



THE FUTURE OF MULTI-USE

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Like Paris in the 1860s, New York City in the 1910s, or Los Angeles in the 1950s, Phoenix is right now humming with the energy and excitement of a city on the verge of blossoming. Though the bud could be nipped prematurely, this flower could also be resplendent and unlike any other.

Currently the 6th largest city in the United States, Phoenix is growing the fastest of the 15 largest cities and expected to be the 3rd largest city by 2020. Like Paris, New York, and Los Angeles in their heydays, Phoenix is home to an impressive concentration of talent, energy, and vision attracted in large part by the possibilities made available by rapid growth. At the same time, this city has more vacant land in its downtown than any other major city in the country. This rare combination of human ingenuity and urban growth presents tremendous opportunities for bringing Phoenix into the hallowed realm of most livable and vibrant cities.

But it also presents tremendous challenges. How can Phoenix avail itself of this opportunity to offer a truly urban experience? How can our city become pedestrian-friendly as well as auto-friendly? How can it be authentic, true to its roots, have a sense of place, or a "there" there? How can we gracefully accommodate people of different ethnicities, races, social classes, age groups, and abilities?



These questions are both logistical and existential. Answering them requires skill as well as imagination. And the future success of our city hinges upon how we choose to respond.

Phoenix will not accomplish these goals by following the prevalent suburban model of tract housing, free standing office towers, and shopping malls surrounded by seas of asphalt parking. Of that we are certain. But nor should we pursue the popular national trend of emulating pre-automobile 19th-century cities with narrow winding streets and a fine-grained urban fabric.

A certain density is necessary to achieve the urban experience we crave, but we clearly do not want to Manhattan-ize Phoenix or even follow the pattern of Los Angeles. Although building and population density will need to intensify in certain areas, what we really need to focus on is enhancing "programmatic density," or the juxtaposition of diverse activities. Rather than separate our living from working from recreating and so forth, the predominant pattern in the Phoenix metropolitan area presently, we need to think about ways to bring these back together, albeit not necessarily in the same fashion they co-existed in the pre-automobile era. The outcome would be new hybrids that pool human and natural resources to the benefit of all, conserving energy, time, money, water, fuel, building materials, paper, and more. Such an integration of activities would reduce commuting, enhance convenience, preserve the natural environment, and greatly increase the amount of quality public space along with the opportunities for social interaction, spontaneous as well as planned.



LACY, RAINEY, AND THE DE MARCOS

Taking cues from the natural evolution of Phoenix over the last several years, some interesting new patterns emerge from which we can learn. Creative entrepreneurs with keen intuitions about what is right for here and now have been making indelible marks on the urban and cultural landscapes of this city.

Former investment banker David Lacy purchased the building at 530 West McDowell Road in 1998 with the goal of opening a bakery on the ground floor and living above it on the second level. Willo Bread opened its doors in 1999 and was embraced by the community for which it became a hearth writ large. After numerous requests from customers for a place to linger, Lacy purchased the space next door and opened the urbane café/restaurant My Florist in July 2001 (open 6am to midnight, later on weekends). Its landmark neon sign, dating from 1947 when it was indeed a floral shop, has been described as "a tower of flower power" (New Times Best of Phoenix 1996). My Florist, designed by Lacy himself along with the Patrie Building Co., is both a neighborhood restaurant as well as a popular gathering spot for the downtown business crowd at lunch and the opera, symphony, and theatre crowd in the evenings. Patrons enjoy the live jazz of John Summer and company. In need of more parking and wishing to improve the view across McDowell, Lacy leased the former Dolly Madison Bakery Building and arranged with art dealer David White to locate his gallery New Urban Art in the space. The gallery is also available for meetings, workshops, and private parties with the option of catering by My Florist.



Opening two years ago, the monOrchid building at 214 East Roosevelt is home to a diverse and thriving creative community. Owned by photographer (and Shade publisher) Wayne Rainey, the 12,000 square feet of monOrchid occupies a warehouse featuring 24' bow wood truss ceilings built in 1937 by Del Webb. Today, it houses two large shooting areas, the gallery Artfit Exhibition Space owned and curated by Bob Diehl and Scott Andrews, the commercial photography studio Camerawerks, the graphic design firm Blenderhaus, the Downtown Marketing Group (a full-service marketing agency dedicated to downtowns), and the offices of Shade.

Amenities available to all include a conference room with a concrete tabletop salvaged from the bathroom floor, dressing rooms and makeup areas, high-speed DSL internet connections and workstations, and a full kitchen.

The name monOrchid was chosen to suggest "many petals to make one flower." The newest petal will be an architectural firm slated for early 2003. Reflecting on the day-to-day workings of the monOrchid community, Rainey remarks, "It makes for an interesting life. There are creative projects conceived every day and the energy levels sustained are nothing less than phenomenal." He adds, "It is not Utopia, but certainly we are on to something that will become more common in the near future. We look at things from so many perspectives. Having gone through the process of growing such a business changed the way we look at our work too." In addition to monOrchid, Rainey also owns Holga's, a two-storey apartment



building down the street that he sandblasted and converted into live/work spaces for artists as well as a gallery. The Chinese characters prominently displayed on the building façade symbolize love, interdependence, and balance.

