Preservationist, or Pest for Short

By Heather Kenny

When a park is not a park, Tang Pie, good reads from across the pond, a new Chris Ware comic, and more...
Preservationist, or Pest for Short

Marty Hackl, self-appointed protector of lesser Prairie School lights, is about to lose his latest fight. But there’s always another one coming.

By Heather Kenny

You’d think Marty Hackl would be happy. The River Forest Women’s Club—a green-stained, board-and-batten 1913 building designed by Prairie School architect William Drummond—is under contract to be sold to a private buyer with the money needed for its restoration. The structure, on the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois’ ten-most-endangered list for the last two years, is now safe from the wrecking ball. It won’t be sold to developers eager to build on its double lot.

But Hackl is disappointed. A preservationist and longtime Oak Park resident who recently moved to River Forest, he’s kept tabs on the building for years. The women’s club, though private since its founding as an arts society in 1894, allowed its auditorium to be used as a public performance space, and Hackl often reserved time in it to practice his violin. A restoration consultant and contractor, he noticed some maintenance problems, but overall the structure appeared to be sound.

Still, it was clear that the women’s club was having trouble keeping up the building. In 2000 they placed an announcement in local papers soliciting presentations from other organizations interested in taking over care of the facility. Hackl and Laura Good, a real estate agent specializing in historic properties and singer who’d practiced and performed in the auditorium, put together a proposal for turning the club into a community arts foundation. He says they never heard back from club representatives. (River Forest Women’s Club president Marilyn Organ refuses to comment on the matter.) Instead, maintenance of the building wound up in the hands of the River Forest Park District.

The building’s condition continued to deteriorate. The window frames were crumbling and there were leaks in the roof. In 2003 Hackl held a benefit concert to raise funds continued on page 18
“when you absolutely, positively got to KILL EVERY MUTHAF*CKER IN THE ROOM”

—Ordell, JACKIE BROWN

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Letters

You Say Tomato

Wow, Michael, I guess you're right. [Letters, June 10.] Art really is subjective. Taking a vernacular aesthetic that usually gets you arrested and your car impounded and calling it legitimate when it's on rented space and paid for by a cheap body fragrance—sounds kinda like a "bullshit corporate ad" to me.

James Mathien
PS: Liz Armstrong, how much did Jack FM pay you to sell for them?

Right Place, Wrong Band

I am a member of the blues band AfterMidnightBlues. We performed in the Chicago Blues Fest on Thursday, June 9. Thank you for your coverage of us [The Reader's Guide to the Chicago Blues Festival, June 10]. Unfortunately the info you printed was about a band from San Antonio, Texas, and we are not that band. We are a band from downtown Illinois and have no affiliation with this band from Texas. Thank you for taking note of this mistake.

Karen Brault

David Whiteis replies: My apologies to Ms. Brault and her bandmates.

Bad Bedfellows

In the article "Saving Journalism From the Jalopies" [Hot Type, June 3] Orrville Schell, dean of the graduate school of journalism at the University of California—Berkeley, mentions the paradox that "none of us went to journalism schools." But that's not the critical paradox, nor is it the pressing question regarding university-affiliated journalistic ethics.

Columbia University, one of the "five distinguished universities" that will be an integral part of the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education, has all too often been an active participant in practices that threaten the "integrity of the profession." Most recently, Columbia cut a deal with the New York Times so that the university could dictate coverage of its Middle East studies department controversy. Interestingly, the Columbia campus newspaper was offered the same deal and refused it (although the student writers have let the university slide on other serious ethical issues). Columbia, like the other "distinguished universities," has a brand name to protect, and the university manipulates the press according to it. Certainly it looks like the Carnegie-Knight people, as frequently happens with these equally "distinguished" philanthropies, either have been played or are not sincerely interested in journalistic integrity.

Liam Cunningham Chicago

The Commercialization of Everything

Dear editor: The issue Ms. Armstrong raises in her most recent column is interesting (June 3). Basically we are not an artist being paid to do an ad on the side of a building, a building owner being paid for the space, and an ad that's being advertised, Pretty standard. What gets tricky is that the ad is in the form of graffiti art, making it appear to be just some graffiti, rather than a standard ad or billboard. It's a new disguise for advertising. On one hand, legally, Ed was probably "wrong" to paint over the mural. Some thoughts on that are: private property, contract for space, free speech. And I'm not familiar enough with the whole clean-up-graffiti-in-the-neighborhood program to know how that would serve as a reasonable justification. It is true that one has to feel a bit bad for the guy hired to paint the mural. In fact, I saw him out there again today repainting it in the 90-degree heat of the day (he's probably getting paid through). But is it "art"? Broadly defined, maybe. Art for hire.

I suppose that companies have used music and visual art (in various ways) to sell for a long, long time. But this seems like another step, a little trickier, shadier, cheaper. The fact that in this particular instance the art form is graffiti just adds to that. Graffiti artists and taggers, from what I've seen, are rarely working for the man. They probably aren't shocked when other artists come along and tag over or paint over their graffiti either.

I hope that the "urban youth" market they seem to be targeting will see through all of this— I mean, when I first saw the ad/mural at Division and Hoyne I had that moment of "Hey, that's new. What is that? That's kinda cool (eyes scanning from right side of mural to left bottom, left-hand corner). Oh, it's a stupid advertisement for crappy college or some such thing, fake art. Ugh—of course. But in general, lots of people/consumers are probably just stupid enough to fall for it. When companies figure out their target market. Another tiny step toward the commercialization of everything. Yet one more addition to the chatter that evidences big-business America's never-ending, capitalistic, moneygrubbing drive to sell, sell, sell. So it was "right" for Ed to paint over the mural? I'm not sure about "right," but I think it was pretty a cool, expressive, and provocative move. It was a statement. I think what Ed did with simple black paint was real art. After all, we're all talking about it, aren't we? And what does art do if not make us think?

Michelle Wicker Park
Money Changes Everything

With funds dwindling, the Chicago Reporter has taken some drastic measures.

By Michael Miner

The Chicago Reporter just bowed to reality and switched to bimonthly publication. In the best of times the monthly schedule was hard to keep and often wasn’t—the young investigative reporters sometimes missed their deadlines by weeks. But these are more like the worst of times at the Reporter: Foundation support has dwindled, the staff’s not sure that anyone’s still reading it, and about half the staff recently disappeared. The old schedule looked both impossible and pointless.

The Community Renewal Society launched the Reporter 33 years ago to examine poverty and racial injustice. A sign of the idealism of the gifted young reporters the paper has attracted is their chronic ambivalence about CRS itself. “It’s an un holy alliance to bring together a news publication with an advocacy group, which CRS is,” explains former editor Laura Washington. But she appreciates what some staffers don’t—that CRS’s underwriting the Reporter would never have survived.

At some point in the last few years, camaraderie among the staff began to fray. In recent months it’s been in tatters. On April 5 editor-publisher Alysia Tate e-mailed her staff: “We all agree that the environment here has become so difficult that none of us will be able to continue working under the current conditions in a productive way. . . . Movement is required from all of us.”

Two days later Tate fired contributing editor Mick Dunme. Dunme says he offered to resign if he could stay long enough to wrap up the project he was on. But Tate wanted him gone immediately. The following Monday she fired associate editor Brian Regal when he came to work, having called his mother to try to track him down beforehand. Reporter Rupa Shenoy soon quit. Reporter Sarah Karp went on maternity leave.

Trying to understand why things soured, I was encouraged to take several factors into account. For starters, race and poverty stopped being topical, and the major media lost interest in the Reporter’s findings. “I wrote a story during last year’s elections about people being disfranchised in Cook County,” Shenoy told me. “It didn’t get any pickup—none whatsoever. Then I wrote a story about how the Chicago police were violating state law. There was no pickup.”

A longtime benefactor, the McCormick Tribune Foundation, concluded in 2000 that the Reporter wasn’t reaching the right people, and for the next four years it gave the magazine $100,000 annually to spend on marketing and circulation. The lack of results dismayed the staff, and it didn’t thrill the foundation either. “We thought you were planning to do a steady drumbeat of mailings, using different lists, to expose people to the magazine and ask them to subscribe but we don’t see much evidence of that last quarter,” said a memo the foundation sent Tate and her manager of circulation and marketing last October. “As you know, this grant was conceived of as a one-time thing. We’ve now renewed it, despite lower-than-expected activity during the first grant. But in renewing it, we expected to see a real, aggressive push. We hope that’s coming.” The grant has since expired.

Vivian Vahlberg, McCormick’s director of journalism programs, told me, “They made progress. They didn’t get as far as we wanted.”

The stock market hammered the CRS endowment, and CRS tried to find other funders to cover the Reporter’s operational expenses. That’s how the Reporter’s sister magazine, Catalyst, is supported, but race and poverty turned out to be a tougher sell than education.

The December 2003 issue of the Reporter thanked the funds and foundations that had contributed $609,000 during the previous year. Last December’s list was shorter, and the total contribution only $538,200.

