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Van Stain



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From being hired to build a gallery by the Metropolitan Museum of Art early on in his career, to restoring the only surviving Synagogue in Auschwitz, Poland, to designing Disney's Times Square Sign, Bob Kupiec's résumé is extensive. After living and working in New York City, he yearned for a smaller-scale urban experience and, lucky for us, wound up in Montecito.

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It may not come to mind when listing cities famous for their architecture, but Graz, the second-largest city in Austria, boasts a unique mix of architectural styles. From the amoeba-like structure of the contemporary art showcase Kunsthaus Graz, to the conceptual art in the oldest train station in the country whose colors shift throughout the day depending on the natural light, one can see why it was designated the European Capital of Culture in 2003.

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Romero Canyon trail is a gateway into the front-country of the Santa Ynez Mountains and the backcountry of Los Padres National Forest. There are two paths one can follow, and each provides its share of stunning views, babbling brooks, and muscle burning heights.

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Dutch artist Hubert Vos painted his way through Chicago to New York to Hawaii and finally China, creating portraits of government officials, one of which was China's last empress, Cixi.

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Hailing from Cleveland, Ohio, Henry Ernest Bothin was one of the largest landowners in Santa Barbara. He built *Piranhurst* in 1914, a 30-room Italian Villa that still stands today, along with a 200-seat amphitheater and an arched arcade that served as a teahouse, all known as *Mar y Cel*, a Montecito landmark.

130 Up and Out

The second half of the Copernican revolution may be about to begin, that is, if the new Mars Rover "Curiosity" lands on Mars and discovers that we are not the only form of life. Julian Nott discusses the likelihood that this will – or will not – happen, and why it even matters.

140 Eateries

For a tiny coastal village (population: 10,000 souls) wedged comfortably between the mountains and the sea, Montecito has a good selection of excellent dining choices; you'll find every one of them listed in this guide, along with other chosen eateries from Carpinteria to Goleta.

Cover: Original painting by Thomas Van Stein of a proposed mixed-use building designed by Bob Kupiec, to be built in downtown Santa Barbara.



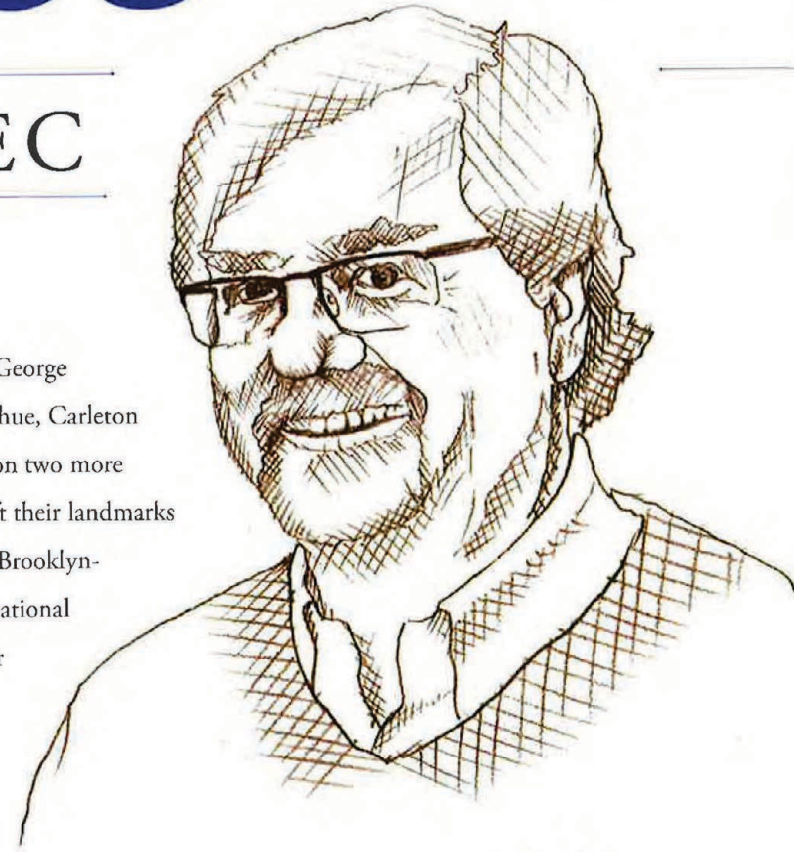
Profiles

BY JAMES BUCKLEY

BOB KUPIEC

KUPIEC ARCHITECTS

Men with international architectural reputations – Frank Lloyd Wright, George Washington Smith, Reginald Johnson, Gardner Dailey, Bertram Goodhue, Carleton Winslow, and Winsor Soule come immediately to mind, not to mention two more contemporary names, such as Jack Warner and Barry Berkus – have left their landmarks in and around Santa Barbara and Montecito for the better part of 150 years. It is likely that Brooklyn-born Bob Kupiec – an unassuming Montecito presence with a stellar background and international reputation who recently transformed what was known as the Anacota building (at the corner of Anacapa and Cota Streets in downtown Santa Barbara) into Antioch University's new campus – could quite possibly find his name added to that aforementioned illustrious list somewhere down the road.



10,000 sq ft ocean side Montecito residence designed by Bob Kupiec Architects

Proposed mixed-use building on Chapala and Canon Perdido; entryway is Kupiec's interpretation of the Romance architecture of the Courthouse



As a relatively recent arrival, Kupiec's local work has just begun. He currently operates out of a spacious second-story office on Coast Village Circle and lives in Montecito's hedgerow with his wife, Ann, a lighting designer, and their daughter Julie, a freshman at Santa Barbara High School.

