

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

A Shimmering Facade
Cloaks **Jean Nouvel's**
Striking Agbar Tower
in Barcelona

also in this issue

RESIDENTIAL SECTION

Houses on Hills

SPECIAL HURRICANE REPORT

Louisiana passes new statewide building code; critics say it may burden home repairs

November 29, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco signed legislation for the state to adopt the International Building Code, a uniform code issued by the International Code Council that will replace a patchwork of municipal codes. The legislation requires that new construction adheres to the code, and that it be applied to repairs if costs are more than 50 percent of prestorm valuation. When the bill was signed, the 11 parishes hardest hit by this season's hurricanes had 30 days to start applying the code. Those without a permit or cement officials had 90 days. The code will take effect statewide on January 1, 2007.

Concerns about cost

While many applauded the adoption of a statewide standard for construction, industry experts say the adoption of the IBC will increase the spread between insurance payouts and repair costs, perhaps making it too expensive for many homeowners to rebuild. In the New Orleans suburb of Kenner alone, the Federal Emergency Management Agency says more than 500 houses meet the 50 percent test. Phil Hoffman, president of Hoffman Custom Built Homes in LaPlace, Louisiana, says due to the cost of bringing those homes up to code, "They might just as well bring in the bulldozers and knock it all down."

Louisiana parishes without

existing codes will see the sharpest cost increase, says Ronnie Kyle, president of Louisiana Homebuilders Association. "Places like Cameron, which had no code, will have a 17 to 20 percent increase," he says. "Most of Orleans [Parish] was under at least a 1995 code, so it's probably looking at an 8 to 12 percent increase."

To make things more difficult for homeowners, Hoffman says, the code is "basically a wind code," addressing roofs, wind anchors, bracing, siding, and glazing, while most of the damage is from storm surge or flood. Insurance companies, says Hoffman, "will only pay for the [flood] damaged areas of the house."

Benefits of uniformity

However, the insurance industry, building associations, and contractors say code uniformity for new construction is needed to woo insurers and secure federal funding. "Insurance companies have been taking a really hard look at whether they want to do business in Louisiana anymore," says John Marlow, assistant vice president

for the Southwest Region of the American Insurance Association, a trade group.

The code's appeal is uniformity and insulation from ever-changing political influences, says Derrell Cohoon, executive director of Louisiana Associated General Contractors. "It will bring investors back and send a message that it's not business as usual in Louisiana."

Although the new standards will surely increase costs, "if you can't buy insurance, it doesn't do you any good to rebuild," says Kyle. "At some point, you've got to say the cost is what the cost is."

Under the law, the governor will name a 19-member code council to review the code every three years. Legislators have already planned the first review for March. Elsewhere in the region, Texas's June adoption of the IBC for municipalities goes into effect January 1. Mississippi building groups are lobbying a statewide adoption of the IBC, but the legislature is not in session until January 3. *Angelle Bergeron, with Tom Sawyer*

Rebuilding slowed throughout Gulf region

Most aspects of recovery in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast seem to be losing momentum, a development that could meet with tragic consequences. Besides political discord and a lack of funding for preservation, there are more reasons:

New Orleans: Levees People and businesses scattered around the country can't commit to rebuilding in New Orleans because Congress is still unwilling to underwrite a multibillion dollar levee upgrade that would resist a Category Five storm. Large-scale private investment that would lure people back will probably not occur unless Congress writes the check. Nor will the levee investment make sense, it seems, if there is not a coordinated investment in reworking the entire lower Mississippi flood-control system. The levees will remain vulnerable if the river cannot flood lowlands and supply silt to rebuild fast-retreating coastal marshes and barrier beaches. The total price tag may hit \$30 billion.

Gulf Coast: Flood resistance On the Gulf, repairs appear to be progressing more quickly, partly because the coast was not inundated as badly as New Orleans. But an impasse to coastal rebuilding may arise as local governments resist provisional Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps that vastly expand the territory in which structures may have to be made flood-resistant. In some areas, the maps require that homes be raised above storm surge waves as high as 20 feet. Those requirements raise the cost of rebuilding, and the increased cost is usually not covered by insurance or disaster aid. However, complying with

FEMA requirements qualifies homeowners for federally underwritten flood insurance, which can be essential to secure a mortgage. Katrina's flood-insurance claims may reach \$23 billion, perhaps triggering a congressional bailout of the flood-insurance fund.