Such bequests are a mixed blessing anyway. “There are far more strings attached to grants than even when I started the job,” says Tate, who’s held it three and a half years. “There’s much more emphasis on reports, benchmarks, measurable outcomes. More and more we have to rethink what we do and how we prioritize what we do and how we talk to funders about what we do.” A magazine so beholden to its advertisers would humiliate everyone who worked there.

A few weeks after 9/11 transformed the nation’s economy and priorities, Tate took over the Reporter. She was 29, the same age as the magazine, and she’d been a reporter there for three years. But Tate’s talents and ambition exceeded her managerial experience, and she found herself in the difficult position of supervising friends and colleagues. Yet Shenoy, an intern at the time, remembers, “That first year, it was the best place to work. It was like a living embodiment of the ideals it was supposed to espouse—a totally integrated place where everyone was equal, down to the interns. But very gradually a breach began to form between the management and the staff.”

It widened in 2003, when CRS executive director Calvin Morris ordered cutbacks throughout his organization and Tate laid off two reporters. Every fall the Reporter staff had gone on a retreat, but not last fall. In October the staff took Tate out to lunch, and the conversation focused on the McCormick grant, which they...
believed was being squandered. It wasn’t a pleasant meal. Communications between Tate and her staff continued to deteriorate, and in March her number two, senior editor Alden Loury, announced that she’d decided to do something about it. Charles Whitaker, a Medill professor who cochaired the Reporter’s advisory board, was coming to conduct a meeting. Everyone was expected to show up and say what was on his or her mind. Tate would not attend. The March 22 bitch session went on for hours, and afterward Whitaker handed Tate a seven-page memo. “A few days later she called a meeting to talk to us,” says Shenoy. “She starts cutting and apologizing. ‘I’m sorry I haven’t recognized your contributions.’ We thought, ‘Oh, this is cheesy but good. She’s trying.’ She asked for individual meetings to talk about our concerns.” Shenoy was first to sit down with Tate. “It quickly became clear I was on the defense, she was on offense,” Shenoy says. “She was seeking to defeat our concerns rather than deal with them. I told her my principal concern was we have pickup: ‘You have no idea how difficult this is. Your life into these freakish stories and no one one of them. It’s maddening.’ She said, ‘You can’t expect pick-up—other media see us as com- petition.’ She said we never got much pickup ever—‘I don’t know why you’d expect some now.’ Her whole thing is ‘We’re having impact. You don’t run in the circles I run in. She sees city leaders, and they compliment us. You run in these circles you’re in freakin’ Englewood and Austin, she’s going to hear more of it.”

Tate’s relationship with Dunke was particularly touchy. They’d worked together for years, and he was the managing editor when she took over. But she appointed Loury senior editor above him. Though Dunke quit as managing editor early last year to teach at Columbia College, as a “part-time” con- tributing editor he was still giving the Reporter 30 hours a week. After their meeting Tate e-mailed him. She said she “remained concerned . . . about your acknowledgement that it is difficult for you to envision your role here under existing leader- ship and in the offices of Community Renewal Society . . . I will be sharing my recommendations and goals after meeting with each staff member, and then will sit down with each person again.”

Dunke was alarmed. He wrote back, “I spoke to you Wednesday as frankly as I could with the understanding that the discus- sion would be open and honest. I did not understand it to be part of a formal process of evaluation of my performance.” Tate replied, “I apologize if I have not been clear. All of our discussions here about your per- formance and opinions about the Reporter, and your role in partic- ular, should be viewed as part of my current goal to reassert and evaluate every aspect of the mag- azine . . . You are correct in assuming that our upcoming conversation, which is sched- uled, will focus largely on your role and future at the magazine.” Dunke then told her, “My assumptions about the informal nature of our conversation were not derived out of the blue. For the six years you and I have worked together, regardless of the titles we have held, we have continued on page 6.

The Straight Dope by Cecil Adams

In the column in your online archive about why the missionary position is called that [1992] you repeat the myth that the term missionary position was coined by uniden- tified natives as a reaction to shocked missionaries’ proselytization against unorthodox sexual practices. To your credit, you mention that there is no hard evidence to support this assertion. However, Robert J. Pnist (yes, the coincidence is amusing) in his article “Missionary Positions: Christian, Modernist, Post-Modernist” (Current Anthropology, February 2001) carefully picks this story apart. [Lengthy explanation omitted because I’m about to go through it below.—C.A.] Prist even cites the Straight Dope as one of the many sources perpetuating the missionary position story. Anyway, this is my contribution to the fighting of ignorance. —Zinkie, via the Straight Dope Message Board

N w, Zinkie, I didn’t just repeat the myth. ’I told the story, then remarked, ‘That’s the legend, at least. It may not be true.’ As it turns out, my caution was amply justified. Thanks to you and Robert Priest, we now appear to have the full story on missionary position. Although European and Euro- descended Christian missionaries have been proselytizing all the major religions of the world for centuries, the phrase missionary position, meaning the part- ners facing-man-on-top posture for heterosexual intercourse, was at one point thought to have first surfaced only in the late 1960s. This timing suggested to at least a few people, me included, that the standard explanation of the phrase’s provenance in terms of actual prissy missionaries was dubious. I speculated that the phrase was the work of a bunch of redneck fun at upright religious types. That guess wasn’t entirely off the mark but omitted a key connection, which Priest has now supplied. He unearthed what he believes to be the missionary position’s first known and earliest occurrence, the following quote from Alfred Kinsey’s Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948): ‘It will be recalled that (anthropologist Bronislaw) Malinowski (The Sexual Act in Western Melanesia) (1929) recorded the nearly univer- sal occurrence of a post (‘missionary’ posture) among the Trobriand’s in the Southwestern Pacific, and that he notes that careful analysis of the local Pacific position are performed around the com- munal campfires, to the great amuse- ment of the natives who refer to the position as the “missionary position.”’

According to Priest, however, Malinow- ski’s book says nothing about the missionary position. Rather Malinowski devoted his entire book to analyzing the Trobrianders’ play ribald games at gath- erings during the full moon; (b) islanders who work for whites sometimes mimic the in jest of religious rites. That guess wasn’t entirely off the mark but omitted a key connection, which Priest has now supplied. He unearthed what he believes to be the missionary position’s first known and earliest occurrence, the following quote from Alfred Kinsey’s Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948): ‘It will be recalled that (anthropologist Bronislaw) Malinowski (The Sexual Act in Western Melanesia) (1929) recorded the nearly universal occurrence of a post (‘missionary’ posture) among the Trobriand’s in the Southwestern Pacific, and that he notes that careful analysis of the local Pacific position are performed around the communal campfires, to the great amusement of the natives who refer to the position as the “missionary position.”’

According to Priest, however, Malinowski’s words. Priest conjectures that Kinsey conflated these disparate elements to come up with the missionary position tale, apparently never bothering to compare his faulty recreation against Malinowski’s words.

Priest, a divinity school professor, believes that from there missionary position gradually took hold as a way of mar- keting the Vatican’s. Furthermore, Kinsey in his book claims that the Christian church once considered non-MLP sex sinful. Priest conjectures that Kinsey conflated these disparate elements to come up with the missionary position tale, apparently never bothering to compare his faulty recreation against Malinowski’s words.

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"We must agree to operate as a team that is not a collective or a family," she wrote. "We must move in the direction of eliminating gossip. ... We must commit to testing the ideas and decisions communicated by the leadership by putting them into good practice, rather than undermining them." Furthermore, "It will also be increasingly important to our work to have good working relationships with the rest of the CRS staff."

Team versus family? Brian Rogal says Tate had been making that distinction for months, and no one understood it. But the tone of her memo was clear. It was, well, corporate. "Whitaker told us Alysia wanted a more corporate structure," says Rogal. "He said he thought it was wrong. We thought it was wrong."

The second time they met, Tate fired Dumke. Rogal went in next and, like Dumke, objected to the memo. "I felt it was written by someone who knows the words and not the music," he says. "She gave me a cold, cold stare. ‘So you think it’s all my fault.’" Rogal walked out pretty certain he was history.

"Brian and Mick were two of the best reporters the Reporter had," says Sarah Karp, who’s now on maternity leave. "They went into the conversations wanting to be fair and honest. I don’t think they went in trying to bash her or take down the Reporter, anything like that. We thought we were having honest and open discussions about the Reporter. I don’t think any of us expected the result would be half the staff would be fired."

Tate told me she wouldn’t discuss personnel matters, but she was friendly and suggested lunch. Then she e-mailed CRS executive director Morris and the members of the advisory board. "In the next week or two," she wrote, "you may see some media about recent staffing changes at the Reporter. I wanted to make sure that all of you knew that these stories were promoted by former employees here—not current staff—and that the tenor of those stories will likely be largely reflective of people’s upsets, not the truth about what is happening here."

I felt obliged to e-mail the same board members. I wanted them to know that none of the former Reporter employees I’d spoken to had come to me with the story. I didn’t even know that Dumke and Rogal had been fired until two months later—when someone outside the magazine told me.

