

Portland Architecture

Coming to a Coffee Table Near You: BOORA TBA Projects Featured In Taschen Architecture Series

One of my favorite publishers in any genre, but especially among architecture and design books, is Taschen. They bring design, art and nostalgia to the masses in smart, elegant packaging and with eclectic taste ranging from surf photography to ancient architectural theory to Japanese advertising posters. And recently, the publisher has been pressing a series of titles focusing on architecture in individual countries. Previous editions focused on design Meccas like Holland. Now, the US edition is out, and it features one Portland representative: BOORA Architects' designs for the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art's Time-Based Art Festival in 2004 and 2005.



In 2004, it was a temporary 200-seat theater, cabaret stage, bar and cafe, using recycled and other simple materials: scaffolding, pegboard, plastic buckets. In 2005, BOORA produced an event complex (pictured in these official shots supplied by the architect - no amateur photos here) by creatively using scaffolding and orange plastic temporary fencing and a few lights and plants. That one was particularly impressive visually, comparable to the Maryhill Double project near Maryhill Museum in Washington by Annie Han and Daniel Mihalyo of Lead Pencil Studio.

The book is called simply Architecture in the United States, and it features "15 to 20 architects--from the firmly established to the up and coming--with the focus on how they have contributed to the very recent architecture in the chosen nation." About the TBA project, author Philip Jodidio writes, "The involvement of BOORA, including hundreds of hours of free design and execution work, represents an explicit acceptance of the fact that architects cannot content themselves with building 'timeless' structures for wealthy patrons. The temporary and effervescent nature of this initiative might in a sense be closer to performance art than to architecture in the usual sense, but it underlines the ways in which contemporary architecture has evolved."



So how come we get a kind of mini-landmark, a local structure that transcends the usual constraints of budget and formula to become something far more impressive than the sum of its parts, and it's only around for about ten days? I'm mostly joking. I mean, our neighbors in Seattle have more so-called architectural gems or landmarks, but I'd certainly wish for the facade of the Experience Music Project to disappear eventually (although I love Hendrix and the museum).

I would love to see someone take the BOORA/TBA projects and turn them into some kind of recurring presence. Maybe the sight of those orange buckets, scaffolding and plastic mesh fencing could become the physical identity of some art or theater group that stages performances in all kinds of unexpected places by bringing the architecture along as a kit of parts.



One other funny thing about the recent publication of Architecture in the United States is that, as I understand it from reading a recent newspaper report, PICA has decided to go with an existing brick-and-mortar space for its after-hours eat/drink/entertainment venue: the Wonder Ballroom and adjacent Cafe Wonder in Northeast Portland. It's great to see TBA heading to Northeast, and perhaps it's asking too much of BOORA to design these kinds of spaces every year. But it's also a little sad to think of these temporary spaces missing from this year's TBA, because their design and construction was itself the embodiment of time-based art.

Incidentally, one of the other Taschen titles I own is called Modernism Rediscovered and consists of architectural photographs by midcentury legend Julius Schulman. The one photo in that book of a Portland building is of Memorial Coliseum. I must say, though, that it does look good. And some of its bones, in an odd way, remind me a little of the scaffolding of BOORA's 2005 event complex.