrew J. Broekema (Dean of the College of the Arts), were interested more in the appearance of a participatory process than in a true participatory process. For example, they disregarded comments by a landscape architect on the importance of the landscape. Green envisioned the site "as a work space and exhibition area for works that range from traditional sculpture to 'earthworks; and land-form art" (p. 19), and envisioned the architecture as "more than functional. It must signify possibility and limitless experience. . . . It must signify to us and future generations a commitment to the broadest notions of experimentation, research and human visual creativity" (p. 20).[89]

The process resulted in a vague program. According to Miller, "neither the program nor the site was proscriptive" (p. 22).[153] Part A of the program described the site and the general characteristics of the building and programs it would house. It allowed the designers to adjust areas and adjacencies. Instead of a specific site, it presented a general territory on the east end of the campus and asked the competitors to choose between two large sites. Part A also indicated some vague goals. It stated that the building should be "an inviting aesthetic statement," "a focal point for the University and the community," "anticipate the directions of the future," "very functional," "dedicated to experimentation and vanguard artistic activity," and "a meeting point for the public and art" (p. 5–6).[192] It gave the designers "the prerogative to review adjacent building" to possibly locate "some of the programmed items into those sites" (p. 5). Part B listed and prioritized spaces along with some minimum descriptions of their characteristics. The description offered little to nothing about the desired character of space and adjacencies,

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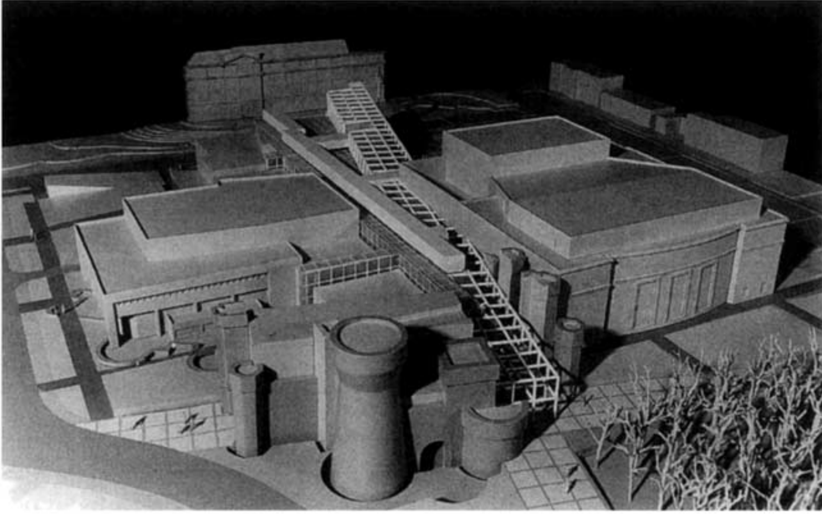

Figure 1.1. Visual Arts Center entry by Peter Eisenman. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.

but it did set a project cost of $16 million. The philanthropist Leslie H. Wexner agreed to give a $10 million gift to the university to help build the center.

The five teams visited campus in February 1983 for a briefing. Miller's committee then recommended a final jury to President Jennings. The jury consisted primarily of artists and architects. Heading the jury was the internationally known architect, Henry N. Cobb, Fellow of the AIA (FAIA) (partner in I. M. Pei & Partners and chairman of the Department of Architecture at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard). Other members included Noverre Musson, AIA (an architect from Columbus, Ohio), Jan van der Marck (director of the Center for the Fine Arts, Miami, Florida), Budd Harris (director of the Columbus Museum of Art), Jonathan Green (Director of the University Gallery), Douglas Davis (senior writer in architecture, photography, and contemporary ideas at *Newsweek*), David Black (professor of art, OSU), Barbara Groseclose (associate professor of art history, OSU), and William J. Griffith (assistant vice-president emeritus of Campus Planning and Space Utilization, OSU). The jury, dominated by avant-garde designers and artists, did not adequately represent the eventual consumers and the public.

In April 1983, the five teams submitted their proposals. Figures 1.1 through 1.5 show the final entries by Peter Eisenman; Arthur Erickson; Michael Graves; Kallmann, McKinnell, Wood; and Cesar Pelli.