News Bite

The way a magazine shops for new blood says a lot about how it idealizes itself. Crain’s Chicago Business just promoted managing editor Joseph Cahill to editor, and now it’s looking to fill his old job. It wants applicants to know its stories “are known for sophisticated analysis, strong point of view, sharp writing and a forward spin that tells readers what to expect, not just what happened yesterday.” The next managing editor should “know how to balance hard-hitting news coverage with the occasional offspeed pitch. … A competitive nature wrapped in a congenial personality seals the deal.”
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This Is Not a Park

And yet nobody’s paid taxes on it for six years.

By Ben Joravsky

With its trees and drinking fountain the little triangle of land at the corner of Milwaukee and Augusta certainly looks like a park. The nearby residents who for years have sat in the shade of those trees assume it’s a park. And nobody’s paid any taxes on the land for years—the county lists it as tax-exempt, just as if it were a park.

But in March, Holly McDonald, who often walks by the lot, saw a notice the city had posted on a tree saying condos were going to be built there. “I just thought it was outrageous that the city would let someone demolish a park to build more condos,” she says. “The area doesn’t need more condos—they’re going up all over the place. But it does need parks. There’s no other green space on this stretch of Milwaukee.”

McDonald repeatedly called the local alderman, the 27th Ward’s Walter Burnett. When he didn’t respond she sent him a letter. “This tiny oasis has ash, maple and flowering crabapple trees and is a humanizing bit of land in the area,” she wrote on May 6. “So now, this home for birds and these old trees is going to be wiped out and built over in order that more wasteful condominiums in an already oversaturated real estate market can be built.”

Burnett didn’t respond to the letter either, but he says he supports the zoning change that recently zipped through the City Council allowing eight condos to be built. “The developers met with local residents,” he says. “There were no objections.” He also says the lot’s an eyesore. “No one’s been cutting the grass. It’s neglected. You’ve got homeless people sleeping in it and cars illegally parked there.”
He doesn’t say why he hasn’t gotten the owner to clean up the lot, but at least he knows that it isn’t a park, that it’s been privately owned for years. When I called the Cook County assessor’s office they told me the current owner was the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority.

Joelle McGinnis, a toll authority spokesperson, says her agency doesn’t own the land, and she can’t understand why anyone would think it does, since there isn’t a toll road anywhere near the intersection of Augusta and Milwaukee. “It’s bizarre—very bizarre,” she says. “We have never owned that property. The folks in our property office have been around long enough to remember if we owned property in the city, and they tell me we don’t. I wouldn’t think that if any state department owned it, it would be the Illinois Department of Transportation.”

IDOT spokesperson Mike Claffey says his agency used to own the property, which it bought in 1957 when it was constructing the Kennedy Expressway. “It was land left over from the Kennedy construction,” he says. “Obviously the state didn’t need it for the highway.”

Claffey says there wasn’t much the state could do with the plot, which was wedged up against the Kennedy. As a goodwill gesture to the community, the state turned it into a park, putting in walkways and a water fountain, planting about a dozen trees, and doing regular maintenance.

By the mid-90s, Claffey says, IDOT had decided to sell the land. The city wasn’t interested, so IDOT offered to lease it to local residents to maintain as a park. But the residents didn’t want to sign a lease. Finally in 1999 IDOT sold the land for $355,000 to a trust fund. It’s not clear who the owners were because they’re not listed on the deed. “We really had nothing more to do with the property after we sold it,” says Claffey. “At that point the land should have been put on the county’s tax rolls. It wasn’t, and nobody put it on the rolls in 2003, when it was bought by MCM Properties, the real estate and development company that plans to build the condos. According to Frank Thoke, an MCM spokesperson, his firm bought the land from William Kritt, another local developer. Kritt died in March, and it’s not clear how long he owned the property.

At any rate, Maura Kownacki, a spokesperson for the assessor’s office, says it’s not her agency’s fault that the lot’s still listed as tax-exempt. “The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority has filed annual affidavits for the past two years indicating that they owned the property,” she says. “They did not indicate for either year that the property has been sold, leased, or transferred.” Moreover, she says, “The buyer of an exempt piece of property must notify the assessor’s office by certified mail within 30 days of any transfer of exempt property. We have no record of any notification.”

Alderman Burnett says he didn’t know the county was treating the land as tax-exempt. MCM’s Thoke and Gabriels say they didn’t know it was tax-exempt either. But they assume the assessor’s office will update its records once the property’s developed, and presumably someone will then have to pay the back taxes. “It’s all very confusing,” says Holly McDonald, who’s been pleading with the city to let the land remain a park. “Obviously one hand of government doesn’t know what the other’s doing. It seems like developers have been getting big breaks with this land since they bought it. Now they get to turn it into condos—that’s the biggest break of all.”
Graffiti artist StefOne, Cooperative Image Group headquarters, the Wicker Park Axe ad defaced again

The New Longer-Lasting Axe Effect

By Liz Armstrong

Last Saturday just before dusk, I was outside a Humboldt Park apartment building watching graffiti artists Flash, Chumbly, and StefOne and a couple others paint a wall with huge bright flowers. A passing cop car slowed down for a few seconds, then continued on its merry way.

There's something to be said for using daylight as diversion, but that's not what was going on here. The building, on the 2000 block of West Evergreen, is the new headquarters for Cooperative Image Group, a nonprofit arts education collective for kids. Cooperative Image's projects include maintaining a community garden on North Campbell, running a T-shirt business, covering boardered-up buildings with artwork by elementary and high school students, and giving muralists materials to create large-scale works on privately owned buildings.

Cooperative Image gets permission from the building owners, says executive director Ed Marszewski, but that's not what was going on here. The building watching graffiti artists spray painted on a boarded-up sign board hosted by Lumpen's Axe ad, and someone involved with an arts program in Portland, Oregon, contacted him about replacing it with a large-scale anticapitalist painting. Black told the guy sorry, that space is taken until Labor Day—how 'bout the two panels in front of the building? But the guy insisted on that space, offering to buy out the Axe contract.

Black says he hasn't seen a cent from Critical Massive yet. He won't say how much he's supposed to get. He also says he's turned down offers from other ad agencies. “People want that side so much,” he says. “They're trying to capitalize on the uproar about that corner. I don't want a whole political debate about this, but now I have to think, Who's gonna attack this? I've gotten death threats because of this. I understand what Ed and his friends are trying to do, I just think they're going about it the wrong way. If they're going to keep pursuing this, they're going to keep pursuing this, they're going to keep pursuing this.”

The advertising-gossip site adrants.com referenced Wooster's version of the story, then the culture-crit magazine Stay Free! blogged about the action. The Conversation, a message board hosted by Marszewski's Lumpen site, and Harkin's blog filled with comments from readers. Discussions about private property, advertising, art, and underground culture commodification gave way to insults—my favorite was posted on the Conversation by someone claiming to be an “actual graffiti artist” whose culture doesn’t need defending from “art fags” like Marszewski. “Frankly,” the poster wrote, “you guys are just a bunch of pussies with too much time on your hands.”

Besides a throng of insults, Marszewski says, “people are threatening to kick my ass and hating on my events.” The week after the story ran, friends of friends delivered messages to him from the artist who'd painted the ad—who still hasn't identified himself to Marszewski or me—telling him to watch his back. At a robot-themed party at Buddy's, a space Marszewski runs, last week-end some graffiti-writer kids showed up to confront him. “I tried to explain to them the irony of a graffiti guy wanting to throw me in jail,” he says. “We all agreed it was a complex issue, but there was one kid who was like, ‘Fuck you, I just want to hate on your ass.” Later the kids went over to the adjoining Heaven gallery and tagged a wall outside.

The Axe ad was repainted a week and a half after Marszewski's crew covered it up. Then someone—both Marszewski and Black say they don't know who—wrote OFF LIMITS in big silver letters on top of it. The artist soon painted over that message.

They didn't even leave notice that they wanted to remove the piece, says Black, who hasn't notified the city that he wants the ad to stay up. Around the same time the Axe ad went back up, Black says, someone involved with an arts program in Portland, Oregon, contacted him about replacing it with a large-scale anticapitalist painting. Black told the guy sorry, that space is taken until Labor Day—how 'bout the two panels in front of the building? But the guy insisted on that space, offering to buy out the Axe contract.

Black says he hasn't seen a cent from Critical Massive yet. He won't say how much he's supposed to get. He also says he's turned down offers from other ad agencies. “People want that side so much,” he says. “They're trying to capitalize on the uproar about that corner. I don't want a whole political debate about this, but now I have to think, Who's gonna attack this? I've gotten death threats because of this. I understand what Ed and his friends are trying to do; I just think they're going about it the wrong way. If they're going to keep pursuing this, they're going to keep pursuing this, they're going to keep pursuing this.”

