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ON OUR COVER
Celebrating
the beginning of our
25th year!
World Expos, Shanghai, The U.S. And You

by Gordon Linden

Do you remember the magical experience of visiting a World’s Fair as a child or teen? Perhaps it was Expo ’62 (Seattle), Expo ’64 (New York) or Expo ’67 (Montreal). Or you might have attended HemisFair ’68 in San Antonio, or Expo ’70 in Osaka, Japan. Those which the U.S. did not actually host, it contributed to as a major international exhibitor. The recent picture is different. U.S. involvement in world expos – as host and as participant, has been lagging – if not sagging – for more than 20 years. The last world expo on U.S. soil was New Orleans 1984. Europe and Asia picked up the ball after that, but because of scant coverage from the U.S. media and a tendency to be overshadowed by the Olympic Games, many Americans think world expos have died out altogether.

The report of the expo’s demise has been greatly exaggerated, however. Major international expositions have taken place in Hanover (2000), Aichi, Japan (2005), and are forthcoming in Zaragoza, Spain (June 14-Sept 14, 2008) and Shanghai (May 1-October 31, 2010).

These days, world expos come in two sizes, as defined by the Paris-based Bureau of International Expositions (BIE). Zaragoza’s is the smaller version: three months long and held on a site of no more than 25 hectares, with a specific theme, in Spain’s case “Water and Sustainable Development.” The Shanghai expo, which is the main focus of this story, is a larger, Universal expo, running for six months and addressing a broad theme, in China’s case “Better City, Better Life.”

Shanghai Expo 2010 is being built on 3.28m2 of land on the Huangpu River waterfront downtown between Nanpu
Bridge and Lupu Bridge. The "Better Cities, Better Life" theme turns on the fact that by 2010 about 55% of the world population will reside in cities. Organizers anticipate some 70 million visits to the exhibits of about 200 participants, who are encouraged to explore the topic of cities, urban development, and urban life in the new century.

World expos are idealistic endeavors that take a snapshot of the world at a point in time while striving to understand and improve the possible future. "Expo 2010 will center on innovation and interaction," reads the Shanghai promotional material. "Innovation is the soul, while cultural interaction is an important mission. In the new era, Expo 2010 will contribute to human-centered development, scientific and technological innovation, cultural diversity and win-win cooperation for a better future."

In short, world expos are alive and well – and relevant. And they are good news for our industry because they offer
huge opportunities to the design and fabrication community, serving as a creative laboratory for the development of presentation techniques that often go on to become standards. Great design and architecture careers have been launched at world's fairs. "Expos are a creative fountain from which many innovations flow - from new mixed-use destinations, new systems of building infrastructure, to new applications of technology in design and communications," says Barry Howard of Barry Howard Limited, expo and museum exhibit designer, whose credits include the American Park for Osaka Expo '70, the U.S. Pavilion for Spokane Expo '74, the U.S. Pavilion for New Orleans Expo '84 and the Electric Energy Pavilion for Taegon Expo '93. Together with fellow expo design veteran Leonard Levitan, Howard is spearheading a current proposal for the U.S. pavilion at Shanghai.

**Global Trade & Other Benefits Of Participation**

World expo participants fall into five basic categories: 1) host city/region, 2) participating nations, 3) non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 4) corporations, and 5) regional participants. All of them need exhibition design and related services to help them achieve their goals. Taking part in a world expo is a major expense and participants are driven to make the most of the opportunity within the limited timeframe of the event.

What the host city seeks to achieve may include boosting international awareness of the city, increasing tourism and business, and creating a catalyst for needed civic improvements, including redevelopment or upgrading of a given district or area. While effects will differ according to circumstances, it is fair to say that past hosts such as Lisbon (1998), Hanover (2000), Aichi (2005), and Montreal each achieved particular successes in this regard. Shanghai 2010 is poised to represent China as a whole - its rich history and culture, to be sure, but more importantly, its huge future as an economic and world power. "Shanghai owes its successful bid for the World Exposition in 2010 to the international community's support for and confidence in its reform and opening-up," states the expo organizing committee.