Growing up in a four-family house in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, Kupiec attended Brooklyn Technical High School, whose specialties were design and engineering.

PUBLIC HOUSING AS A SPECIALTY

After high school, Bob attended Pratt Institute on a full scholarship. While there he became involved in a program that specialized in rehabilitating public housing in New York City. The program paired students with certain professors to provide architectural services – designing buildings, sketching working drawings, supervising construction – to community groups. “What we were trying to do for those community groups,” Bob recalls during the first of our three sit-down interviews, “was actually bring a higher level of design into the process. This isn't glamorous architecture, but we tried to provide a glimpse of what good design might be

for projects that generally wouldn't get that kind of attention.”

During those years, Bob also got to work on high-end homes. “We did some pretty glamorous projects in the Northeast. That was fun to do,” he says.

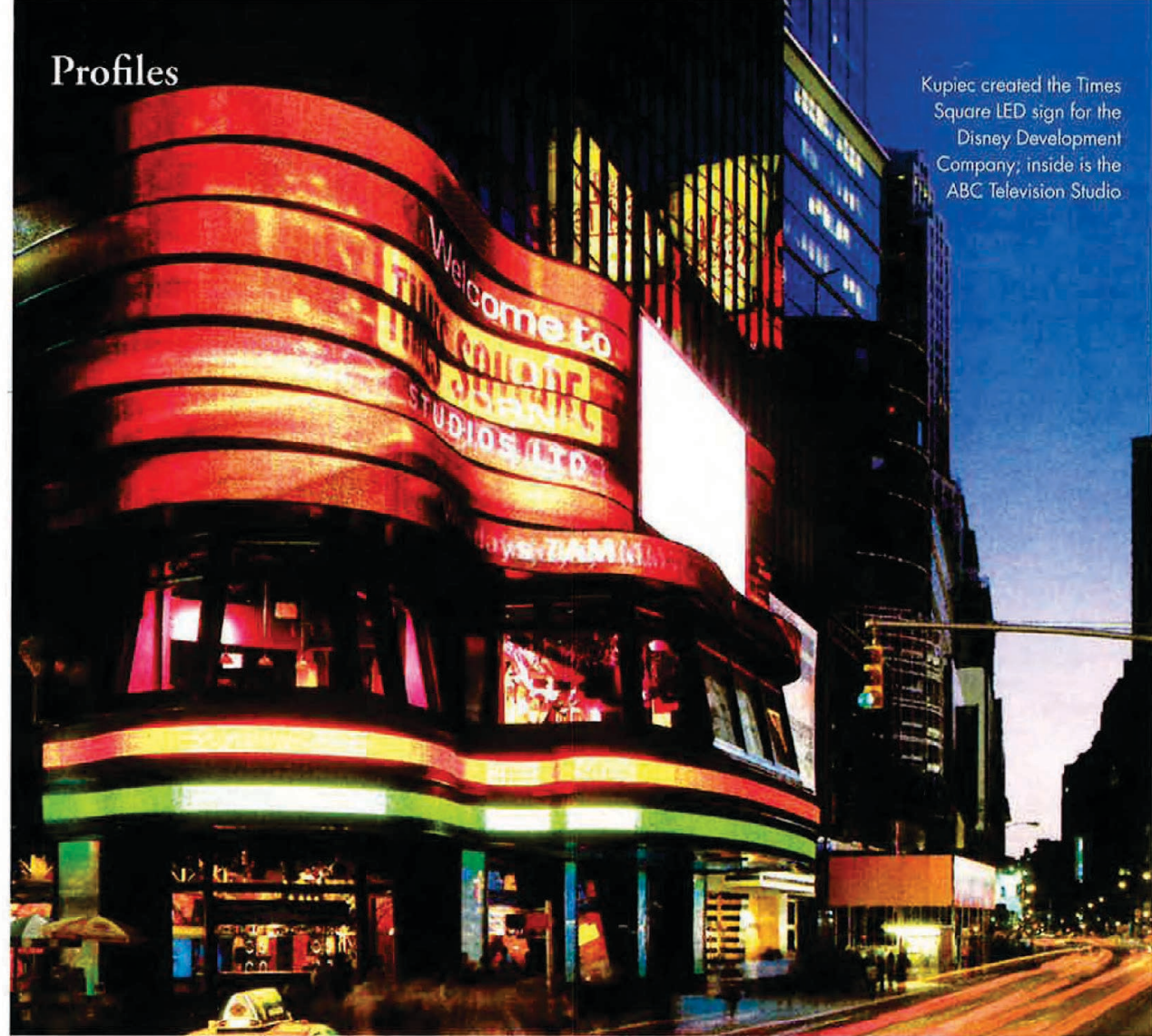
Not long after graduating from Pratt, Bob went to work for Marcel Breuer of Bauhaus fame (the architect responsible for designing the Whitney Museum of Art), who ran a seventy-person firm in Manhattan; Bob stayed there for five years, and became an associate of the firm.

The rest of our interview took place over the course of several days.

Q. What can you tell us about your time with Breuer?

A. When I came to work at the firm, we were working on the governmental headquarters in Egypt. A city outside Cairo called Sadat City. I worked on the presidential rest house, which unfortunately I don't think Anwar Sadat ever saw completed. I was [also] one of the project architects for a million-and-a-half-square-foot factory building for Philip Morris in South Carolina. It was gargantuan... you needed to have a golf cart just to be able to get around in it.