The week after the story ran, friends of friends delivered messages to him from the artist who'd painted the ad—who still hasn't identified himself to Marszewski or me—telling him to watch his back. At a robot-themed party at Buddy's, a space Marszewski runs, last week-end some graffiti-writer kids showed up to confront him. “I tried to explain to them the irony of a graffiti guy wanting to throw me in jail,” he says. “We all agreed it was a complex issue, but there was one kid who was like, ‘Fuck you, I just want to hate on your ass.” Later the kids went over to the adjoining Heaven gallery and tagged a wall outside.

The Axe ad was repainted a week and a half after Marszewski's crew covered it up. Then someone—both Marszewski and Black say they don't know who—wrote OFF LIMITS in big silver letters on top of it. The artist soon painted over that message.

Losing the Axe contract.

Besides a throng of insults, Marszewski says, “people are threatening to kick my ass and hating on my events.” The week after the story ran, friends of friends delivered messages to him from the artist who'd painted the ad—who still hasn't identified himself to Marszewski or me—telling him to watch his back. At a robot-themed party at Buddy's, a space Marszewski runs, last week-end some graffiti-writer kids showed up to confront him. “I tried to explain to them the irony of a graffiti guy wanting to throw me in jail,” he says. “We all agreed it was a complex issue, but there was one kid who was like, ‘Fuck you, I just want to hate on your ass.” Later the kids went over to the adjoining Heaven gallery and tagged a wall outside.

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When the ad went back up I called the city's graffiti hotline (312-744-1234) to report it, just to see what they'd do. Streets and Sanitation spokes-man Matt Smith says the city's antigraffiti program doesn't differentiate among painted signs, murals, and tags. “Graffiti is graffiti,” he says. “We're gonna take it down wherever we can.” He says the only way something stays up is if a building owner sends written notice to the city explaining why it should. Otherwise the Graffiti Blasters buff it out or paint over it. But they seem to be a little more forgiving if the graffiti is selling something.

Two weeks ago I wrote about a graffiti-style ad for Axe body spray painted on a boarded-up building at the corner of Honore and Milwaukee, which Ed Marszewski, Elisa Harkins, and one of their friends had painted over. The owner of the building, Michael Black, threatened to press charges against them—a threat he's since rescinded.

New York City's Wooster Collective, which hosts a street-art Web site, got wind of the story; though the site rarely does so much, it's trying to do; I just think they're going about it the wrong way. If they're going to keep pursuing this, they're going to keep pursuing this, they're going to keep pursuing this.”

The advertising-gossip site adrants.com referenced Wooster's version of the story, then the culture-crit magazine Stay Free! blogged about the action. The Conversation, a message board hosted by Marszewski's Lumpen site, and Harkin's blog filled with comments from readers. Discussions about private property, advertising, art, and underground culture commodification gave way to insults—my favorite was posted on the Conversation by someone claiming to be an “actual graffiti artist” whose culture doesn't need defending from “art fags” like Marszewski. “Frankly,” the poster wrote, “you guys are just a bunch of pussies with too much time on your hands.”

Besides a throng of insults, Marszewski says, “people are threatening to kick my ass and hating on my events.” The week after the story ran, friends of friends delivered messages to him from the artist who'd painted the ad—who still hasn't identified himself to Marszewski or me—telling him to watch his back. At a robot-themed party at Buddy's, a space Marszewski runs, last week-end some graffiti-writer kids showed up to confront him. “I tried to explain to them the irony of a graffiti guy wanting to throw me in jail,” he says. “We all agreed it was a complex issue, but there was one kid who was like, ’Fuck you, I just want to hate on your ass.” Later the kids went over to the adjoining Heaven gallery and tagged a wall outside.

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When the ad went back up I called the city's graffiti hotline (312-744-1234) to report it, just to see what they'd do. Streets and San said they'd take care of it immediately. But when the Graffiti Blasters came through the neighborhood the next day, they blasted a tag on the very same wall but didn't touch the ad.
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Our Town

American

Mmmmm, Sauerkraut Custard Pie

Meet Sue Anne Zollinger: no-wave guitar hero, doctoral candidate, collector of unusual pastries

By Peter Margasak

Sue Anne Zollinger was starstruck. “Look, there’s Phyllis Bartholomew,” she said to her friend Susan. Bartholomew, a 60-year-old woman from Columbus, Nebraska, was the amateur winner of last year’s National Pie Championship, and she was walking across a convention room at the Radisson WorldGate Resort in Kissimmee, Florida. This was Zollinger’s first visit to the Great American Pie Festival, an annual event put on by the American Pie Council, but she wasn’t there to compete. Zollinger, a scholar and specialist in pie-culture arcana who lives in Indiana, had rented a booth at the festival’s outdoor expo in nearby Celebration to promote her Web site, the Pie of the Month Club (pieofthemonth.org).

It didn’t go quite as she’d planned. Rain limited visitors on the first day, and instead of meeting other pie aficionados, Zollinger found her booth surrounded by vendors hawking jewelry and soap. The primary attraction was an all-you-can-eat pie buffet stocked with mass-produced goods. “Who wants to eat Sara Lee pie?” Zollinger asks. Meanwhile, the pie competition was being held back at the Radisson, some four miles away.

“I was hoping it would be 10,000 people who were into pie, but there was only a small group of people that traveled [to Celebration] for the pie festival,” Zollinger says. “The rest were people who lived there, or were there for Disney World and just happened to be strolling by.”

Back when Zollinger was studying at Chicago’s School of the Art Institute in the early 90s her interest in pie was ordinary—she just liked a slice every now and again. But in the stifling summer of 1993 she began spending evenings at the Harold Washington Library Center, basking in the air-conditioning. She stumbled upon a cookbook that featured the strangest pie recipes that I started feeling that there was some underlying Americana cultural thing that I found really interesting and that I thought my friends would also find interesting.” She began jotting some of the more peculiar recipes and historical lore down in a notebook. “I would sit on a stool in the cookbook aisle and open up indexes and read pie recipes, I started making xeroxes of any weird pie recipe,” she says.

Most of the recipes she’s gone on to collect are folkloric, many of them drawn from old community cookbooks Zollinger’s discovered over the years. Some pies are decidedly white trash in origin—there’s Tang Pie, the poor man’s orange chiffon, and Pink Lullaby Pie, whose main ingredient is Jell-O, “any red flavor you like.” (The latter was concocted by Nita Krebs, who played a Munchkin Lullaby League girl in The Wizard of Oz.) Others are variations on old favorites like chess pie and shoofly pie sporting quaint names like Barbara Fretchie Pie and Collage Pie. And some are just downright bizarre: Beer Cheesecake Pie, Sauerkraut Custard Pie, Pralined Cicada Pie.

That fall Zollinger began designing postcards that featured a recipe on one side and an original illustration on the other. She’d duplicate them at Copy Max in Wicker Park and send them out to about 50 of her friends. She prominently labeled the first card with “Pie of the Month Club,” but given her busy school schedule it took her nearly two years to produce the first dozen. After that she stopped, but then “everyone pitched a big fit because they liked them,” she says. “I was burnt-out, so I worked on getting guest artists for a year, but they were even worse at getting them done on time than I was.” At the time Zollinger was the guitarist in the avant-rock trio Scissor Girls, and many of her guest artists were fellow musicians like Lois Maffeo of Lois, Eternals front man Damon Locks, and Kelly Krovo, her eventual replacement in the Scissor Girls.

While she was working on the second set of Pie of the Month Club cards Zollinger moved to Baltimore, where she put her art career on hold to study biology at the University of Maryland.

“I went to art school and decided that I should be a scientist as a day job to support my art habit,” she says. From Baltimore she went to Bloomington to get her PhD—she’s studying the mechanisms involved in birdsong. Three years later, in 2002, feeling isolated from her friends and frustrated that continued on page 14
## Bike Sale!

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<tr>
<td>Near North</td>
<td>2183 W. Montrose Ave</td>
<td>Mon-Fri 10-9, Sat 10-6, Sun 11-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>3701 N. Western Ave</td>
<td>Mon-Fri 10-9, Sat 10-6, Sun 11-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln Park</td>
<td>1581 N. Western Ave</td>
<td>Mon-Fri 10-9, Sat 10-6, Sun 11-6</td>
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<td>Downtown</td>
<td>321 S. Wells St</td>
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she hadn’t been making any art, she restarted the club. “It satisfies all of these needs I have,” she says. “It keeps me in touch with my friends without my having to actually correspond with them all… and it forces me to make some piece of artwork every month, even if it’s thematic about pie.”

After two more years Zollinger was getting exasperated with both the cost of the postcards and postage and the time it took to address all the recipes. She decided that selling subscriptions to the club could offset some of her expenses, so with that goal in mind she and a friend designed the Web site for the Pie of the Month Club early last year. “I thought, ‘I’m going to have the Web site for all things pie—an international pie database,’” she says. “I decided I needed to be like the Willy Wonka of pie or something, I guess.” In addition to archiving the previous recipes and art, she created a pie map directing visitors to the best pie places in America, listed pie-oriented events, and provided links to pie cookbooks. She also started an advice column about baking pies, reluctantly appointing herself the site’s pie expert. Although she had to make up the first couple questions herself, she now gets about two a week; answering them requires that she spend a few hours consulting cookbooks, surfing the Internet, and talking on the phone to her mother. Fearful of the commitment to a steady schedule that subscriptions would demand, Zollinger initially held off from offering them, but they’re now available for $16. So far she’s only had 24 takers, bringing her mailing list up to 121, but with 10,000 people visiting the site each month, she’s anticipating more.