Nations, participating on the federal level, are a world expo's primary exhibitors. If the event location is one favor-
able for market exposure, prospective trade and business opportunities, goodwill, etc. Then participation will be quite relevant and resources should be allocated to make an appropriate presentation. In the case of China's forthcoming expo, the case for participation is quite strong because of the country's growing importance as a market for goods and services. The Shanghai 2010 literature states, "We count on the continuing attention, support and participation of all the peace-loving countries."

But whether the U.S. will join the roughly 150 participants already on board is still in doubt - at press time, our country had yet to provide written confirmation to the Shanghai organizing committee. The U.S. has a unique and self-imposed complication when it comes to world's fairs - a federal law was passed in the 1990s making it illegal for the federal government to put any money into an expo pavilion. (The U.S. pavilion at Aichi 2005 was funded by Toyota.) However, a detailed RFP for a U.S. pavilion at Shanghai was filed in November 2006 and published in the Federal Register.

"The U.S. should have been at Hanover Expo 2000 to pay respect to the newly formed European Union, but it wasn't," says Leonard Levitan, who noted that Germany invested 3 billion marks in the event, which was held on the Hanover trade fair grounds. "The reason the U.S. needs to be in Shanghai is trade relations. In addition to presenting exhibits for the generality of visitors, a U.S. pavilion at Shanghai would be a focal point and meeting area for companies to connect with Chinese business representatives. The people who go to a world's fair are middle-class to upper-class. They are the bankers, the skilled people, the people who create whatever is going to happen in that country. The Chinese are the future right now." Levitan's extensive background includes exhibit design for pavilions at nine world's fairs, including the Canadian-Pacific pavilion (Vancouver '86) the British Columbia Pavilion (Vancouver '86),
NGOs such as the International Olympic Committee, the Red Cross and others are fairly regular exhibitors at expos. While these entities do not mount large, expensive presentations, they do have a place in the format as it affords an opportunity to get out their message to a broad range of visitors in a face-to-face setting. Regional and local participants, such as state or provincial governments, cities or other such entities, are also represented at expos. This category of participants finds relevance in the opportunity to present themselves to their local constituents and to international visitors.

**Uplifting Visitor Experiences & Architectural Ingenuity**

Expo organizers have considerable scope to plan and shape the visitor experience and, in turn, make the event relevant and interesting to suit local tastes and conditions. Out-of-home entertainment and education are at their very best, because the world is on show and every exhibitor wants their pavilion to be a standout. For example, Vancouver '86, Seville '92 and Lisbon '98 all had spectacular evening and night programs that attracted visitors to stay long hours into the night, increasing attendance as well as spending. Aichi Expo 2005, located in a very densely developed urban corridor between Tokyo and Kyoto, featured extensive green areas, many of which have remained as a permanent park. Many of the techniques developed to attract and engage large crowds of people for sports events, theme parks and museums can be productively applied to world expos.

The out-of-home experience is a shared experience, and an international public event on this scale offers the very best opportunities for people-watching and -meeting. “The modern expo is the most powerful global forum we have for the exchange of information,” says Barry Howard. “It’s the ideal environment for the public of one nation to come...”

Buckminster Fuller USA dome Expo '67.

the Federal Express Pavilion (Knoxville ‘82) and the Canadian Pavilion for Osaka Expo ‘70.

When taking part in an expo where international trade opportunities abound, nations will often design and build dual-purpose pavilions, with one area for the general public and another for business-to-business conferencing and VIPs. “About 30% of a pavilion might be devoted to business,” says Levitan, “and include a VIP lounge, food service, bar, couches and chairs, maybe a garden. This trade fair part is secondary to the main communication of a pavilion, but in a country such as China it will be very important.”

