urban designer is asked to protect and foster. Today, it is the urban designer, not the planner, who has emerged as the place-centered professional, with "urban design" often assuming a friendlier, more accessible popular connotation than "planning."

Urban Design as a Frame of Mind

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive; other urban design activities could surely be added. In rapidly modernizing parts of the world, urban design has emerged as an important component of managing this modernization. An example is the BOT (Build, Operate, Transfer) transportation and related mixed-use projects common in both South American and Asian countries. (BOT is a form of project financing in which a private entity receives a franchise from the public sector to finance, design, construct, and operate a facility for a specified period, after which ownership is transferred back to the public sector.) Nor is the point of identifying—even caricaturing— the above spheres of urban design to lay claim to vast jurisdictional territory for the discipline. On the contrary, it is to strongly suggest that instead of moving toward professional specificity, urban design has come to represent—and its varied practitioners have come to be aligned with—distinct avenues for engaging and facilitating urbanity. Rodolfo Machado, my colleague at Harvard, offers an appealing (if somewhat rhetorical) definition for urban design: the process of design (or planning, I would add) that produces or enhances urbanity. Is this but an "amiable generality"?

Perhaps Sert would be disappointed that half a century after his first conference no more precise definition for urban design has emerged. Around the third or fourth of the near-annual urban design conferences that he hosted at Harvard throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, he expressed concern about the "fog of amiable generalities" that the conversations had so far produced. He hoped to move past them, but they have persisted.

Following a quarter of a century of practicing and teaching urban design, my own conclusion is the following. Urban design is less a technical discipline than a mind-set among those of varying disciplinary foundations seeking, sharing, and advocating insights about forms of community. What binds urban designers is their commitment to improving the livability of cities, to facilitating urban reinvestment and maintenance, and indeed to enhancing urbanity. The need for