Kupiec created the Times Square LED sign for the Disney Development Company; inside is the ABC Television Studio



You were with Breuer for five years, from the late 1970s to 1981 or so. Then what?

At that time, there was an educational foundation in New York with a board of about twenty architects; the National Institute for Architectural Education (NIAE). The institute was the beneficiary of the William Van Alen estate, architect for the Chrysler building, who had been one of the organization's founders. He left his townhouse in mid-Manhattan to the institute, which sold it and bought a six-story loft building a block away from the flatiron building (23d Street & Fifth Avenue) with the proceeds.

Rather than try to choose among themselves who might be the architect to renovate the building – it was in really bad shape – they decided to interview a series of young architects. I was invited to be interviewed and was lucky enough to actually get the job.

That relationship worked out pretty well because later I became chairman of the board of NIAE, and helped to shepherd the organization, redirecting its purpose. We ran competitions for architecture students, granting travelling fellowships and administering the Paris Prize in Architecture, a very prestigious award. Other professional organizations however, were doing similar things and sometimes with better results. As a board we wanted to best apply our endowment, become more vital, focusing attention on critical issues related to architecture and urban design. We saw a need to improve general awareness and professional engagement in civic design. So we renamed ourselves the Van Alen Institute and established a new mission: to raise the architectural design bar for public projects.

So, you went back to your roots in public housing?

Sort of, but on projects that included many other types of architecture. We did a lot of preservation work and got into the trenches to help make government agency projects more "design responsible." The schedules were terrible and getting paid was even worse, but we needed to help change the attitude about how people approached that kind of work. Van Alen did a lot to encourage architects, especially young practitioners,

to get more involved and make a difference in their communities. We held many conferences and design forums which emphasized the message, "if you're not in it, don't complain about it later".

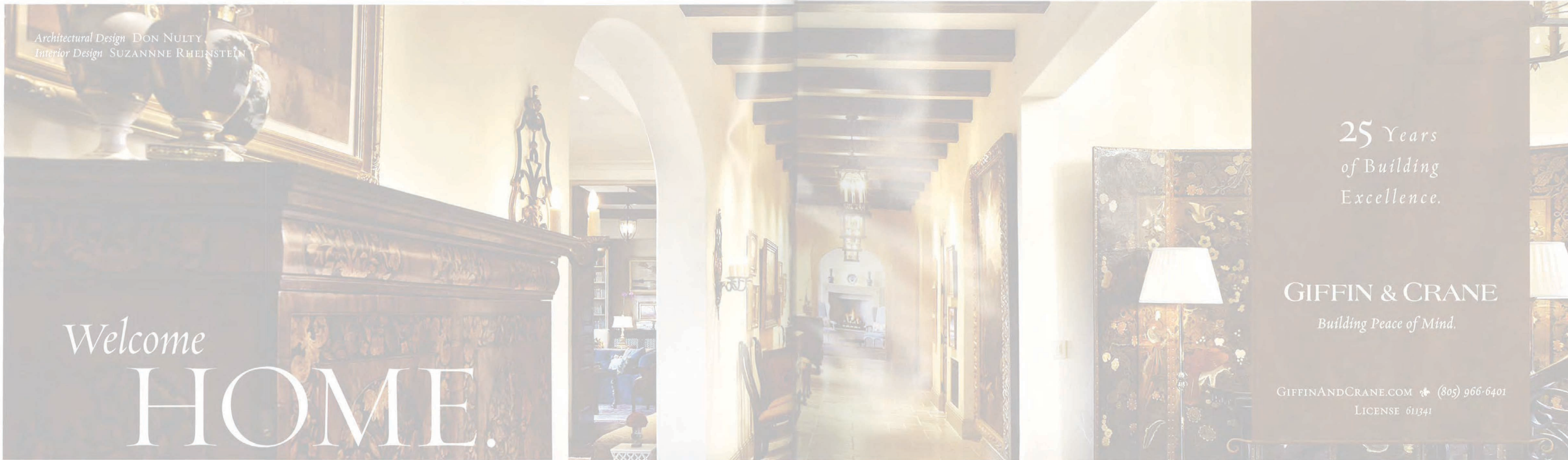
For example?

One of the members of our board, Jim Polshek – his firm, the Polshek Partnership, was the master-plan architect for the Santa Barbara Bowl – was responsible for designing the Newseum in Washington, right on the mall. It is a wonderful civic expression of modern design and relays some important civic messages. Good design counts, and so does America's history of journalistic excellence and a free press.

You were a young architectural firm and yet were hired by New York's most prestigious museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Why?

We wound up doing a pretty good job in renovating that building in the flatiron district for the NIAE and after a couple of years a former board member, a fellow named Arthur Rosenblatt who was then Director of Architecture for the Met directly under Thomas Hoving, called up to say that the museum had been gifted an art collection valued at seventy-five million dollars (a lot of money for 1983 or '84).

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It was given under contract, the Met being obliged to install the art in a permanent gallery within three years. Museums often have very quirky politics, and curators wield tremendous authority at the Met. They virtually wasted two out of the three years and started to panic because the donor of the art passed away and the family no longer wanted the art to leave their archives. The museum knew it had only twelve months to fulfill the contract or forfeit the art. Rosenblatt's admonition to me was that, although I was very young, and would [ordinarily] never get a commission to work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we were the only people he knew that were crazy enough to take on a commission like that.

