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UNION-TRIBUNE

November 18, 2006

Grand Onion

Salk Institute for expansion plan

Recipient: Salk Institute for Biological Studies**Location:** 10010 N. Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla

The Salk Institute is once again proposing to expand the historically designated and internationally revered iconic masterpiece by Louis Kahn. The Salk wants entitlements for a complete build out now, but only offers up cursory designs for review. The plan would remove the original east parking lot and plantings and unnecessarily build on the south and north mesas causing impacts to environmentally sensitive canyon lands. The “big box” building proposed along Torrey Pines Road will obstruct what's left to see of Kahn's building from the east. The iconic Kahn labs, courtyard and site deserve much better.

Grand Orchid

California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2) Building (Atkinson Hall)

Recipient: University of California San Diego**Location:** Voight at Engineers lanes on the UCSD campus, La Jolla

Collaboration, creation, innovation – these are the ideals that the Calit2 building lives up to. This building, sleek and contemporary – yet with an aura of mystery – provides shared facilities for researchers and artists working at the intersection of art, engineering and science. A challenging budget did not prevent the designers from creating this memorable and beautiful facility. The jury was especially impressed by the creative use of materials and the dramatic arrangement of windows. This was clearly a work of architecture that was meant to lead rather than follow. UCSD should be commended for maintaining their high standards of planning and architecture.

Urban context awards

1. Orchid for architecture: Fahrenheit condo building

Recipient: CityMark Development**Location:** 1025 Island Ave., downtown San Diego

A sophisticated, great looking building. Fahrenheit received an Orchid not only for its superb architecture, but

also for successfully overcoming the challenge of concealing a large parking garage. The street is activated and the units are full of light. Generous balconies are provided throughout. Impressively, the building's layout works well despite a shallow 24-foot deep site. This is the type of innovation we need from more developers.

2. Onion for architecture: Cortez Blu condo building

Recipient: K. Hovnanian Homes

Location: 801 Ash St., downtown San Diego

This clumsy high-rise with the pretentious name looks like someone stacked five different buildings atop one another – each one more mundane than the last. The result is a Frankenstein's Monster of architecture that should be chased out of town with pitchforks and torches. The overgrown satellite dish on the roof is the perfect capper for such a silly building. On our Web site one voter noted that the Cortez Blu “has all the charm and allure of a military radar installation.” Another voter suggested that we “Photoshop fruit into the big crown-bowl” as a tribute to Carmen Miranda.

3. Orchid for architecture: Petco Park

Recipient: San Diego Padres

Location: 100 Park Blvd., downtown San Diego

Petco Park is an experience, not just a place. It feels like San Diego and it's a great place to watch a game. Its light and airy design is something that San Diegans have never had in a sports facility. Lush landscaping and a monumental water feature add color and interest. The ballpark's connection to the historic warehouse district, Gaslamp Quarter and a new grassy park are truly memorable. Petco Park is a handsome facility that represents our city well.

4. Onion for architecture: Gaslamp Square condos

Recipient: K. Hovnanian Homes

Location: 435 Fourth Ave., downtown San Diego

Disneyland meets the Gaslamp. The poster child for architectural fakery. This monolith is an eyesore that almost single-handedly ruins the Gaslamp Quarter. With such a prestigious location, this megablock is a wasted design opportunity. Are the architects trying to fool us into thinking this building is five or six individual historic buildings? Its walls consist of cheap materials and paper-thin facades. The clunky, pasted-on bay windows can't make up for the complete lack of refinement and detail. Slapping a pseudo-historic facade onto a mass of condos is exactly what the Gaslamp doesn't need

5. Orchid for historic preservation: Western Metal Supply Building

Recipient: San Diego Padres

Location: 215 Seventh Ave., downtown San Diego

The classic old Western Metal Supply building at Petco Park has become the most talked-about aspect of the ballpark. It's great to walk through and experience the heavy timber wood columns and beams that were an important characteristic of San Diego's old warehouse district. Thank God the Padres didn't tear it down like most other developers would have tried to do. The Western Metal building preserves a piece of our history right in the middle of a modern landmark. It's a great example of blending old with new.

6. Onion for historic preservation: Proposed condo tower next to El Cortez

Recipient: J. Peter Block Companies

Location: 777 Beech St., downtown San Diego

This proposed project will rob Cortez Hill residents of their special relationship with their neighborhood icon, the historic El Cortez Hotel. The proposed structure is a high-density, blocky building, with virtually no outdoor space for its residents and it occupies every square inch of lot space. The residents of the hill have become increasingly

hemmed in by tall, high-density condominiums. The proposed structure would also obliterate the 1950 swimming pool and palm trees that so greatly enhance the iconic stature of the stately El Cortez building. Soon it will be impossible to see the El Cortez from any vantage point in the city. This important site is no place for another faceless condo tower.