On the southwestern corner of Campbell Avenue and 40th Street, a bustling hub of activity has sprouted over the last year and a half thanks to the dedication, diligence, and vision of Craig and Chris De Marco. After studying business at ASU and managing the Balboa Cafe in Tempe for six years, Craig developed a concept for his own businesses. Postino's, located in the old Arcadia Post Office, opened in April of 2001 and La Grande Orange opened last summer. They straddle a parking lot that the De Marcos see eventually doubling as a courtyard through introducing a pervious paving surface and landscaping. Postino's (open 11am-11pm) is a wine bar/restaurant with displays of art, currently of Tom Tuberty who also designed the handsome salt and pepper shakers, the menus, and the tables. Postino's was designed by Chris De Marco along with Hayes McNeil and the Patrie Building Co. La Grande Orange (open 6am - midnight) is a market/bakery/café/pizzeria/flower shop designed by Chris along with Cathy Hayes (whose office is a few doors down) with custom display cases by Hayes as well as fixtures salvaged from a 1940s Los Angeles high school gymnasium. The bathrooms are outfitted with Phillippe Starck appliances. The full kitchen offers meals throughout the day as well as catering that is not limited to their own menu. Each entrepreneur (for instance, the pastry chef Tammy Coe and flower

vendor Marc Karp) owns her/his own business. "The whole thing," Craig explains, is "all synergistic;" it "is based on creating a certain energy." Considering future additions, he describes this corner of Phoenix as a "constantly moving and breathing space." The De Marcos efforts have been paying off—both businesses are extremely successful. As Craig maintains, "it's about high standards, everything we do. We're New York Yankees mentality... We're winners."

SLASH CITY

I have been describing the attitude expressed by these creative entrepreneurs as well as its outcome as the Slash City (/city) because of the hybrid functions (this-slash-that) and because of the emphasis on the slash itself, on what happens where these functions meet. In contrast to the modern attempt to eliminate boundaries and the postmodern tendency to ignore or alternatively fortify them, the /city celebrates the boundary, edge, or threshold as the place where people, things, and ideas converge. It does this by retaining the integrity of each activity and group of people (e.g. bakery, restaurant, residence, gallery), but also allowing for easy movement between them through the creation of porous "membranes": separators that are physically, visually, and/or symbolically permeable. This is an urbanism that refuses to stay within the lines, that seeps through (seeping of views, people, activities, inside and outside).

Conventional big box stores, schools closed off from their surrounding communities, and gated communities are not porous. The /city is. By allowing for diversity (of people, activities, etc.) to thrive, this approach succeeds in re-integrating (or integrating anew) without obliterating differences, in fact, preserving and celebrating them. This approach and the landscape it generates reflect the complementary human urges to merge (connect) and to separate (for distinction, individuation), with the ongoing tension and dynamism these generate.

In the process, we are also integrating— or slashing— the professions that divided and subdivided: architecture/planning/landscape, architecture/engineering/interior, design/industrial design/graphic, design/fashion design/sculpture/painting/performance art/etc. We are perhaps "slashing" (in the sense of deconstructing) some existing structures of thinking, acting, and building for the sake of reconstructing. This reconstruction features permeable boundaries (the slash itself) that become thresholds of diversity: biodiversity, social and cultural diversity, artistic diversity, and commercial diversity.

The pop culture trend to slash television programs bears some interesting parallels with slashing architecture and urban design. Published in "slash zines" and on numerous websites, slash is a subgenre of fanfic which involves rewriting television programs through recontextualization (filling in the gaps between episodes), expanding a series timeline to past or future, refocusing (shifting

attention from main characters to secondary ones), moral realignment (for instance, transforming villains into protagonists), genre shifting (for instance, converting a drama into a comedy), crossing over (combining programs), character dislocation (moving characters to another time and/or place), personalization (injecting oneself), emotional intensification, and eroticisation. Applied to architecture and urban design, we "slash" the city when we become actively involved with it, when we challenge convention by recombining elements in new ways, and when we activate places that have lain dormant, or manifest intensities in places where they have only been latent.

The three instances of making slits in our urban fabric— of slashing Phoenix— described above succeed in putting a brake on the economic, cultural, and environmental devastation of sprawl. Neither idealizing the past nor escaping the present, the inspired contributions of Lacy, Rainey, and the De Marcos serve to mend seams in our urban and social fabrics. Though we may bemoan our current lack of urbanity vis-à-vis other cities, we have an opportunity that denizens of those cities do not. To be a part of the blossoming. This is a good time to be a Phoenician. [s]

left to right from previous:

Monorchid, La Grande Orange, Il Postino, My Florist