[In order to accomplish our task] people worked in the office through the night. My mom used to bring me clothes in a suitcase so I could change at the office. It was an incredibly intense time. And it was do or die. Success had to be the end result. And, as it turned out, Douglas Dillon was also the benefactor donating the money for the construction of the gallery.

Ten months later, the Met opened a new five-million-dollar gallery (also a lot of money at the time). We not only brought the gallery in

ahead of schedule, but under budget too. We became the museum's secret weapon, and after that it was a ten-year run of different galleries, and all sorts of different projects for the Met.

Did you ever have a project in Washington, D.C.?

Never built anything in D.C. Our work was mostly centered in the New England area, other than an occasional foray to Palm Beach or Aspen to work on an estate or large residence. Our museum work however did take us off-shore and abroad. We worked on two museums in the Caribbean: the new Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico near San Juan, which was commissioned by the government development bank of PR and is devoted to the Art of the Island, as well as the Museo de Arte de Ponce, where we restored a 1960's Edward Durell Stone building built by Jose Luis Ferre, the former Governor and a real hero of Puerto Rico.

They were very exciting projects but I was really pleased when we had the opportunity to work in Eastern Europe, restoring the only surviving Synagogue in Auschwitz, Poland. It was a remarkable journey to make on

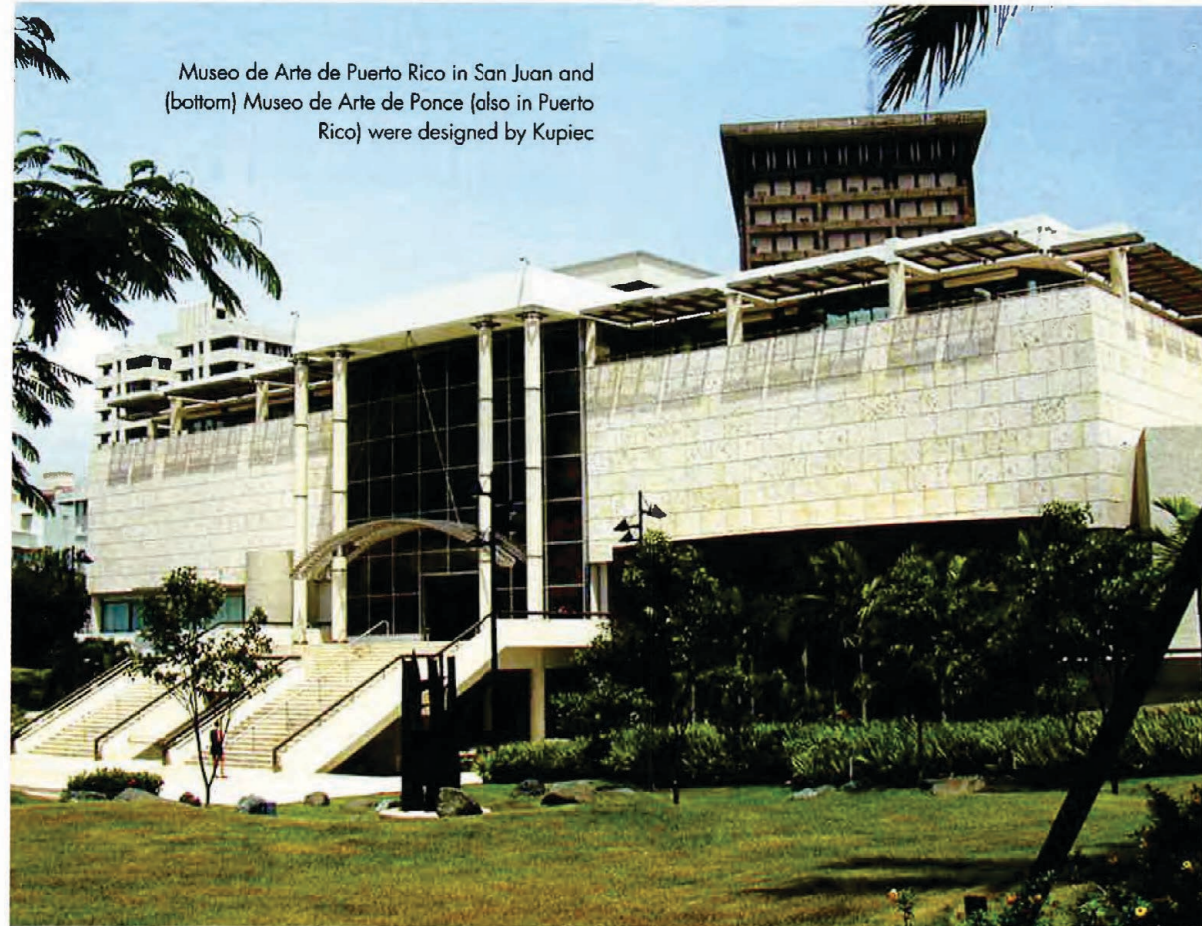


Antioch University
main lobby at
Anacapa and Cola;
upper-level library
spills over into the
ground floor. Behind
glass walls are
offices and student
services areas.

