

Left: Boston Public Library

firm that he created. The exhibition looks at the history of the firm from the perspectives of “immigration history, architectural innovation, and the cultural conditions that led to the creation of hundreds of America’s great public spaces.”

Guastavino Sr. capitalized on the urban construction boom in the United States by adapting centuries-old Spanish building methods and patenting a new system that enabled the construction of supporting arches that were lightweight, fireproof, and inexpensive. His son Rafael Guastavino Jr. (1872–1950), an equally skilled inventor, kept the company at the forefront of the construction industry in the early 20th century with the development of acoustical ceramics and the design of larger, lighter domes.

The exhibition highlights the intersection of this technology with aesthetics. The Guastavino Company controlled the fabrication process of their signature tiles, supervising craftsmen in the shaping and firing of tiles that were used to create vaults patterned in colorful geometric designs. Original Guastavino Company patents and drawings are on view, many on loan from Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University. And a beautiful half-scale tiled vault inspired by the Guastavinos’ work at the Boston Public Library (1889–90) allows visitors to see the patented “cohesive construction” technique—multiple layers of ceramic tiles bonded with thick mortar.

The Guastavinos were not only innovators and artists, they were also entrepreneurs who knew how to make a profit, create hype, and built partnerships with some of the greatest American architects. Despite his limited English, Guastavino Sr. enthusiastically lectured and gave hands-on demonstrations to sell his products

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SOARING IDEAS

Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America’s Great Public Spaces

National Building Museum
401 F Street NW
Washington, D.C.
Through January 20, 2014

Constant innovation, revolutionary technology, shrewd marketing, and a risk-taking founder. No, the current exhibition at the National Building Museum is not about a 21st century tech start-up. It’s about the Guastavino Company (1881–1962), which, over a century ago, revolutionized American architectural design and construction.

Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America’s Great Public Spaces features the work of the Spanish immigrant Rafael Guastavino Sr. (1842–1908) and the family



Asphalt Jungle Examined

ReThinking a Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking
Eran Ben-Joseph
MIT Press, \$24.95

The opening credits of the short-lived 1980 sitcom *Bosom Buddies* shifts scenes in a series of rapid fire clips to the theme of Billy Joel’s “My Life.” Although the show was cancelled in 1982, a moment where Peter Scolari’s Henry Desmond feeds a parking meter, grabs a

reflective face tanner, and joins Tom Hanks’ Kip Wilson on his own cancer-taunting chaise lounge within a parallel curbside spot, left an indelible mark on my childhood psyche—a psyche pock marked by many a misspent summer vacation watching reruns. As a youth, what was

so intriguing, aside from the absurdity of adults getting to play in the street, was why they chose not to just use the adjacent park, clearly within the camera angle, merely the width of a sidewalk away. Several years of architecture school and practice later, the genius of their move to repurpose public space is better appreciated.

This kind of activity has now become a full movement. “PARK(ing) Day” is one featured example of the re-use of parking spaces that author Eran Ben-Joseph celebrates in his

sixth book, *Rethinking A Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking*. Organized in three sections—A Lot in Common, Lots of Time, and Lots of Excellence—this volume features no shortage of puns, but seeks to raise (or begin) the discourse of this omnipresent necessary evil, which in some cities has become “the most salient landscape feature of our built environment.” One can read this book as a manifesto for quality of lot design over quantity of spaces, one that seeks to re-integrate the parking lot into community

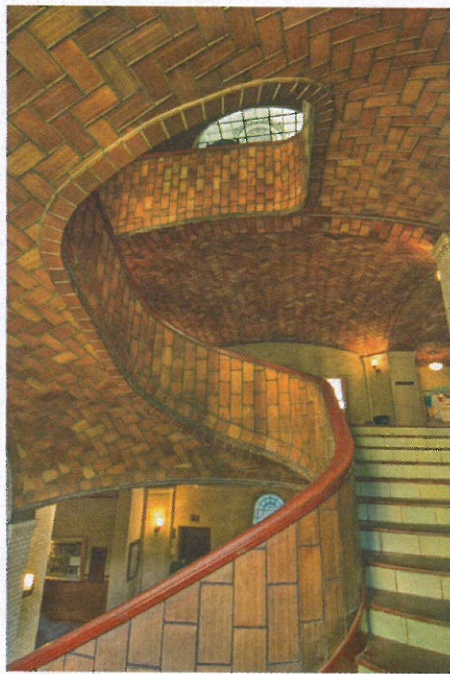
life and promote its stature to the realm of an asset.

Early on, Ben-Joseph acknowledges minimal advancement of the typology since the dawn of zoning. Overcome by maneuvering automobile mechanics, zoning requirements, and a developer’s bottom line, design efforts appear to cease at the shop front threshold, and good design too often yields to maintenance and management interests. Parking lots have become an afterthought, a purgatory between where one is and where their true

destination lies. His analysis covers fundamentals, history, and potential, spotlighting adaptations and designs that do work and are reaching for a richer meaning amid utility.