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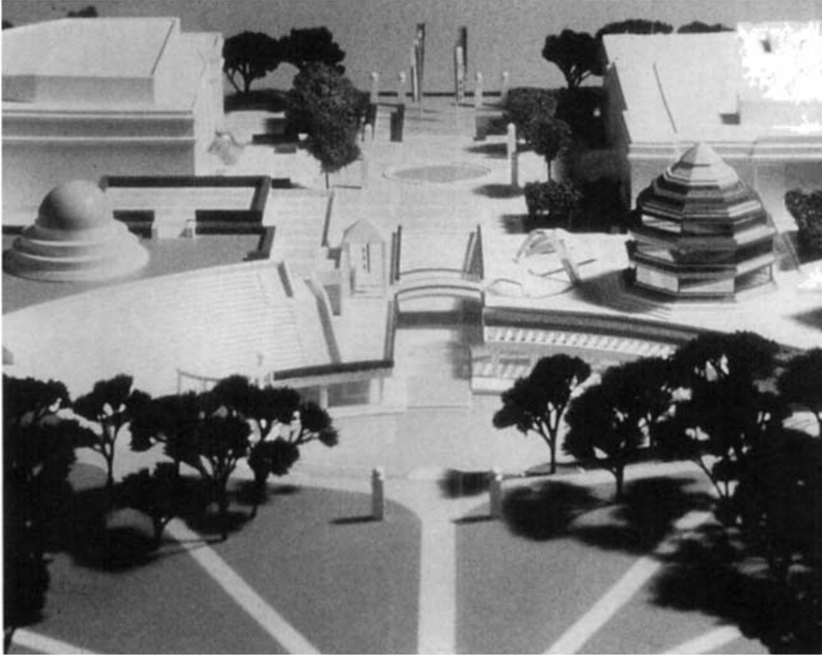

Figure 1.2. Visual Arts Center entry by Arthur Erickson. Courtesy of Arthur Erickson Architectural Corp.

On April 15, 1983, the jury met to establish its rules and a schedule for their deliberations. Prior to the meeting they received background material "on the historical development of the campus, the campus plan and its objectives and the program" (p. 26).[51] The jury agreed that the entries would be put on display over the weekend, and that each member would go individually, pick up the submission brochures and view the submissions for as long as necessary. On the following Monday morning, they would begin deliberations. They did not set out any specific criteria, but they did agree "to select the best solution to the program of requirements as amended by subsequent communications by the professional advisor to the collaborating architect teams." They decided to base their evaluations on one six-page section of the twenty-four-page program: This short section described the two sites and gave vague and general descriptions of the desired building (p. 26).[51] The jury set aside the specific description of desired facilities and their characteristics as less important. They held all deliberations in private. On the morning of May 29 the jury discussed the entries in the order of

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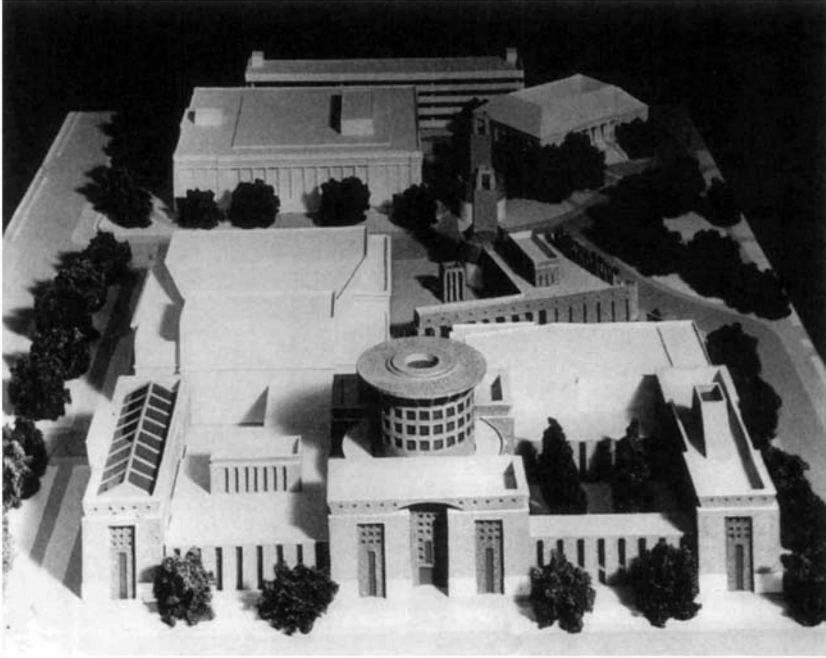

Figure 1.3. Visual Arts Center entry by Michael Graves. Courtesy of Paschall/Taylor.

their eventual presentation, with each juror presenting an initial appraisal of each submission. That afternoon each design team gave a half-hour presentation, followed by a half hour of questions from and discussion with the jury. On the following morning, the jury met again. The jurors presented their points of view and then they began a process of elimination. They had a final round of comments and a vote. That evening, they wrote the jury report and letter to the university president. The jury indicated a unanimous judgment in favor of one proposal: the Eisenman/Trott design.

In their letter, the jurors indicated that they had selected the design because it "made the best use of the available site and offers the best solution to the program requirements" (p. 24).[51] The jury report echoed some of the vague and metaphorical language found in Part A of the program. It said:

> This proposal best captured the spirit, dynamism, and open-endeness of the new center's programmatic needs . . . It fits a program . . . dedicated both to experimentation and vanguard artistic activity and to

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