Zollinger estimates that she now spends between four to ten hours a week on pie-related activities. She’s also taken up pie sculpture, crafting a handful of little snow-globe-like objects. “One of them has some paramedics carrying a big pie on a stretcher, and another has a bunch of circus chimps on a teeter-totter and there’s a big pie on the other end,” she says. But oddly enough, baking pies has remained a minor activity for Zollinger. Although at first she planned on taking a stab at every recipe she sent out, she was soon relying on her friends to do it. “I think the grossest pie I had was Prune Buttercotch Orange Nut Pie—it was disgusting,” she says. “But some of the ones that seem gross are pretty good—Sauerkraut Pie isn’t bad, as long as you distribute [the sauerkraut] evenly through the custard.” Early on Zollinger had ambitions of compiling the various recipes and art in a cookbook. But she wants to finish her dissertation first. She hopes to get her degree next May. Meanwhile there are plenty of other pie projects to occupy her. “I had a friend who’s been on the mailing list for years but with whom I rarely actually correspond write me a letter this week,” Zollinger goes on. “In the letter she said she was checking out the Web site on the off chance that I might have had a section on pies in film online. And I actually felt guilty that I didn’t have that up yet, because I have been compiling this list of pie appearances in film, and that made me laugh at myself because (a) my friend went online assuming I was deranged enough to have this information and (b) I do.”

Let’s not kid ourselves. From the online “Reason Express”: “The 21st century will see great advances in biotech, and the U.S. will not dictate what those advances will be. The federal government may opt to ban, restrict, or refrain from funding research involving human somatic cell nuclear transfer, but labs elsewhere in the world will pay no heed to political dust-ups in Washington. To pretend otherwise is madness.”—HH

continued from page 12

Our Town

continued from page 12

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REVIVAL
In the print edition of the Reader this page is occupied by a Chris Ware comic. At his request, we do not make his work available online.
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  - now $219.99
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  - shock-absorbing RST fork
  - light alloy wheels
2005 Trek 3900
- msrp $330
  - now $299.99
  - lightweight Alpha aluminum frame
  - light alloy wheels
  - bump-absorbing RST front suspension fork
2005 Trek 4300
- msrp $360
  - now $329.99
  - lightweight Alpha aluminum 6i frame
  - trustworthy Shimano Alivio rear derailleur
  - bump-absorbing RST front suspension fork
2005 Trek 4900
- msrp $500
  - now $449.99
  - tough Alpha super-light aluminum frame
  - proven RockShox Judy front shock
  - off-road-ready Shimano Deore rear derailleur

COMFORT BIKES
2005 Trek Navigator 50
- msrp $230
  - now $209.99
  - upright-riding comfort frame
  - back-saving suspension seatpost
  - smooth-riding Bontrager tires
2005 Trek Navigator 100
- msrp $310
  - now $279.99
  - lightweight aluminum frame
  - upright-riding comfort frame
  - back-saving suspension seatpost

HYBRID BIKES
2005 Trek 7000FX Fitness
- msrp $290
  - now $259.99
  - lightweight aluminum frame
  - smooth Shimano drivetrain
  - only available at Village Cycle Center
2005 Trek 7100
- msrp $310
  - now $279.99
  - Alpha aluminum frame
  - RST front suspension fork smooths bumps
  - comfy upright riding position with plush seat and suspension seatpost
2005 Trek 7200FX Fitness
- msrp $420
  - now $379.99
  - lightweight aluminum frame
  - Shimano Deore rear derailleur
  - vibration-dampening Cre-Moly fork

ROAD BIKES
2005 Trek 1000
- msrp $630
  - now $549.99
  - sleek super-light aluminum frame
  - road-dampening Bontrager carbon fork
  - reliable Shimano Sora/Tegra shifting system
2005 Lemond Big Sky & Comfort
- msrp $800
  - now $699.99
  - lightweight aluminum frame
  - carbon fiber fork and suspension seatpost
  - Shimano Tiagra rear derailleur
2005 Lemond Rene
- msrp $880
  - now $799.99
  - Shimano Tiagra/105 10-speed derailleurs
  - Lemond 404K full-carbon fiber frame
  - Bontrager Race carbon fork
2005 Trek 1700
- msrp $880
  - now $799.99
  - sleek super-light aluminum frame
  - road-dampening Bontrager carbon fork
  - reliable Shimano Tiagra/105 derailleurs
2005 Trek 1500 or 1500RS
- msrp $1000
  - now $999.99
  - women’s-specific-geometry frame design available
  - lightweight racing aluminum frame
  - Shimano 105 shifters and derailleurs
2005 LemondBrowserRouter
- msrp $2000
  - now $1499.99
  - Slick Design Carbon Fiber/Steel frame
  - Shimano Ultegra/105 drivetrain
  - Bontrager Race carbon fork

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for repairs. He offered several
times to fix the windows for free,
but says that Organ turned him
down. Meanwhile, there were
signs that the lot was vulnerable.
A 2003 draft of the
Comprehensive Plan for River
Forest identified the site as one
with potential for a development
of single-family homes.
This April, when word of a
potential sale came out, Hackl
kicked into high gear, e-mailing
friends and acquaintances and
gathering some 91 pledges to
join the club (male members
have been accepted since the
80s). Their dues would help raise
needed funds, he reasoned, and
their number could help
pressure the club to keep the
facility open for public use. The
response was a form letter dated
May 23. “Membership in the
RFWC is subject to its bylaws,
which include sponsorship for
membership by two members,” it
said. “The RFWC does not meet
during the summer but will
resume its meetings in October
2005, at which time new
membership will certainly be
considered by the membership
committee.” By then, of course,
the building will have been sold.
The buyer—Paul Coffey,
director of the undergraduate
division at the School of Art
Institute—has agreed to let the
club continue to meet at the
building, and the terms of a
preservation easement tied to it
require him to open it to the
public once a year. But Hackl
says the transaction robs the
community of an important
public space. He believes this is
antithetical not only to
Drummond’s intentions as a
member of the Prairie School,
but to the aims and ideals of the
club itself. “What a great time, a
great movement, all these
progressive women’s
organizations,” he says. “They
were really into bettering the
community through education
and art. How could people like
that just let it go?”

Hackl became interested in
Prairie School architecture
and its preservation largely
through his research into the life
and career of John S. Van
Bergen, an architect who
worked in Frank Lloyd Wright’s
studio for a little less than a year,
just before Wright fled to
Europe with his mistress in
1909, effectively closing up the
shop. In 1994 Hackl and his
family bought a 1914 Oak Park
home designed by Van Bergen,
one of three built for a local
florist. Then a jobbing musician

H

Top: Flori Blondeel house number three, the one Hackl owned, in Oak Park.
Bottom: John de Blois Wack house, Montecito, California, demolished in 2000; Braeside School in Highland Park

MARTY HACKL
who did some small contracting on the side, Hackl was impressed by Van Bergen’s solid workmanship and attention to detail. He started to catalog and study the architect’s work.

After Wright’s departure Van Bergen developed his own clientele in the Chicago area until 1954, when he moved to California. A fire ten years later destroyed many of his records and blueprints, and he died there in 1969. But many Van Bergen structures still stand, in Highland Park, Oak Park, River Forest, and other western and North Shore suburbs. Though most of the buildings Hackl has identified in an extensive search are single-family homes, the architect was also commissioned to design schools, additions, and a few commercial buildings. Van Bergen’s work throughout his career showed Prairie School influences, especially in its roofs, with their overhanging eaves, wooden trim, and horizontal lines. He paid meticulous attention to his clients’ needs and to the structures’ natural settings. Even the simplest houses of his early career, built on a square plan, flow organically and use natural materials like stone and cedar. Living rooms open up into surprisingly grand spaces, with vaulted ceilings, large fireplaces, and lovely views. Van Bergen got to know the eminent landscape architect Jens Jensen when they both lived in Highland Park, and Jensen almost certainly influenced his work. His later buildings in California diverge from the Prairie style—long, low structures that are simpler but also more refined. The natural setting became even more important, to the point that Van Bergen would match colors, textures, and materials to the native soil and greenery. He was also known for his naturally cooling “ponded” roofs, which flooded in summer. Using a list of buildings known to have been designed by Van Bergen, Hackl started knocking on doors. “I would ring these doorbells, and ten minutes later we’d be having lunch … and a half hour later I’m walking out of their house with blueprints,” he says. A couple of visits to one of Van Bergen’s daughters in California yielded some old files, account ledgers, family photos, and invaluable recollections. He looked up (and has become friends with) Walter Sobel, a former draftsman of Van Bergen’s who lives in a Wright home in Wilmette. Hackl has folders full of correspondence and piles of blueprints, much of which he stores under his bed.