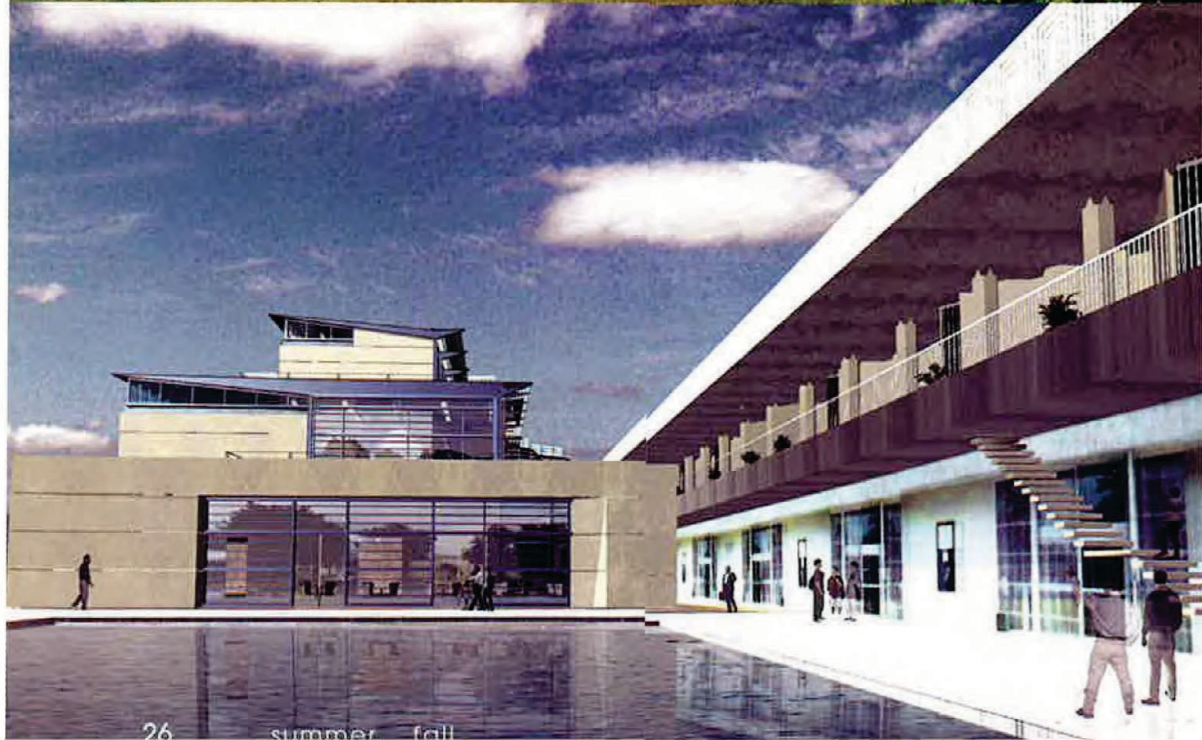
photo: Cara Coelho

both a professional and personal level, being of Polish decent. There are projects that you're lucky to be a part of; helping to restore the synagogue and establish a museum designed to celebrate the life and culture of a lost society was very moving.

I even discovered the two Kupiec brothers who were victims at the Auschwitz death camp. It gave the holocaust a whole new meaning for me and I hope that visitors to our center will come away with a deeper appreciation for tolerance and humanity.



Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico in San Juan and (bottom) Museo de Arte de Ponce (also in Puerto Rico) were designed by Kupiec



Working in cultural institutions has taken us in some interesting directions. A lot of our work incorporates exhibitry and graphics. Now it's part of our architectural DNA. We like to mix it up and have worked on projects that allow us to blend visual technology with architectural design, like our trade exhibits for Mercedes-Benz, a traveling road show that pops out of a semi-trailer and goes up in forty-eight hours!

We were getting pretty involved in animation and LED imagery and got introduced to Disney by my wife who was designing their new store on 42nd Street. Ann, who headed up her own 10-person award-winning lighting design firm in NYC, had some real national clout. So when she suggested to Disney that they utilize some of our special talents to help design a new Time Square Sign for ABC-TV Studios, they were inclined to listen.

It's a great wavy-gravy ribbon of lights that has a giant Jumbotron in it. We worked closely with Disney's Imagineers here in California. After that, a whole bunch of companies wanted our help to develop signage programs for different buildings.

Moving away from architecture for the moment, there was a little drama that occurred during your first meeting with Ann, who is now your wife. Could you describe that event?

When we moved to a building in the flatiron district, that area of Manhattan was still questionable, especially at night. A fancy lighting design firm called Wheel Gerstoff had rented the floor above us and were a bit paranoid about the neighborhood, so they installed an overly sensitive alarm system that went off all the time, making us architects, who work nocturnally and on weekends, crazy. They lived in Connecticut, and so finally gave us keys to their office so that we could disable the alarm.

One Sunday night, after the third false-alarm of the day, I was more than ready to go up and turn off the damn thing. "One night, you're going to go up there and it won't be a false alarm," my former partner warned. So, in his wisdom, he decided to go out the rear window and climb up a

fire escape to see inside and make sure things were okay. Well, the claxons were blaring because they were set off by the only person at work upstairs that night, the cub employee, Ann Kale.

I couldn't stand it anymore, so I took off with the keys to their front door...

The lone Ann Kale, trying to turn off the alarms, suddenly sees some guy peering in at the rear window. She had come from California, grew up in the San Fernando Valley, and had departed for New York to do this internship. Her friends and family warned about how horrible and dangerous New York was, and here she was, her life flashing before her eyes. She streaked through the office, and just as she gets to the front door, I'm opening it. So the first time I met Ann, she had a ten-inch bread knife in her hand and was ready to stab me with it.