Entire region: Housing FEMA's trailer program, to provide temporary housing in the region, has been slow to get under way, especially in New Orleans. With much of the city lacking basic utilities, FEMA has been unable to deliver trailers to peoples' properties because they need hookups. It has tended instead to create "FEMA villages"—large encampments of trailers on open sites, often in remote locations, that the agency's contractors can more quickly supply with sewer, water, and electricity. Opposition has slowed the building of these enclaves because neighbors view them as instant slums, concentrating the unemployed and disconnecting people from schools, jobs, families, and social institutions. Meanwhile, FEMA's program of housing people in hotels while they relocate or rebuild was supposed to end November 30. After thousands failed to find temporary housing, the deadline was extended to December 15, and even January 7 for some. A federal judge told FEMA to continue the hotel program until at least February 7 for 42,000 more evacuee families. Almost 85,000 applications for aid were pending at press time.

The Enterprise Foundation, which devotes its efforts to affordable housing, says the federal government should commit \$33 billion to fill the gap between total permanent housing losses (on the order of almost \$87 billion) and the amount that insurance and other sources will pay out. Meanwhile, until now homeowner loans have been virtually nonexistent. *James S. Russell, AIA*

SPECIAL HURRICANE REPORT

(continued from page 30)

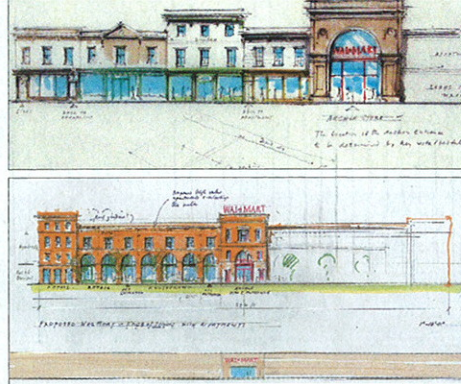
an withstand a major hurricane without "ugly and expensive" pillings. Architect and urbanist Stefanos Polyzoides of Pasadena, California, who led a charrette design team for rebuilding Biloxi, told that city's leaders, "You have two choices, as I see it. Either scrap Biloxi and move north, or create a town that can take a swim every 30 years."

Time is of the essence, warns the document. The best policies, codes, and design criteria must be put in place quickly "so that redevelopment on an appropriate scale can take place just as quickly as sprawl development would." The report says that mayors and other officials will

have to take projects under their wing, the Mississippi Department of Transportation will have to be convinced to relocate roads and infrastructure, and builders and developers will have to be persuaded of traditional urbanism's value. Finally, the report urges towns to stay in close contact with each other during planning and rebuilding, so that good "solutions can be duplicated elsewhere in the region."

Resistance

Predictably, the CNU's proposals have met heated resistance. Reed Kroloff, dean of Tulane University's School of Architecture, criticizes a "pattern-book, cookie-cutter

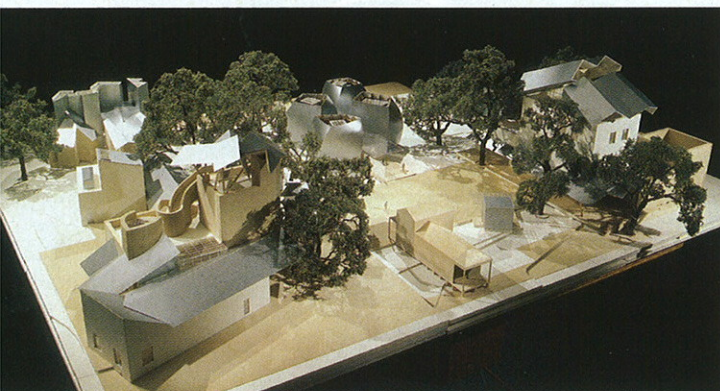


Designers envisioned an area Wal-Mart built along the street line. Its traditional exterior and small scale would fit in with local neighborhoods.

approach." While agreeing with New Urbanist ideas about creating dense communities sensitive to transit issues, he asserts that "any ideas that can be boiled down to a set of guidelines don't respond to the diversity of human nature and the needs of particular locations. Eric Owen Moss, director of SCI-Arc, says, "The New Urbanists have a priori answers before asking vital questions: What should the vision

for this place be?" He points out that the New Urbanists' small town model grew out of 19th-century conditions. "This is a very different time," he says. "To assume that relatively small-scale groupings of people are ideal is to be conservative and pessimistic, believing that people want to

live in homogeneous, no-risk, no-tension situations. The uncertainty quotient is a part of making cities." Steve Badanes, a founder of the design/build firm Jersey Devil, says he disagrees with some aspects of New Urbanism, but says, "How can you knock a situation where the governor called in architects, rather than developers, to solve urban problems." *Andrea Oppenheimer Dean*