In 1988 Hackl started putting out a newsletter for Van Bergen home owners and other interested parties. This has since morphed into a book-length catalog of buildings with photos, descriptions, and building plans, plus a short illustrated biography of Van Bergen. In 1999, after failing to interest any publishers, Hackl published the book himself. (The book can be ordered at Hackl’s Web site, re-building.com; it’s also available there on CD-ROM.) Now he’s completed a revision and is thinking about doing another edition. His catalog is continued on page 20.
not, Hackl acknowledges, a scholarly work. “I’ve had scholars tell me . . . I didn’t footnote anything correctly in my book,” he says. “I don’t care if his background isn’t scholarly, but his approach should be,” says John Thorpe, a restoration architect who specializes in Prairie-style buildings and also owns a Van Bergen house in Oak Park. Thorpe does acknowledge the architectural community’s debt to Hackl. He’s used the book as a guide during meetings of a club for Van Bergen home owners: “I just held up his book and said, ‘Marty’s already done [the work], so we can just look at each other’s houses and have brunch,’” he says. But Thorpe cautions against taking certain of Hackl’s conclusions as fact. For instance, Van Bergen’s daughter told Hackl her father got the idea to use stratified limestone from rock outcroppings they saw on vacations to Wisconsin. Thorpe points out that Jensen was using piled limestone in his work as well. “This is where scholars are careful,” he says.

But no one doubts Hackl’s enterprise. “He’s dug up all kinds of things,” says Paul Kruty, an architecture professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who’s written books on Wright and is an authority on the work of Prairie School architect Walter Burley Griffin. “He has opinions on what surfaces should be, what restoration should be like. People like me rely on him for technical information.” Kruty says that Hackl can get “carried away” sometimes. But, he adds, “I wish every Prairie-style architect had someone like that.”

Through a blog and a mailing list of over 100 people—some preservationists with their own mailing lists, others fellow musicians, still others simply interested friends or acquaintances—Hackl stays on top of news about significant buildings and gets the word out when they’re threatened. Recent e-mails have included updates on endangered sites, announcements of architecture tours he’s planning, a rhapsody about seeing a deer in Thatcher Woods, and dismal assessments of the Bush administration. Many homes by former Wright employees and associates are vulnerable to teardown because their designers aren’t recognized. “These buildings are not as well protected because they’re not Wrights,” Hackl says. Occasionally, he says, tourists passing by his house would “come up and ask, ‘Is this a Frank Lloyd Wright?’ And you go, ‘No, it’s by John Van Bergen.’ And all of a sudden they turn around and walk away.” He laughs. “You liked it when you thought it was a Wright!”

The principal of Braeside...
School, a 1927 building in Highland Park that’s listed on the National Historic Register, had been instructed so well by Hackl in the details of Van Bergen’s work that during the building of an addition a few years ago she ran out and stopped workers when she noticed them installing fake limestone. Eventually she persuaded the school board to put up the extra money for the real thing. Last January Hackl and Frank Lipo, executive director of the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society, appeared before the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission to talk about four Van Bergen field houses in Oak Park, which they warned were going to be demolished and replaced. Hackl and Lipo spoke for an hour or so, emphasizing Van Bergen’s research on children and schools, the concept of leisure—new in the architect’s time—and the field houses’ place in the village’s history. Ultimately, Oak Park officials “decided there wasn’t enough money [to build new structures],” which we told them at the beginning,” says Hackl. “We just appealed to the reasoning part of their thinking. But … the buildings will be protected until next round, maybe in ten years.”

Hackl’s particularly concerned about houses that come on the market when an owner becomes ill, dies, or just can’t afford the upkeep anymore. Two years ago, after he discovered that Krich House, a Van Bergen home in East Dundee, was being sold by the elderly owner’s family, he got the real estate agent to make note of its architectural significance in the listing, along with Hackl’s name and Web address. He was contacted by the eventual buyer, who’s maintained the house in its original condition. A few months ago Hackl sold his own Van Bergen home and moved himself, his wife, Eva, and their teenage daughter into a modest condo in River Forest. He has his eye on another Van Bergen, this one in Lake Zurich. The house, situated on a huge secluded lot, is a prime example of Van Bergen’s subtle style, with a round hearth fireplace, built-in cabinetry, an elegant screened veranda, and expert siting.
Marty Hackl

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ago, and as he got to know them he expressed interest in buying it. The woman died a few years back, and the man has become increasingly frail. Hackl visits him from time to time, to check up on him—and on the house. “We asked for a contract for right of first refusal, but he just doesn’t want to go to any of those places,” Hackl says. “He says if he ever sells it he’ll let us know... We’d be happy to purchase the house, take care of it, and he could live there as long as he wants.”

Last month the owner’s son, who had been sympathetic to Hackl’s concerns, unexpectedly died after hip surgery. Meanwhile, Hackl has calculated that in a few months the price of the land will be more than he and Eva can afford.

“It’s either we’re going to buy it or a developer’s going to buy it,” he says. The house is surrounded by McMansions. “The only person who would be attracted to it is a developer,” Hackl frets. “A developer would be nuts not to put a big house out here, because he could make a lot of money.”

The position Hackl has appointed himself to isn’t for someone who wants to be liked. “It’s hard to get a lot of public support behind you unless there’s a crisis,” he says. But he believes he’s learned what heralds one—the death of an organization or spouse, rising taxes or land values, the deployment of certain key words like firetrap or outdated. “Almost everyone who deals in preservation knows what those signals are, and you can’t wait until they’re alarming to do anything,” he says. “At the same time, you’re questioning yourself—am I being alarmist, am I imagining this?

“Now I’m the bad guy, picking on those poor old women” in the River Forest club, he says. “I really like them and don’t want to hurt them. But I know I am. It really sucks. If I didn’t do it, I’d feel really bad about not doing something. I’m not alone. I think everyone who does this thinks the same thing.”

He pauses. “Or else they like to have lots of enemies.”

Still, Hackl didn’t mince words in his online newsletter in May, accusing the club members of preferring to lose their building over opening their membership, and criticizing the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois—a group he had up till recently worked with—of ignoring the wishes of the community. LPCI president David Balkman wouldn’t comment on Hackl, his split with the group, or his efforts, but called the sale to a private buyer the best-case scenario. “We have a private buyer who is willing to donate an easement on the property and has the means to rehabilitate the property immediately,” he told
me. "The well-being of the structure itself is what’s most important here."

Hackl was initially involved in LPCI’s efforts to get an easement but says, "They barely respond to me in a positive way anymore, just e-mail conversations—'Keep your nose out of it.' Their concern is basically that with an easement, it won’t get torn down. I have a different opinion, that it's better in the long term to keep it with an organization."

There are others besides Hackl who haven’t resigned themselves to the club’s sale to a private owner. Patti O’Connor, an attorney who’s lived in River Forest for more than 20 years, is still trying to find an organization to take over the building—an effort that Hackl says he plans to stay out of. O’Connor says that after holding a baby shower for her daughter at the club about five months ago she tried to join the women’s group and even attended a meeting, which she calls a “tea party” at which no business was discussed. Ultimately, she says, president Marilyn Organ told her the club was accepting new members. "Then I read in the paper that this building is being sold for $400,000," she says. "The property is obviously worth more, even in its dilapidated state." O’Connor is acquainted with Paul Coffey and calls him "a wonderful human being." It's not that I would say at the end [it] couldn’t go to Paul Coffey—there’s no better person," she says. "It's just that [the sale] is against the 100-year-old premise of the club, and the rules of the club. They need to give the club to another 501(c)3 organization and not sell it for money. . . . There are alternative organizations that would love that building. The historical society would love that building."

On June 13 O’Connor called a meeting for club members and community residents, and about 18 people showed up—including Laura Good and a smattering of musicians, one of whom, Don Schmalz, said the building had been part of his life for 20 years. Hackl attended too, though he made sure that everyone knew the meeting was O’Connor’s idea. One club member who turned up refused to comment.

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Marty Hackl

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O’Connor passed around photocopies of a February 10 letter from the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society to Organ and the club’s attorney. In it, historical society president Laurel McMahon wrote that its board of directors “expressed unanimous support for beginning formal discussions with the leadership of the River Forest Women’s Club. We believe that the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest would be an ideal steward of the building if the Club leaders would entrust it to us. We stand able and willing to commit to preserving the building for the good of the community in perpetuity and would commit to such preservation in writing.”

Coffey, who declined to comment for this article, didn’t attend the meeting, but O’Connor said she had come directly from seeing him. She said he’d told her that if the women’s club decided it wanted to arrange a deal with the historical society or some other nonprofit organization, he’d be willing to withdraw his offer.

Organ disputes the claims made by Hackl and other critics of the sale, but declined to comment until the third week of June, presumably after the closing. She would only say that “the River Forest Women’s Club is a private club. It’s not a public building. That’s the way it’s always been.”