She became a true New Yorker that night, because a Californian would have hid in the closet. I had to do some really fast talking or this story might have ended right here.

Ann absorbed New York the way an intern really should and developed a very successful practice of her own. We lived in New York twenty-some odd years before we decided to move to California. As Ann will tell the story, moving to Santa Barbara was part of the pre-nup. She said we could live in New York but we were going to die in Santa Barbara. So I thought we might as well move there sooner than later.

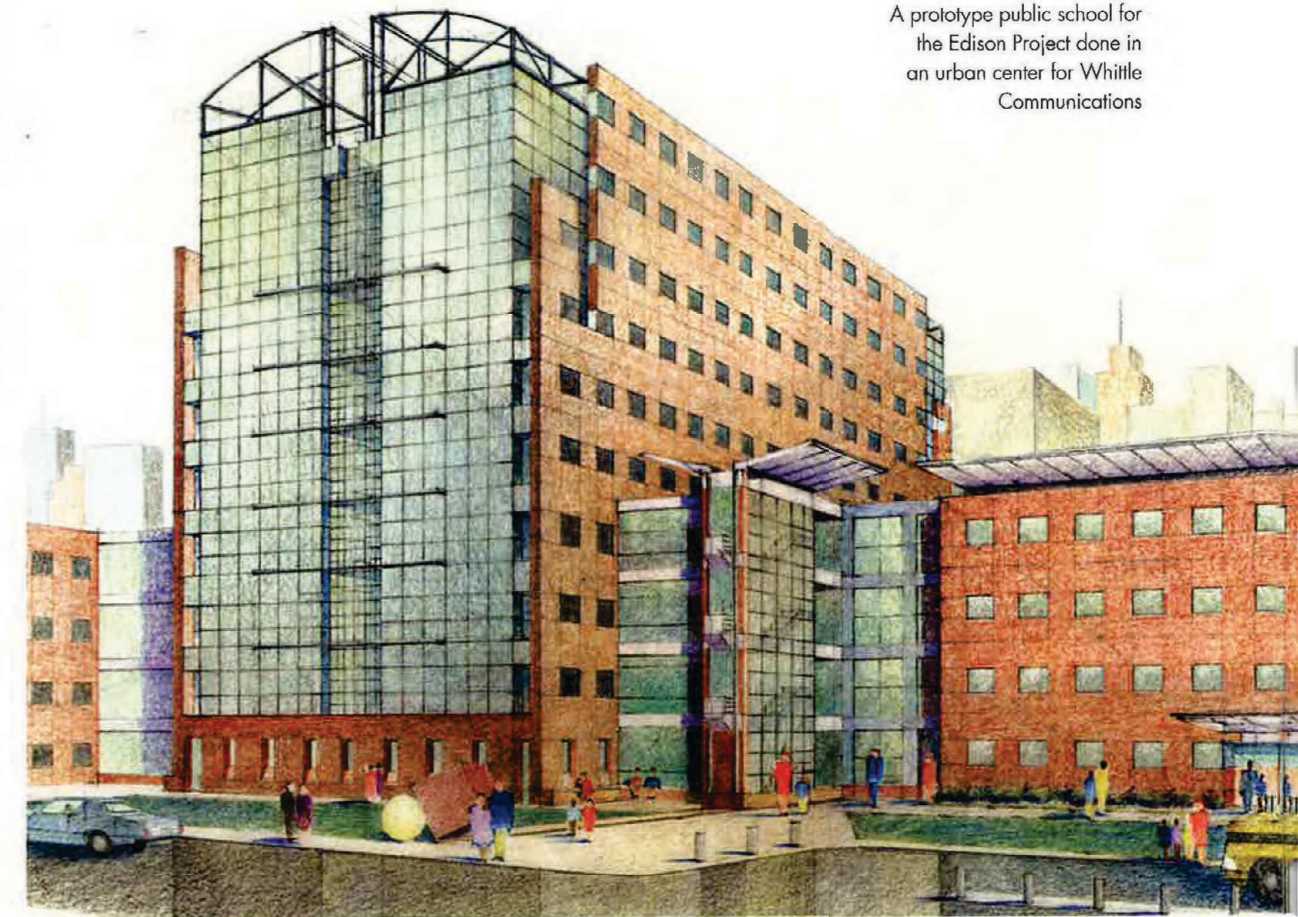
How many years after the incident did you get married?

I didn't see her again for nearly five years. I was preoccupied with building the practice and Ann was off to another lighting firm. But while I was Chairman of NIAE our executive secretary called me one day and said, "I have this kid sitting here, a young student from Siberia who is one of our travelling fellows. He has a suit on with lapels out past his shoulders, and barely speaks any English. He doesn't really have any money; what do we do with him?"

I took him home and let him stay in my apartment. He was excited to be out of Russia and I felt a bit sorry for him, not having enough resources to get around. So I got a collective of architect buddies together

who pooled a little bit of their money. We wanted him to see a little more than just New York.

And I'll never forget my fabulous travel agent who I solicited for help, "I'd love for him to go to Chicago or somewhere, have a flavor of... what kind of cheap airfare could we arrange?" We had members of the organization in different cities that could put him up, so Chicago, Washington, and Boston were covered. About an hour later she called back with a round-trip flight for him from New York to Chicago, Chicago to Atlanta, Atlanta to Miami, Miami to Boston, Boston to New York, and it was \$110. As I started to speak, she said, "Say nothing. This never happened." Well the phone went dead and the tickets arrived a few hours later. He got a great tour.