Corporations themselves participate in expos as sponsors and as exhibitors. The benefits to them are basically found in the opportunity to present themselves in a positive way to the many visitors, dignitaries and business persons attending the event. Corporate partners for Shanghai 2010 include Siemens and General Motors.
into contact with the public of another – to meet people they otherwise would not, and benefit from the encounter. If you really want to learn about a nation, then go and see how they express themselves in a world’s fair pavilion."

With today’s concern for avoiding waste, expo buildings are sometimes designed to be dismantled and reassembled elsewhere and sometimes a page is taken from the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, in deploying a mix of existing and new facilities. Where the buildings themselves are not temporary, their use as world’s fair pavilions is, and this often gives rise to great ingenuity – in temporarily adapting structures that were designed to later permanently house, for instance, a mixed-use development, trade fair or convention center complex.

**With today’s concern for avoiding waste, expo buildings are sometimes designed to be dismantled and reassembled elsewhere.**

As is typical, Shanghai 2010 will have a mix of self-built pavilions from the larger participants, and pre-built space for the smaller participants. Land for self-built pavilions will be available to builders by November 2007. All construction work is to be completed by December 2009. Organizers are encouraging the use of environmentally-friendly and reusable materials. Most pavilions will be torn down after closing day, which generally creates a pang among the local community which has become attached to an expo, its buildings and its attractions after six months of operation. But temporariness is inherent to an expo – and that quality combined with the incentive of a world showcase has given rise to some marvelous creativity in pavilion architecture and building techniques.

There’s plenty of building and planning activity already underway at Shanghai.

In May, expo organizers kicked off the first batch of pavilion construction on a portion of the expo site that is planned as the exhibition area for Asian countries. The September/October 2007
Netherlands. Körneling’s concept, “Happy Street,” was described as a strongly three-dimensional idealised image focusing simply yet refreshingly on the quality of life for urban dwellers and providing prospects for the future. Visitors will be able to stroll along it, walk down its 450-meter street via various different routes, and pass or enter its houses. Others who had competed to design the pavilion were UN Studio, West 8 urban design & landscape architecture, NL Architects, NeutelingsRiedijk and Marcel Wanders.

We can only hope that the U.S. will follow through and join the distinguished list of international participants at Shanghai Expo 2010. And the terms of the RFP for a U.S. pavilion at Shanghai are something of a Catch-22, as Leonard Levitan explained: “You have to go out and raise $100 million to prove to the US government you can do it. You won’t get the official sanction to build the pavilion until you do raise that money. But if you don’t have the sanction when you do your fundraising, it weakens your position to raise those funds. Still, I think we can raise considerable money if we get the interim blessing. Sustainability is the new industry of our future and that’s what Expo 2010 is really all about.”

For those of us who would also like to see the U.S. again take up the role of expo host, my own recent experience as a consultant indicates that there is plenty of interest around the country. Not every idea becomes reality, but over the past 10 years or so I have prepared studies for American business and government-related individuals and groups that were (some still are) exploring the possibility of organizing a modern world exposition. The locations include Atlanta, San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Alameda, San Antonio and Charlotte. Often the studies were done in conjunction with my colleague Paul Creighton and with Economics Research Associates. It’s no accident that regions where there is this kind of interest have often played the host before, to a world expo or Olympic Games. They understand the benefits. The expo is a motivator, a catalyst. It attracts attention and business and brings in tourism and urban renewal. It inspires us to ask questions, to do our best and then to do better than that — in technology, education, entertainment, development, conservation, international relations, resource management and, of course, design. eb

Gordon Linden is manager of planning and urban design with Parsons International, based in Dubai, UAE where he has responsibility for directing the planning of a variety of megaprojects in the Middle East. During his career, he has worked on numerous one-time events, including Olympic Games and international expositions; recently he was part of a team assisting Toronto, Canada in assessing the potentials for hosting an expo in 2015. He has recently co-authored a book with Paul Creighton entitled, The Expo Book: The Past, Present and Future of Organizing International Expositions, which will be partially serialized in upcoming editions of InPark Magazine. Further information is available at www.gordonlinden.com.