After describing the techniques of curbs and access, the author cruises down memory lane with a perhaps too-soon-to-be nostalgic nod to the once-ubiquitous parking lot follies of Fotomat kiosks. Save for a few examples of well-intentioned lighting and landscaping, most domestic examples of parking lot interventions that occupy

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Left: St. Paul's Chapel; Above: The Vanderbilt Hotel

SOARING IDEAS continued from page 28 and promote his new construction system. The company took out advertisements in trade journals and made headlines in widely read newspapers and magazines. *The New York Herald* reported on the heavenly construction of the vault at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1909): "Young Architect Upsets All Theories of Engineers and Erects Vast Structure."

The greatest marketing materials, however, were the buildings themselves—new civic spaces that reflected the nation's ideas and aspirations. The master builders

worked with Heinz and LaFarge at City Hall Subway Station, New York City (1903), Richard Morris Hunt at the Biltmore Estate (1895), Warren and Wetmore at the Grand Central Terminal's Oyster Bar, New York City (1912), and architect Bertram Goodhue and mosaic artist Hildreth Meière at the Nebraska State Capitol (1922–1932). Large-scale, commissioned photography by Michael Freeman captures these expansive yet intimate spaces.

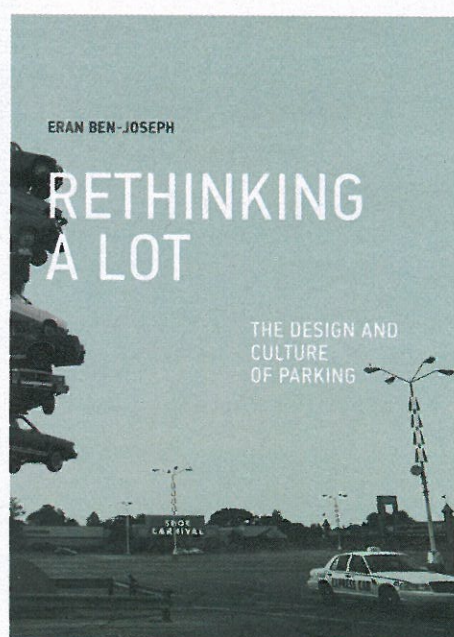
The Guastavino Company is a case study for modern entrepreneurs looking to disrupt the construction industry today (ahem, 3D printing companies). The exhibition and accompanying interactive searchable map, a work in progress that will feature nearly 600 extant Guastavino buildings, will help reintroduce the work of this somewhat forgotten company to a grateful public.

LIZ MCENANEY IS A WRITER AND INDEPENDENT CURATOR IN NEW YORK.

ASPHALT JUNGLE EXAMINED continued from page 28 any specter of a potential parking space—from SITE's macabre *Ghost Parking Lot* to Dustin Schuler's *Spindle*, which graces the dust jacket—have all been cannibalized into further parking spaces. One is almost lead to believe nothing is sacred, but then there is the one exception: a pre-existing gravesite within a theater parking lot in New Jersey. Rightly so, the author acknowledges we can do better.

In the spirit of Kevin Lynch, his predecessor at MIT, the text is supported by a generosity of images. The diagrams by Stephen Kennedy would engage Edward Tufte himself, and are among the most successful images. Together, they begin to develop their own language akin to Lynch's infamous marginalia dialect of doodles. Even more diagrams would alleviate some of the tangle in dense pockets of statistical data that crowd the text in later sections.

Some over-attention is given to certain anecdotal examples. Three paragraphs are devoted to a car magnet that your children *should* touch. Another is gratuitously given to Marshmallow Fluff. However, in all there are countless conversation starters to engage not just designers, but ideally developers, local chambers of commerce, activists, and regular citizens. Paying attention to the bigger picture—exploiting potential, addressing environmental run-off via permeable paving, and designing to the most regular need, not just the demands of desperate Black Friday consumers—the landscape can begin to transform. Less harmful, and in fact more inviting, lots can provide settings for any number of organized



and impromptu civic events.

In discussion of both street parking and mass lots, Ben-Joseph notes that the standard space varies between 144 and 200 square feet. NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg's recent AdAPT NYC competition for micro apartments capped out at units of 300 square feet for a primary residence. Parking lots may never become more than tumors of tarmac, awkward pauses from our vehicles to the next Dryvit-clad big box, but perhaps we can all do more with a lesser lot.

SEAN KHORSANDI IS A NEW YORK-BASED WRITER AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER.

Civic Horticulture Conference and What's Out There Weekend

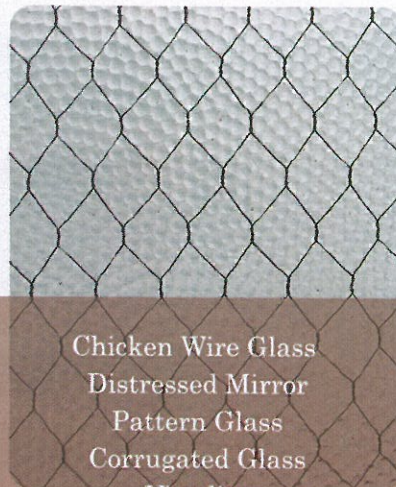
May 16-19
Philadelphia

Register today tclf.org/event

The urban core's future is a very hot topic and Philadelphia's use of horticulture in city shaping will be examined and debated May 17 during *Civic Horticulture*, co-organized by The Cultural Landscape Foundation and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and during *What's Out There Weekend* FREE, expert-led tours on May 18-19.



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