A prototype public school for the Edison Project done in an urban center for Whittle Communications

The last night before his return to Siberia, it turned out that a friend of mine was leaving New York to relocate in Santa Fe. There was a kind of architect's party in a cool loft space for her and I thought our Russian guest would get a kick out of this on his last night in New York, so off we went to the party, and Ann was there. I didn't know if I should back away or not, but the truth is our re-meeting led us pretty quickly to getting engaged. This was 1989. We got married in 1990. I was thirty-six years old.

Was Ann already thinking about coming back to California at that time?

Well, she had always talked about coming back to California, even then. Her mom lived here in Santa Barbara; her sister lives in Carpinteria. Ann was born in Reseda. So they grew up in the San Fernando Valley. We bought a house in '02 and moved here in 2003.

How did you end up in Montecito?

We took a tour of Montecito Union School, and decided that we were going to live here so Julia could attend. I was on the school board; we participated; it was a great community of families. Julia went on to the junior high; Ann and I kind of continued our tradition of involvement, and were co-chairs of the PTA for a year. Now Julia's at the high school, enjoying it, running cross country, singing in the drama program. I'm happy she's a [Santa Barbara High School] Don, and so is she.

How difficult was it finding work as an architect in Santa Barbara?

Interestingly enough, my first client here in Santa Barbara was myself and my wife. We had to actually renovate our house; it was over a hundred years old and needed substantial renovation and care. We're within the coastal zone, so we learned all about California regulations. Our house had an old tower on it. The tower – which had windows all the way around it – was going to become a little studio for me.

At the time the building was built, it had an outdoor stair, which disappeared in some subsequent renovation. An interior stair was attempted, but it was a crazy spiral stair, very funky and dangerous. We wanted to re-implement a safer, *exterior* stair. The planners just couldn't figure out how to permit it. An outdoor stair was beyond allowable zoning. Then, somebody said, "We can permit this as an accessory building... An artist's studio." And I said, "What a great idea."

A few weeks later, our planner called to say, "You know, we're not sure that an architect is an artist." At first, I thought it was our neighbor who lived around the corner playing a practical joke and I laughed out loud.

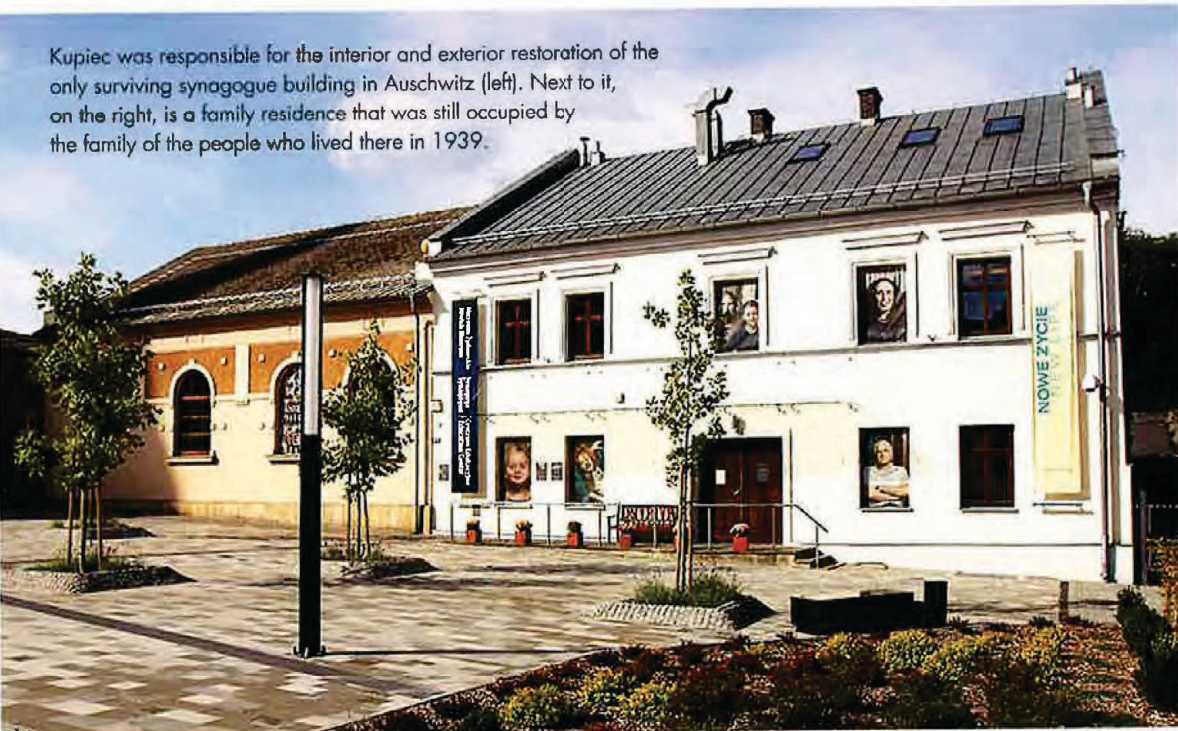


Kupiec worked on the restoration of the historic Bryant Park outbuildings, paving, lanterns, and light fixtures in NYC



Until I realized it was not a joke, they were very serious. After two or three weeks of deliberation, they decided an architect was *not* an artist. “You know, I said... “I seem to recall that architecture resided in the school of fine arts of every major university of the world.” And we had a real tough, head-to-head conversation. They rescinded. They decided to permit it, yet

Kupiec was responsible for the interior and exterior restoration of the only surviving synagogue building in Auschwitz (left). Next to it, on the right, is a family residence that was still occupied by the family of the people who lived there in 1939.



as something else so they could bypass this issue. It gave us a window into what practice was going to be like, a little bit, in Santa Barbara. But it all worked out in the end. In fact no sooner had we finished our restoration of “*El Contento*” (the house actually had a name) we were featured on the Pearl Chase annual tour of historic homes that took place in the hedgerow.