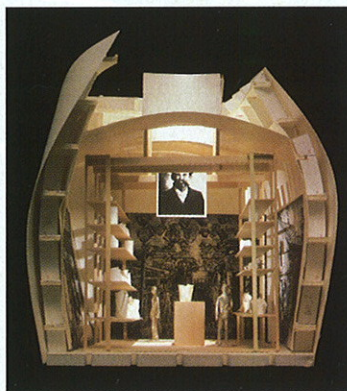


Fund established to save Gehry's Ohr-O'Keefe museum in Mississippi

Friends of David Whitney, the respected art curator who died last June, launched a building fund in his honor at New York City's Gagosian gallery on December 9. It will aid reconstruction of the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art, in Biloxi, Mississippi. The museum, designed by Frank Gehry, FAIA, was headed toward a July 2006 opening when it received substantial damage during Hurricane Katrina.

The centerpiece of the 25,000-square-foot museum comprised four podlike gallery pavilions to show the work of George E. Ohr (1857–1918),

the famed "mad potter of Biloxi." He is celebrated as one of America's first ceramic fine artists. Ohr made the act of throwing pots a performance, producing colorful vases and bowls pinched and ruffled into shapes of impressive delicacy. Whitney was consulting curator for the museum's inaugural exhibition when he died. He was also a prominent art collector, and the long-time life partner of architect Philip Johnson. "David was a great friend," said Gehry, standing by an architectural model of the complex at the fund launch. "I will do whatever it



takes to get this institution back on its feet."

Gehry's design included six twisting, metal-clad pavilions arranged around 26 ancient live oaks on a 4-acre site. The gallery "pods" are like curved silos, and the rest are boxy pavilions with overlapping curved-metal roofs. Gehry used elements found in local architecture, such as porches and open-air belvederes, on each pavilion.

A casino barge blown onshore by the storm crushed a pavilion devoted to African-American folk art and history. The unfinished gallery

The Ohr-O'Keefe was to feature pavilions topped with curved-metal roof, displaying pottery inside.

pods were seriously damaged. The storm also destroyed the Pleasant Reed House, an 1887 "shotgun" house that had been moved to the site. A center for ceramics, which included storm-resistant storage, was only slightly damaged. Pavilions designed to house artists-in-residence and education programs were also damaged. The Ohr pottery collection was off-site during the storm and was not harmed.

Insurance will cover much of the damage, according to Gerald O'Keefe, who was once the mayor of Biloxi and helped launch the museum with a substantial early gift. The David Whitney Fund will specifically aid the reconstruction of the gallery pods. The museum project was budgeted at \$30 million. It is unclear how much additional money will need to be raised to upgrade storm resistance. The museum now expects to reopen in about two years. *James S. Russell, AIA*

SPECIAL HURRICANE REPORT

Mississippi charrette report is complete

Amid the bleak news from the Mississippi Gulf Coast comes a beam of optimism: the completion of a report on the mid-October planning charrette led by the state and the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) in Biloxi. The report, released in print on November 21, posits that the Gulf will emerge a better place, and that the nearly clean slate left by Hurricane Katrina offers the area an opportunity to be the first U.S. region "to arrive at the inevitable future" of sustainable development.

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour gave Miami-based architect and planner Andres Duany the go-ahead to lead the charrette, which took place from October 11 to 18. One hundred and twenty members of CNU—designers, engineers, and other specialists—plus an almost equal number of Mississippi officials and professionals, gathered for a week to brainstorm ideas for resurrecting a 120-mile coastal region, including 11 cities.

Reconnect towns

The report first suggests reconnecting the Gulf's towns and their region by turning Highway 90 into a beachfront boulevard, moving the CSX freight rail line to the north of I-10, transforming the abandoned CSX right-of-way into a boulevard for cars and transit, and creating a high-speed, east-west rail network linking the Gulf Coast with Mobile and Pensacola to the east and Baton Rouge or Houston to the west. Improved freight and passenger rail service, says the report, "has the potential to substantially bolster the economy and vitality of the Southern states." As for roads: "There is a sense of urgency to restarting the local economy that can be assisted through strategic road and bridge projects." Because "design matters," all road, transit, and bridge projects

"should pay attention to the details of place-making."

