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A Global Conversation

For the Greener Good: Conversations that Will Change the World, the Museum's sustainability series completed its inaugural run on Tuesday, April 22, 2008 with *Planning for a Chinese Century*, a program that investigated China's building plans for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and the tension between cultural preservation and the creation of "green" buildings.

On May 3, the National Building Museum will open the exhibition *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* to the public. This ground-breaking exhibition offers an exclusive look into the life, work, and legacy of one of the 20th century's greatest architects. But what exactly is Eero Saarinen's legacy? In an attempt to uncover to what extent Saarinen actually did *shape* the future, *NBM Online* asked several architects the following question:

There seems to be a move towards a critical reevaluation of Eero Saarinen's legacy. To what extent and in what ways is Saarinen's work influencing contemporary design and practice? Has Saarinen directly, or indirectly, influenced your approach to architecture and design?

"I was very close to Eero Saarinen....His influence on my work was great, both in his view of architecture and in the process of design.

I believe that his relevance is being reappraised because today we tend to view architecture and the making of forms in ways not dissimilar from his and it is impossible not to recognize his important precedent. It is also true that his buildings have aged amazingly well. They still look fresh and exciting and most of them still function to the satisfaction of their users. These characteristics are not shared by the buildings of other well known architects of his time."



For the Greener Good, which began in September 2007, was conceived as a set of 16 programs over a two-year period featuring national and international designers, public health experts, academics, and policymakers in panel discussions about a wide range of energy, construction, economic, and social issues surrounding sustainable development. On average, more than 150 people attended each program

—Internationally-renowned architect and AIA Gold Medalist **Cesar Pelli, FAIA**, is the founder of **Pelli Clarke Pelli** in New Haven, Connecticut. Early in his career, Pelli spent ten years working in the offices of Eero Saarinen where he was the project designer for the TWA Terminal Building at JFK Airport and Morse and Stiles Colleges at Yale University.



"I cannot think of more diverse design solutions to the same project type as [those] Saarinen developed, almost simultaneously, for Dulles and TWA's Terminal 5. The ability to start with two entirely different, clean sheets of paper, and evolve two distinct, but absolutely appropriate and valid answers to the question of how to rethink air travel, is to me amazing. His work directly affected our design at JFK for JetBlue, as we consciously

suppressed the profile of our building at every step of the way to avoid any sense of visual competition. We designed a metal-clad building as a counterpoint to the cast-in-place concrete structure of TWA T5, and paid close attention to the connection of our terminal to his, making sure that ours was sympathetic, but not sacrificing our own identity.

As for his impact on the practice of architecture, I am hard-pressed to think of a more confident, at times restrained, at times exuberant portfolio of work than that left by Saarinen."

—**Bill Hooper, AIA**, is the managing director of [Gensler's Washington, D.C. office](#) and the managing principal for the firm's design of the new Jet Blue terminal—located adjacent to Eero Saarinen's iconic Terminal 5—at New York's JFK International Airport.

"Saarinen was one of the most expressive, gutsy, innovative and controversial architects of the 20th century. His designs were poetic and bold, relevant and diverse. He is an inspiration for us designers who try to push the boundaries of the architecture field, who flourish on collaboration, and who experiment with new technology and techniques to forever find new ways to create."

—**David Rockwell**, founder and CEO of [Rockwell Group](#), examines the elements of spectacle—transformation, immersion, permanence vs. temporary, and entrance—in each project in order to create emotionally engaging environments; which range from airport terminals such as the new JetBlue terminal at JFK to set designs for the Broadway musical *Hairspray*.

"Our own reexamination of Saarinen is a very personal one driven by a present project: an addition to and renovation of his Stiles and Morse Colleges at Yale University. While these colleges are not the most favored among Yale undergraduates, they are extraordinary. They reinterpret in modern terms the underlying cloistering—both programmatic and physical—of college life at Yale....Given so much present focus on programmatic invention, he shows anew a way forward that renovates and transforms the past yet still gives rise to meaningful and moving new form.



It is form that has challenged us to engage with Saarinen in a very satisfying dialogue across a half century as we seek to renovate the concept of "college" for yet another time. This conversation enriches every detail of the new work, from the landscape through the public spaces to the student rooms, as we seek new form and renewal from the substance of his work."

—**Stephen Kieran, FAIA**, and **James Timberlake, FAIA**, are the co-founders of [KieranTimberlake Associates](#)—winner of the 2008 AIA Architecture Firm Award. KieranTimberlake is internationally renowned for its commitment to research and sustainable design.