Environmental context awards

1. Orchid for public art: Queen Calafia's Magical Circle

Recipient: City of Escondido

Location: Kit Carson Park, 3333 Bear Valley Parkway, Escondido

Nestled in the natural landscape within Escondido's Kit Carson Park, Queen Calafia's Magical Circle is alive with mosaic sculptures. Internationally acclaimed artist Niki de Saint Phalle designed and built this magical place as a gift to Escondido and San Diego County. The garden is inspired by California's mythic, historic and cultural roots. It explodes with a complex mosaic of mirror, glass, stone and ceramic shapes – which are continually transformed by the sun. As you enter this garden, you cross the threshold into a magical world. The late artist has left an enduring legacy with this, her only permanent sculpture garden in the United States.

2. Onion for sustainable design: Proposed Sunrise Powerlink

Recipient: San Diego Gas & Electric Co.

Location: Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

This proposed SDG&E power line will deface the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, habitat preserves and many special areas of San Diego County with a truly ugly transmission line. The route could not have been more intrusively planned, spoiling communities and countryside for the purpose of connecting to Los Angeles' Southern California Edison system. All this just to allow the export of electricity from Mexico's environmentally-challenged power plants; coincidentally built by SDG&E's parent company, Sempra Energy. This is poor land-use planning and even worse energy planning. There are better ways to provide for Southern California's electricity needs than with huge steel towers cutting across our state parks and pristine open spaces. Time to unplug this boondoggle.

3. Orchid for planning policies: Proposed San Diego Regional Canyonlands Park

Recipient: San Diego Civic Solutions

Location: Countywide

Our canyons bring us nourishment, maintain our health and ventilate our lives. They are the lungs of the city. So says San Diego Civic Solutions, a collection of business and grass-roots leaders who joined together to author this framework for sustaining San Diego's unique topology. These urban canyons are critical to our region – cleaning our air; providing a natural water filtration system; giving us breathing room for wildlife and people; connecting our neighborhoods, towns and cities; and nurturing the region's spirit. In 1868, another group of San Diego visionaries set aside 1,400 acres for a City Park – now known worldwide as Balboa Park. Today we have the chance to create a regional park of canyons which is every bit as important.

4. Onion for architecture: College of Arts and Letters Building

Recipient: San Diego State University

Location: Avenue of Arts (northwest corner of SDSU campus), College area

A “Mussolini Modern” design with post-modern flourishes of tackiness. Interestingly, most of the Onion nominations for this SDSU shoebox on steroids came from the faculty that work in the new building. The main entrance – for no reason – is below street level. Facing the building, one thinks of a forbidding medieval castle that hasn't lowered the drawbridge. Unfortunately, there are problems other than simple aesthetics. This building also violates the principles of sustainability by failing to provide any exterior shading for the windows and by using metal wall panels that are barely insulated. In recent years SDSU has received more than its share of Onions. Maybe the university can draw inspiration from their academic neighbor to the north and follow the strong design

principles of UCSD.

5. Orchids (2) for landscape architecture and environmental graphics: Solana Beach Coastal Rail Trail and Gateway Arches

Recipient: City of Solana Beach

Location: 1.7-mile strip of land between the railway tracks and South Highway 101 and from Ocean Street to Via de la Valle, Solana Beach

Kudos to Solana Beach for making their stretch of the rail trail happen. This leftover strip of land has been turned into an asset for the community. It provides a pleasant pedestrian experience while softening the harsh edge of the railroad tracks. Public art and community participation have been incorporated into the design of the arches which mark the entry to the trail. The exquisite mosaic detailing on these arches depicts the history of Solana Beach. Laden with colorful, locally-made tiles, natural imagery and evocative words, these arches are a creative timeline telling the story of Solana Beach. Let's hope that other cities along the rail trail draw inspiration from this terrific project.

Waterfront context awards

1. Onion for architecture: Manchester Grand Hyatt Seaport Tower

Recipient: Manchester Financial Group

Location: 1 Market Place, downtown San Diego

Doug Manchester makes waves again with yet another piece of his "Bayfront Wall." This uninspiring slab of concrete with a chateau roof is clunky, aloof and dehumanizing. It appears to aspire to the French Empire's love for self-importance and pretension that cost the royal family their heads. Manchester's latest tower of power looms over the bay front like a giant domino, waiting to topple. The Hyatt's impenetrable lobby and parking structures complete the bay blockade. Did someone mention a bay? Is there a bay back there somewhere? San Diegans may never find it again.