When did you open an office here?

For the first three years we worked out of that nice little outdoor studio; as we got busier, we needed more room. It’s a little tough to work at home. There are a lot of distractions. But I think for the first two or three years, I really wanted those distractions; the quality-of-life change was so great that it’s easy to become acclimated. That first year, I remember getting on the phone with my structural engineer on a January day. I was still living on New York time, so I’d get up at five in the morning, make a pot of coffee, and by six I was in the hot tub with my telephone, making phone calls back to New York.

The engineer was on the line with me, and said, “What’s that bubbling sound?”

“A bubbling sound?” I asked.

“It’s nothing, Ralph. Really nothing.” But, he was insistent on knowing.

“Well it’s really early here,” I told him. “and I make my morning phone calls from my hot tub.”

The next sound I heard was “click.”

Although I was born and raised a New Yorker, I think I always yearned for a slightly smaller-scale urban experience. Santa Barbara offers a lot of amenities. It’s incredible, we’re a city of less than a hundred-thousand people and we have amenities that cities of a million don’t have. We have a wonderful museum, all sorts of different cultural venues. It’s a pretty spectacular place to live.

There are a lot of people designing homes in Santa Barbara and Montecito. How were you able to wedge yourself into the business so quickly?

We met a lot of people through Montecito Union. Being on the board, we actually renovated the school’s lobby to create an art space that is now the entrance. I think the first major commission we had here was from a New York client who was developing a property in Santa Barbara. We had a history of doing large estates and still had many close ties with our consultants back east. When they

were looking for an architect, a number of the same people who worked on their team for other projects in New York, said, “You must call Bob, now that he lives in Santa Barbara.”

And you’ve gone from that?

I think what really led us to finally getting introduced was the work we are doing for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. At the end of our tenure in New York, half the work our firm did was museum planning. We did a lot of work for cultural institutions, helping them to map out their future. In 2010 we were interviewed by Santa Barbara Museum of Art and were hired to do a master plan for them.

So you’re the guys that came up with a new plan for the rear entrance? That’s your concept?

Yes it is. It’s because one of the things that you *can’t* do in the museum right now is easily circulate around the first floor. That was big on the wish list of things they wanted to solve, as well as better art storage, better access in loading and unloading, a new roof, more energy-efficient building systems. Very pragmatic stuff, practical things that we’ve had experience with in the past.



A 10,000 sq ft Montecito residence on the beachfront, designed by Kupiec Architects

Do you have a working architectural or design philosophy?

I believe architects who want to do high-caliber work have to think the problem out to the *smallest* level. If somebody else is thinking it out for you, the likelihood is that you won't get the result you really want.

In the matrix of the things that architects do, for example, we need to know everything from how to organize a building so it fits into the site, to what the door frame is going to look like; what are the materials used and how do they meet. The combination of function, form, light, texture and color, together really creates the vocabulary of architecture.

Is there an architect you admire above all others?

There are many good practitioners out there right now. Norman Foster, Renzo Piano, Peter Bohlin. I think I.M. Pei has always been an incredibly tasteful architect. There aren't many projects you can think of that bear his brand that aren't either wonderfully artful or that fit in ways that surprise you. Thirty-five years later the East Wing of the National Art Gallery is still a national symbol of design excellence with that great Calder mobile in the center. It's a wonderful piece of architecture.

Do you have a particular style that can be attributed to you and/or your firm?

As you look through the images in our portfolio, you'll find that there's no real stylistic penchant for us. We're as happy being modernists as we are doing historical vernacular architecture. It's really about what fits, what belongs in a certain place.

I think architecture has a responsibility to be a good neighbor. It wants to weave itself into places in ways that reinforce the fabric of whatever place it resides. It's all about context, which includes considering the client's wishes, the character of the site, the budget, sustainability... being responsible.

Context drives a lot about what we as an architectural concern think quality design and thoughtful architecture really means.



Drawing of Bob and Ann Kupiec by Julia Kupiec

Lastly, your thoughts on Santa Barbara's and Montecito's architectural heritage?

I don't know whether this is a verbatim quote or not, but Frank Lloyd Wright, who attempted to practice architecture in Santa Barbara – at one point he designed a house here –, said of Santa Barbara that it is “the place that celebrates the history that never was.” To some degree it's true; on the other hand, I think one of the reasons people love Santa Barbara is that it has developed a kind of character that is both homogenous and friendly.

Andalusian architecture (George Washington Smith's milieu) has a lot of humor in it. We've had a tremendous amount of fun working in that genre to create buildings that have smiles on their faces, and that people love and are comfortable with. They have all the right cues that we think architecture, whether it's modern or not, should have: appropriate scale and texture, and a relationship to human beings rather than being completely out of context to anything else.

Thank you, Mr. Kupiec.