

Urban Design after Battery Park City: Opportunities for Variety and Vitality

Timothy Love

Large-scale urban design in America is now directed mostly by sophisticated private real estate companies and no longer by public or quasi-public agencies and authorities. As a result, new strategies should be developed that leverage the inherent mechanisms of real estate development as ways to generate more innovative design proposals. For architects and urban designers to capitalize on the new economy, they need to understand the economic and regulatory underpinnings that drive development decisions. Only by their collaborating at the earliest phases with developers on the relationship between the metrics of financial analysis, the opportunities for better building typologies, and the importance of varied uses at the ground plane can an enriched culture of American urban design emerge.

Somewhere between the suburban anti-sprawl agenda of the New Urbanism and the recent media focus on large-scale architecture projects such as Frank Gehry's proposal for Atlantic Yards, mainstream American urban design practice hums along, seemingly accepted by the media, public officials, and the academy as an appropriate, if staid, paradigm for organizing large-scale development in urban areas. When the environments that result from these plans are criticized, the culprit is thought (as it was with Battery Park City and Canary Wharf) to be the quality of the architecture and not the urban design framework.