The battle seems lost, but Hackl hasn’t given up: “Always looking forward, never back,” he e-mailed me recently. “Idealism and that sort of drive—it’s not everyone’s cup of tea,” says Frank Lipo. But it can be effective. “He kind of pushes the envelope, and that sometimes allows for compromise or gets something discussed that wouldn’t be,” Lipo admits that Hackl’s approach is “uncomfortable for some people, including myself at certain points… But he has thought it out; he’s not doing it because he enjoys being lonely out there.”

John Thorpe, the restoration architect, sees it a little different ly. Hackl “decides something, and that’s not a good way to win friends and influence people,” he says. “He’s a zealot. But to be an advocate for preservation you do have to be a zealot.”
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Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad City?

Americans, that’s who—and that fear has kept Batman alive for nearly 70 years.

By J.R. Jones

Since he made his debut nearly 70 years ago, Batman has generated nine movies, three TV series, and hundreds of comic books and graphic novels that run the gamut from cartoonish sci-fi to stark social drama. As Les Daniels documents in his book Batman: The Complete History, the Caped Crusader’s story has proved extremely plastic. Created by comic-book artist Bob Kane, he began as a grim vigilante who sometimes killed criminals on the spot, but by the 1950s he’d become a strapping father figure whose nuclear family included not only Robin the Boy Wonder but Batwoman, Bat-Girl, Bat-Hound, and the elfin Bat-Mite. Over the years the Batman saga has drifted toward relatively straight and delving into Batman’s origins as a child orphaned during a mugger’s attack, and in the next panel his serrated black cape billows out behind him as he perches on the edge of a rooftop.

The latest purification rite is Batman Begins, Christopher Nolan, director of psychological noirs like Memento and Inception, sold Warner Brothers on the idea of playing the story relatively straight and delving deeper into Batman’s origins as a child orphaned during a mugging. The film is too constrained by commercial demands to do anything really interesting with this idea, but by harping on the super-hero’s tragic past it pinpoints the reason he’s stayed alive so long: the horror many Americans feel toward the modern city.

The Batman creation myth dates back to November 1939, when Kane and story man Bill Finger used it as the two-page preface to an adventure called “The Batman Wars Against the Dirigible of Doom.” Young Bruce Wayne and his parents are confronted by a stickup man while walking home from a movie, and both parents are murdered. Wayne pledges to spend the rest of his life fighting crime, and 15 years later he’s ready to begin. But he needs the right costume. “Criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot,” he reasons. “So my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible.” As if in answer, a bat flies through his window, and in the next panel his serrated black cape billows out behind him as he perches on the edge of a rooftop. Sophocles it’s not, but it gave Batman enough of an inner life to distinguish him from his predecessors (Superman, Zorro, the Shadow), and it came at the end of a decade in which urban crime, fueled by prohibition and the Depression, seemed to be devouring civilized society. At first the Batman stories were set in New York, but Finger changed that to the more universal Gotham City. Skyscrapers and shadowy rooftops became a primary backdrop for Batman’s adventures, a world where thugs ran wild and larger-than-life masterminds like the Joker and the Penguin were the logical extension of celebrity criminals such as John Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde. As the writers ran out of ideas, Batman and Robin began looking up with Superman to battle villains from outer space, but in the noisier early stories their enemies were often the cigar-chomping crime bosses who owned the city.

Most of the campaigns to reinvent Batman have amplified the sense of Gotham City as an urban hellhole. The most dramatic makeover began in 1968, shortly after Kane retired and shortly before Richard Nixon won the presidency on a law-and-order platform. In the landmark comic-book story “One Bullet Too Many” Robin was hustled off to college, the Bat Cave was boarded up, and Bruce Wayne traded in Wayne Manor for a city penthouse. In a soliloquy to his loyal butler he declared, “We’re moving out of this suburban sanctuary, to live in the heart of that sprawling metropolis.”

Batman Begins

Directed by Christopher Nolan
Written by Nolan and David S. Goyer
With Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Liam Neeson, Katie Holmes, Gary Oldman, Cillian Murphy, Tom Wilkinson, Rutger Hauer, Ken Watanabe, and Morgan Freeman

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urban blight—to dig them up where they live and fatten on the innocent. As part of this new phase, Wayne starts a program to help victims of violent crime, and his words could have been pulled from a stump speech by Spiro Agnew: “We suffer great pain over true justice—rights of the individual, innocent until proven guilty, innocent of the accused parties. But what about the ‘proven’ innocent—the victims?”

Another urban landscape looms in the Batman comics of artist-writer Frank Miller, who would go on to create Sin City. His series Batman: The Dark Knight Returns (1986), Batman: Year One (1987), and Batman: Year Two (1989) were so popular they were republished in book form and helped launch the graphic novel genre. Year One gives Miller a chance to update Batman’s creation myth, which now transpires in a Gotham rul- ing with junkies, hookers, and homeless people. The police commissioner is on the take, his detectives are as cruel and repug- nant as the criminals they shake down, and sensational TV news coverage only adds to the cesspool. The only honest man on the force is Lieutenant James Gordon, and his secret liaison with Batman places him in jeop- ardy with the cops, who want to snuff the spectral figure.

These changes were off the radar screen of the moviegoing public, which associated Batman with the pow-zap-zowie 60s TV show until Warners tapped Tim Burton, a former animator with the stickup man (later to become the Joker) memorably played by Jack Nicholson. With his jet-black fetish suit and spiky horns, (Michael Keaton), with his jet-black fetish suit and spiky horns, seemed almost as disturbed as his clownish archenemy (Jack Nicholson).

Burton and production design- er Anton Furst, who would win an Oscar for his work, conceived of a Gotham in which not the police but the planning commis- sion seemed to be on the take—a monochrome jungle of clashing architectural styles. Gotham City is definitely based in many ways on the worst aspects of New York,” Furst told writer Adam Pirani. “We even took things like aerials,直升機, and television towers, and then the buildings of Louis Sullivan and ziggurat structures going back and then camouflaging out, and fascism, and putting it all together into huge massive vent structures,off the streets expressing the underground. And just brutal- ity, absolute brutality.” Two years after the movie came out, Furst committed suicide.

A fter Burton bowed out with Batman Returns (1992), Warners handed the franchise over to Joel Schumacher, whose Batman Forever (1995) and Batman & Robin (1997) slid back into the candy-colored camp of the 60s TV series. Warners kicked around several ideas for a fifth movie, including a Batman- Superman adventure and a live-action version of the animated Batman Beyond series. Frank Miller and director Darren Aronofsky (Requiem for a Dream) took a crack at adapting Batman: Year One into a screenplay, but the idea of retelling Batman’s cre- ation myth with a noirish director led the studio to Nolan.

Unfortunately Batman Begins developed as most Hollywood action movies do: it was budgeted at $180 million—Burton’s first movie cost $80 million—yet the script, by Nolan and Blade screen- writer David S. Goyer, is a hack job. For all the hype about explor- ing Batman’s damaged psyche, Nolan and Goyer haven’t added much beyond a corny opening in which he falls down a well and is attacked by bats. Various story elements have been lifted from Year One and the 1999 graphic novel Batman: The Long Halloween; Nolan and Goyer’s main contribution is an overblown sequence in which Wayne (Christian Bale) travels to a small village in the Himalayas and trains to become a ninja with Oobi-Wan Kenobi stand-in Liam Neeson. Once the action shifts to Gotham City, Batman Begins has more genuinely frightening moments than any of the other movies, but the theme of fear and how it affects people is developed only through an endless series of portentous epigrams.

Like his predecessors, Nolan visualized Gotham as “New York cubed,” and in keeping with the downbeat-realism aesthetic, the cityscape is pockcd with vast hill- side shantytowns like those in Rio de Janeiro. Some exteriors were shot in Chicago, most mem- orably a hell-for-leather car chase on Lower Wacker Drive. The cli- max, in which supervillain Ra’s Al Ghul plots to poison Gotham’s water supply, unfolds along the Chicago River. This is the first Batman movie since the September 11 attacks, and I wasn’t exactly pleased to see a plot to annihilate an entire city transpiring on a bridge I cross several times a week. It reminded me of a recent Harper’s story by Jeff Sharlet, in which a Christian fundamentalist in Colorado Springs learns that Sharlet is from New York City and responds, “Ka-boom!” Ra’s Al Ghul expresses much the same sentiment when he tells Batman, “No one can save Gotham. . . . Purging is inevitable.” If that’s the way Americans generally feel about cities and city dwellers, somebody better crank up that Bat Signal, and fast.  ●
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Old News

Three decades on, nothing in Miguel Piñeiro’s award-winning prison drama seems shocking.

By Tony Adler

Miguel Piñeiro famously wrote his prison drama, *Short Eyes*, while doing time at Sing Sing in the early 70s. Joseph Papp saw it in its first incarnation at the Theatre of the Riverside Church and guided it to a production at Lincoln Center. Coarse, ugly, vio-

Theater

lewd, the play offered Broadway audiences a horrifying/titillating glimpse into convict society, the lumpen subcul-

ture that had lately drawn heavy popular attention thanks to jail-

house memoirs like Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, Nixon’s declaration of war on drugs, and—most of all—the Attica uprising of 1971.

