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Museum Architect Adds Context To His Modern Design

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As with most writers, I'm an expert on nothing, an amateur on everything. That includes architecture.

I know what I like - classic - and what I don't - contemporary. Enough of the Frank Lloyd Wright knockoffs and monuments to marketing and ego. But, yes, I will certainly concede, the matter of taste really matters. So does knowing what you're talking about.

What I don't think is relative, however, is context. Does a project fit or is it an aesthetic wedgie? You know, you've seen them. The Superdome that's too close to the French Quarter in New Orleans. That inverted pyramid on St. Petersburg's classy waterfront. Faux Mediterranean Revival permeating South Tampa. A post-modern loophole in historic Hyde Park.

That's why I think it might be significant - well, not irrelevant - that I really like the new contemporary design of the **Tampa Museum of Art**. And I had really wanted the retrofit at the old federal courthouse to work. And, yes, I really thought that \$7 million Rafael Vinoly design was as cheesy as the "mother-of-all-carports" raillery was meant to make it seem.

The museum's \$32.5 million, 68,000-square-foot first phase, scheduled for completion in April 2009, is the architectural inspiration of Stanley Saitowitz of San Francisco.

It will be sheathed in pierced aluminum and appear to shimmer from sunlight. Within its metal skin will be programmable LED lighting. It will play off of the sky and the water. The interior lobby will feature a two-story atrium. A landscaped roof will become a lush amenity. An outdoor sculpture garden will overlook the Hillsborough River.

Saitowitz didn't make excuses for the "Beer Can" building or the Poe Garage. He simply plowed ahead with an animated vision. He called the riverfront site a "charged and amazing place" in his keynote address at this month's annual Tampa Downtown Partnership luncheon.

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He presented a slide show that was top heavy with his urban-infill and city-scapes portfolio. "Integrate," "blend" and "connect" - as in "into landscapes," "with the environment" and "to nature" - seemed his mantra.

His Tampa museum model embodied his words. Mayor Pam Iorio, whose only stake in what happens on the riverfront is her legacy, was in full beam mode.

Saitowitz also said he believed in "architecture as infrastructure." It's why he typically designs buildings without parking. It's his way of "fostering transportation" other than via automobiles.

As if to underscore that point, one of Saitowitz's renderings shows the museum as a light-rail stop. Talk about context.

Talk about a vision.

Staying Fiscally Fit

Time was when going to a health club meant little more than an exercise in jogging, lifting weights and looking for a spotter. Well, it's definitely not your father's Spartan gym - or marketplace - anymore.

From Bally Total Fitness to the local YMCA, more than 15,000 companies and nonprofit organizations are soliciting a market of health-conscious consumers, not just the workout-warrior niche. It's a \$15 billion industry.

Sure, the racks of free weights and exercise equipment remain - but amid the cardio centers, bright colors, piped-in music, roving personal trainers, yoga classes and enough TVs for every Dow Jones compulsive and ESPN obsessive. And hardly atypical: saunas, tanning booths, babysitting accommodations, member-appreciation-day treats, spa packages, apparel lines and, increasingly, 24-hour access.

Not offering a sampling of the hottest fads and perks could be fiscally unwise in a burgeoning market.

Exhibit A could be Tampa Bay Health & Fitness in north Tampa. It incorporates the Giovane Institute/Clinic Med Spa within a traditional club framework. Under one eclectic roof, members can be found pumping iron, boxing (in an actual ring) and undergoing botox treatments, laser hair removal, hormone therapy and mesotherapy for fat and cellulite reductions.

For those wanting something more exotic than Pilates, there's the popular salsa class at The Athletic Club in Brandon, or urban rebounding, offered at any of the Bally clubs, which incorporates contemporary music and a trampoline. Probably the hottest group-fitness trend is Zumba, a combination of aerobics and international music. Shapes Total Fitness even has a Zumba Gold program for seniors.

"The health club business is great," gushed Scott Coultas, the general manager of Tampa's Harbour Island Athletic Club and Spa. "There's no finish line."

But there is a bottom line that is unforgiving of the competitively unfit.

"It's all about membership retention," Coultas said. "It's all about the

'wow' factor."

Harbour Island's fitness hybrid has about 2,500 (membership) sales units (including families). That means courts for tennis (clay), basketball, racquetball and squash, a swimming pool and a well-provisioned café. Plus a spa, where Sonya Dakar skin treatments range from green tea peels to "Visualift" eye treatments.

It also means marketing efforts that integrate year-round holiday and other themed socials with sophisticated direct-mail campaigns and even overtures to the corporate community to pump up their workforces.

And then there are the basics as well as the sweet treats.

"Sure, you want the latest equipment," said Coultas, "but it's also as simple as keeping it clean and maintaining a friendly staff. Sometimes we role-play, and out of that will come a 'sweet treat,' such as grabbing an umbrella and walking a member to his or her car when it's raining."

Over at Lifestyle Family Fitness, "user-friendly" is the member mantra at its 37 sites, including facilities in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Sarasota counties.

"Of course, you have to be on top of the industry, but often it's the little things that help keep members," underscored Lifestyle's founder Geoff Dyer. "Can you easily adjust the seat? Can you change the weight without getting out of the chair? Are the numbers and the instructional-sign letters big enough for an aging population?"

And then there's the music - no minor matter. According to Dyer, Lifestyle centers program more contemporary, up-tempo sounds later in the day. It also allows for more demographically skewed markets.

"For example, in Seminole and Sarasota you'll hear more 'oldies' music," Dyer said. "Whereas it's up-tempo all day at [Tampa's] Hyde Park, which is the youngest in the company. Music is certainly a big part of this business."

On a personal note, for those who skew the hot-bod demographic at Lifestyle's Hyde Park Village facility, you just don't want to leave home without your "oldies."

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