Revive downtowns

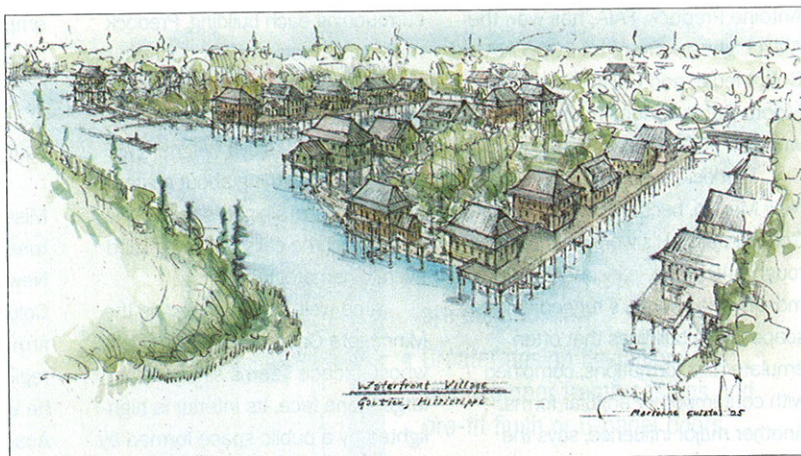
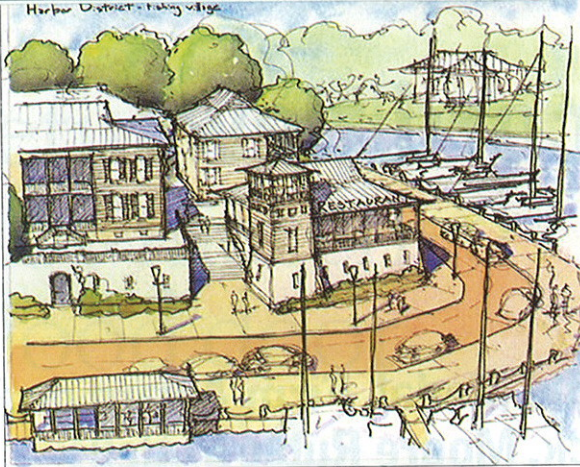
Beyond advocating such New Urbanist trademarks as pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, and transit-based communities, the report suggests stopping the exodus of retail from historic towns. To revive downtowns, it suggests establishing business-improvement-district authorities. Historic buildings would be rebuilt or restored and form-based zoning codes and regulatory boards would be adopted. Coordinated leasing plans could be used to attract leading retailers and big boxes, and it has been suggested that new casinos could be located in downtown shopping districts, or linked to them. Overall, regional planning would be used to discourage sprawl.

Housing issues

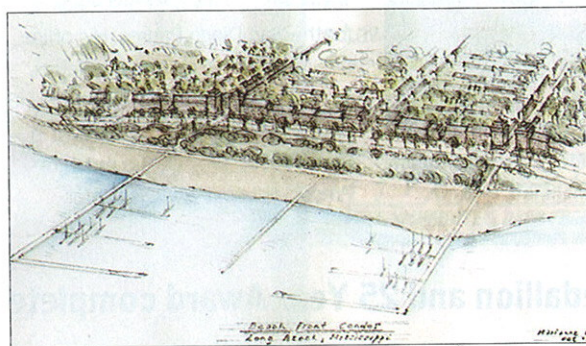
A section on housing options recommends that temporary buildings be designed so that they can later be made permanent, and points out that permitting needs to be expedited. Modular and prefabricated structures "with individual identity" could cut construction time, and that bringing manufacturers to the region could reduce costs and delivery times. Setting regional design standards for architectural detailing could enhance safety. The report also recommends appointing town architects to oversee the rebuilding. As a companion to the report, Urban Design Associates produced *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods*, a resource for homeowners, builders, and communities.

Flood control

The report also exhorts FEMA to



Proposed plans include walkable, human-scaled downtown streetscapes (top), stilted housing developments (above), a raised casino (right), and development begun far from the coastline (below).



replace prescriptive flood-control standards with performance-based principles, and offers some alternatives to expensive, "anti-urban" stilt houses. Recommendations include "submersible dwellings," designed on raised porches using hurricane- and mold-resistant technologies and materials, and buildings with

wide openings, tall ceilings, and appropriate ground-floor finishes that permit storm surges to flow through. These ideas are not universally accepted. Todd Davison, mitigation director for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, insists it is not possible to build beachfront homes or buildings that