"What stands out as clearly today as it did when I was an architecture student in the 1970s is that Eero Saarinen's designs were astonishing acts of will. At that time, with the advent of post-modernism, Saarinen was under fire by critics of modernism; but a visit to one of his buildings belied that criticism. Projects like the TWA Terminal, North Christian Church, and the John Deere Headquarters had a great impact on me.

during the inaugural year. [Audio and video recordings](#) are available on the Museum's web site.

The series returns in September 2008 and will tie in with themes from the Museum's [Green Community](#) exhibition, opening in October.



For the Greener Good lecture series is presented by The Home Depot Foundation.

Celebrate Eero Saarinen



Exclusive Opportunity for National Building Museum Members!

Museum members are invited to an opening reception for the exhibition *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* on Wednesday, April 30. Members will enjoy light fare and a preview of this major retrospective before its public opening.

The evening will feature remarks by His Excellency The Ambassador of Finland, National Building Museum Executive Director Chase Rynd, and exhibition curator Donald Albrecht. Guests will also have the opportunity to

Saarinen's body of work was as diverse as it was creative. His buildings still have gravitas even as they defy gravity. They are as emotional as they are precise. Whenever the struggles of contemporary practice make me doubt the profession of architecture I go back to the work of Saarinen and his peers to be reminded of its importance."

—**Vincent James**, is principal and founder of the Minneapolis-based firm [Vincent James Associates Architects \(VJAA\)](#). A former furniture maker, he brings a keen appreciation of materials, details, joinery, and structure to the firm's work. VJAA's projects are noted for their promotion of social interaction and sustainable design.

"There was a certain degree of representational symbolism that was inherent in the way Saarinen chose his forms. He used sculptural forms that were both functional and artistic. In terms of materiality and form, although many of Saarinen's works were a "refined" type of brutalism of the mid 20th century, they are still fresh and continue to inform and influence current architectural thought. He was certainly a precursor to the work of Frank Gehry and Thom Mayne. He was on the cusp of the transition from the international modern style of architecture to the architecture of the early 21st Century."



—**Edward Feiner, FAIA** served as the chief architect of the General Services Administration from 1996 to 2005. He is currently senior vice president and chief architect with the Las Vegas Sands Corporation. Prior to joining the Sands Corp., Feiner was the director of SOM's Washington, D.C. office.

attend exclusive gallery tours led by Donald Albrecht and coordinating curator Martin Moeller. We hope to see you there!

Not yet a member? Join or renew your membership, and enjoy exclusive benefits like invitations to opening receptions and much more. Please contact the Membership office at 202.272.2448 or [join online](#).



Timeless Design

Eero Saarinen was not only an architect who designed such iconic structures as the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, but also a prolific furniture designer. At a time when modernist furniture was largely derived from Germany and the Bauhaus school of design, Saarinen and his contemporaries shifted the center of modernist design to America. While he is best known for his Tulip and Womb chairs, Saarinen's entire collection was groundbreaking and many items are still produced today.



Much of Eero Saarinen's architectural work was criticized for not having a cohesive style and creating a completely different design for each project. His furniture designs, however, are remarkably consistent and showcase his eye for clean, flowing shapes that were beautiful and functional.



Knoll, the local sponsor of *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*, has been distributing Eero Saarinen's furniture

designs for more than 50 years. Knoll is the only company to produce the Grasshopper chair (1946), the 70-series pieces (Womb, 71, 72: 1948 & 1950), and the Pedestal Collection (1957)—Saarinen's best-known furniture designs. The Grasshopper chair was



Q: What famous actress is buried at Unity Chapel in Spring Green, Wisconsin, near Frank Lloyd Wright's estate, Taliesin?

Think you know the answer? [Click here](#) to find out.

designed in collaboration with Florence Knoll, and it was the first of Saarinen's chairs to be commercially produced.



According to Brian Lutz, who worked at Knoll from 1978-1991 and is the author of the forthcoming book *The Furniture of Eero Saarinen* (Yale University Press), Saarinen's modern furniture designs have stayed so popular because they're simply "good design" and there's an absolute value to well-designed pieces. Saarinen's furniture has an organic, humanistic quality and their fluid forms have proven to be universally appealing and timeless.

To celebrate the exhibition, the Museum Shop has two Saarinen side tables available for purchase courtesy of Vastu, a local Knoll retailer. The entire [Knoll](#) Saarinen collection, currently celebrating its 50th anniversary, can be ordered through [Vastu](#). For every Saarien sale referral received from the National Building Museum, Vastu will make a contribution to the Museum. For more information, please call 202.272.2448 or visit www.nbm.org.

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