*Short Eyes* won two Obies, six Tony nominations, and the New York Drama Critics Circle award for best American play of 1973–74. Thirty years later, it’s just kind of nauseatingly quaint. What middle-school kid doesn’t know that a weak or effeminate prisoner faces the prospect of gang rape unless he becomes a stronger man’s bitch? Or that child molesters are despised and considered good as dead in the prison social structure? Or that you’ve got to cower, rationalize, ritualize, and confront as necessary. And of course, gang up on the outsider.

The secret scandal of the 70s is today’s common knowledge.

More than that, it’s been co-opted by the mainstream. If it does nothing else, watching the new Urbantheater Co. production of *Short Eyes* makes you realize how thoroughly the vocabulary, morality, and peaking order of the cell block have been absorbed into American life. Think of the thugs mode in hip-hop. We’re no longer tourists in this territory; in an odd, frightening way, we aspire to be natives. I suppose this shouldn’t be surprising. With over two million Americans in prison or jail and another five million on parole or probation (according to Bureau of Justice Statistics information for 2003), the steady stream of prison society, the lumpen subculture of the 70s has become part of the national gestalt.

And naturally the national gestalt will have no trouble absorbing them, because when you come down to it those folkways aren’t the least bit foreign. The men who occupy the prison dayroom in *Short Eyes* operate by rules we find familiar. However weirdly they refract at times. Cons and guards alike maintain secure borders. Regulate commerce and relationships. Weasel, cower, rationalize, ritualize, and confront as necessary. And of course, gang up on the outsider.

The primary—though not the only—outsider here is Clark Davis, a white boy in blazer and penis-head hats, among others—petlike headdresses—big foam chinos who’s just spent 33 days under observation at Bellevue and is now being held on charges of molesting a little girl. His arrival changes everything.

Comfortable race, sex, and power roles disintegrate as white bodybuilders and Black Muslims unite in vigilante revulsion against the pedophile. You’d think that the rest would be nothing but mob psychology. But Piñeiro isn’t satisfied with a lynching. Not completely, any-

way. Even as his characters worry Davis like zoo lions fighting over a slab of beef, they’re engaged in a neat little Marxian dance of countervailing interests. And in the end, what’s truly left when the roles fall away is individual conscience.

Unfortunately, *Short Eyes* is more interesting than good. The last production I saw used puppet-like headaddresses—big foam penis-head hats, among others—to distract us from its frailties. Here, director Ron OJ Parson tries a strictly naturalistic approach, which means that the only thing standing between the play’s weaknesses and our sus-
pension of disbelief is the ensemble. Which can’t hold the line. This is most disappointingly obvious in a scene where Davis (Greg Kinnear look-alike Andrew Kain Miller) opens up to fellow inmate Juan (Ivan Vega). Neither actor is bad, really, but neither can muster the force and skill necessary to make this absolutely crucial passage believable.

Still, there are some nice performances. Senuwell Smith would be vivid even without his epic—and, again, not entirely believable—mutilation as veteran convict Ice. And Madrid St. Angelo is sinnous to a mambo beat as a ‘snake charmer’—a sexual predator—called Paco.
Everything Is Nothing

David C. Field overstuffs his play about physics and philosophy.

By Kelly Kleiman

David C. Field’s new play is about unknowability, both the uncertainty principle and the inaccessibility of contemporary physics to laypersons. And maybe for that reason he made the piece indeterminate: it’s impossible to ascertain who or what it’s about. But what might have been a bold conceit in an experimental work—embodying ambiguity in a play that’s partly about ambiguity—is just muddy thinking here.

Symmetry has a conventional structure: boy gets opportunity, boy loses opportunity, boy gets different opportunity. Oscar Newman is a brilliant physicist teaching at Albuquerque State out of a mysterious all-consuming loyalty to his mentor, department head Neal Julian. The setting is also conveniently near the home of Oscar’s late mother, a famous watercolorist conveniently influential by the Eastern philosophy taught by Oscar’s office mate, equally brilliant scholar Ecco Sagada, who’s consigned to Albuquerque for equally mysterious reasons. When Oscar writes a mind-blowing paper, the vultures descend on him: gazillionaire John Slocum, who wants to co-opt his talents for commerce; elderly physicist Edmond Lakos, who wants to recruit him for Berkeley; and Neal, who wants his continued presence at Albuquerque as collateral for Slocum’s investment in a new building. Oh, and Neal’s wife, Myra, wants to (1) sleep with Oscar and (2) return to New York.

Field’s characters are interesting, with the exception of Sagada: her philosophical knowledge consists of fortune-cookie nuggets—everything is nothing and vice versa—and her move into Oscar’s office in act one produces no results whatsoever in act two. But the plot is overstuffed: Oscar turns out to be the son of an intelligence officer killed mysteriously, Slocum and Lakos are both Hungarian refugees, Neal has a book by an Indian physicist that happens to illuminate the very problem Oscar is wrestling with, and on and on. All these threads are worth following, but if you weave every which way with a piece of naturalistic theater, you end up with a knotty mess instead of a tapestry. This script could have been about how three men compete to be Oscar’s father, or about Oscar’s discovery that physics and Eastern religion are one, or about how academic politics distorts the search for truth, or even about the kindness of strangers—but it can’t be about all of them.

Field handles the intellectual content lightly: there’s enough jargon to render the scientific talk persuasive (at least to this non-physicist) and enough general information to sustain his quest for metaphors. But when it comes to Eastern religions, again he’s less convincing, conflating nonsense like feng shui with the rigorous thought of Zen masters. And why must the avatar of mystery and selflessness be an Asian woman?

Symmetry

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National-Louis University
Ink Well
by Ben Tausig

We’re still trotting out Madame Butterfly? Still, this smart script is a welcome change from the back-porch melodramas Victory Gardens has traditionally produced, and Dennis Zacek’s crisp direction complements the work’s complex content. Aaron Roman Weiner charms as Oscar, lecturing the audience-cum-physics-class with a buoyant clarity all teachers should emulate. He also gracefully handles the task of being everyone’s darling, especially in such overdetermined moments as when Slocum calls him by his dead son’s name. Matt DeCaro as Neal, J.J. Johnston as Slocum, and William J. Norris as Lakos are perfect as three wily players trying to get what they want from Oscar, and Meg Thalken is superb as the frustrated Myra, whose aria about Albuquerque ascends to a pinnacle of disgust at “those god-damn pictures of howling dogs!”

Too bad that Field tried so hard for significance. The play would have been stronger if he’d remembered the Buddhist lesson from David Bader’s book Zen Judaism: “It takes effort to attain nothingness. And then what do you have? Bupkes.”

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Roshambo

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Roshambo

ACROSS
1. Ill will
6. Cafe au ______
10. Follow the leader?
14. Knotted neckwear
15. Woody’s son
16. Celestial bear
17. Syd Barrett genre
20. Kind of child
21. The forgetful may draw one
22. "I, Robot" author
25. Draft pick?
26. Halloween prank projectile
29. Fine-tune
30. Pasta suffix
32. "Full House" surname
34. Buckingham Palace inits.
35. Talks big
37. "Yippee!"
38. Student’s assignment
41. Existentialist Kierkegaard
42. Dove rival
43. Number often lied about
45. Emotional pang
47. Crag
48. Early bed
49. LA setting
50. Modeler’s peaks
52. A fool may pick it up
54. World book
55. Demanor
57. Break an elementary school rule
63. Old record label
64. "I could ______ horse!"
65. Complete, as a crossword
66. Driving tools
67. Swing at a fly
68. Remove data from

DOWN
1. Dupe
2. Pen pals’ final thoughts
3. Slick
4. Pending
5. Prefix with musicology
6. Di or Godiva
7. “Q: ______ We Not Men?”
8. “Who’da thunk it?”
9. Type of training
10. Backwoods possessive
11. It’sائم
12. PC panic button
13. Talk, talk, talk
18. “Misteress of the Dark” movie hostess
19. Bagel seed
22. Patient’s vocalization
23. They may be drowned
24. Request
25. Lions and tigers, but not bears
27. Bulldogs’ home
28. Miracle
31. Cop stopping traffic?
33. Kindergarten rest
35. It’s spoken in India
36. Chucklehead
39. Durbin, e.g.: abbr.
40. Phrase that follows many a summer blockbuster
41. “The racer’s edge”
44. Recede
46. Thrills
48. Remove a curse, maybe
51. “Nonsense!”
53. “Siddhartha” author
55. Low poker pair
56. Future doc’s exam
57. Switch
58. Shoshone speaker
59. Chi. el stop
60. Play or play extender
61. Wenona, briefly
62. Date

LAST WEEK: YOU SAY TOMATO...

1. Dupe
2. Pen pals’ final thoughts
3. Slick
4. Pending
5. Prefix with musicology
6. Di or Godiva
7. “Q: ______ We Not Men?”
8. “Who’da thunk it?”
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This is big. This is really big. No, wait, it’s small.

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