2. Orchid for urban design: Waterfront design plan by Sasaki Associates and Rob Wellington Quigley

Recipient: San Diego Unified Port District

Location: Seaport Village to G Street Mole, downtown San Diego

Finally a plan that really seeks to connect the city to the bay – and sticks its toe in the water. The port district was thinking big when it selected the public favorite Sasaki/Quigley Plan as the unanimous winner of the harborfront design competition. The plan extends the city's grid of streets out to the water's edge and culminates in a grand circular promenade out into the bay, offering unique views both up and down the bay and back towards the city. The design integrates the area into a pedestrian-scaled, urban waterfront district. The plan even includes a sandy beach – finally a place for downtown dwellers to interact with the bay rather than just view it from the top of their condo tower. It's high time for the port district to implement this important plan.

3. Onion for architecture: Hilton Hotel-San Diego Convention Center parking garage

Recipient: San Diego Unified Port District

Location: Eighth Avenue at Harbor Drive, downtown San Diego

Unfortunately, building an ugly, faceless concrete parking structure isn't unique, but why build it here of all places? Prime bayfront real estate was sacrificed for this impenetrable mass. The street edge is about as inviting as the Death Star trench. Actually, the design for this garage was apparently inspired by one of Saddam Hussein's Baghdad bunkers – complete with lookout towers. Maybe the Air Force can blow this bunker up, too. There was so much potential for this waterfront site that has now been lost. Yet another "Blunder on the Bay."

4. Orchid for architecture: Garty Family Rowing Pavilion

Recipient: San Diego Rowing Club

Location: 1220 El Carmel Place, Mission Beach

This addition to the San Diego Rowing Club brings to mind the tranquil beauty of rowing and the tradition of craftsmanship associated with the sport. It's a modest, dignified addition that redeems the potential of architecture on the waterfront. The use of wood and the design references to boats cleverly link the building to the sport it celebrates. The Garty Family Rowing Pavilion made the jury want to take up rowing!

5. Onion for planning policies: Proposed Navy Broadway Complex redevelopment plan

Recipient: Manchester Financial Group

Location: South side of Broadway at Harbor Drive, downtown San Diego

Doug Manchester makes waves again with another bayfront proposal. The jury found it hard to tell if this was truly meant for the San Diego bayfront – resembling another Dubai mega-development. Once again it would seem that San Diego is destined to be force-fed another mediocre attempt at developing the waterfront, when there is still a chance for some truly iconic architecture and memorable public spaces. Let's all hope that the port and planning agencies won't let another coastal onion slip through.

Neighborhood context awards

1. Orchid for historic preservation: 3200 Sixth Ave. condo building

Recipient: Del Mar Heritage

Location: 3200 Sixth Ave., Park West

Kermit was right, "It's not easy being green." And even though the voters on our Web site only gave 3200 Sixth Avenue 41 percent Orchid votes, our jury is more comfortable with avocado green. This restored, mid-century modern building charmed our jury with its cool 1960s flair. Famed modernist architect Henry Hester would be proud of this restoration. As Austin Powers might say: "It's shagedelic, baby!"

2. Onion for architecture: North Park "clones" (duplicate condo projects)

Recipient: Gary Taylor & Associates (architect)

The buzzards are circling the older neighborhoods of North Park, searching out old bungalows as prey. The carcasses that are left behind have a familiar stench. Are we seeing double? Or triple? These clones are popping up like mutant mushrooms throughout North Park. Residents are forced to endure the sight of this same uninspired design on lot after lot after lot. Must our housing come from the same assembly line that cranks out McDonald's franchises? Attack of the Clones indeed.

3. Orchid for interior design: Tower23 hotel and JRDN restaurant

Recipient: Miller Enterprises

Location: 723 Felspar St., Pacific Beach

Finally there is a good reason to go to PB if you are not a surfer or a college student. Tower23 is different from the usual beach beauty. It causes people to stop and stare, but it combines style with substance. The bold, minimalist building and its interior celebrate the energy of the boardwalk on which it sits. The interior draws you in during the day with the easy indoor-outdoor transitions, while at night it evokes a more dramatic theatrical presence on the street. Tower23 and JRDN Restaurant offer respite from the architectural mediocrity of its neighborhood, while encouraging other Pacific Beach businesses to take it to the next level.

4. Onion for planning policies: Granny flat ordinance

Recipient: City of San Diego

Location: San Diego citywide

This Onion goes to the city of San Diego for not allowing “granny flats.” Granny flats are accessory residential units built behind existing homes. The images you're looking at would show some creative possibilities if these units were permitted by the city. Such a zoning allowance, which is permitted in many other California cities, would support the city's stated goal of sensitively adding density to older communities. The city seems to prefer approving new midrise megablock developments that require existing blocks to be bulldozed. This is a huge missed opportunity and a creative way of addressing San Diego's housing needs.

5. Orchid for urban design: Washington Street Skatepark

Recipient: Washington Street Skatepark Association

Location: Beneath Pacific Highway overpass at west end of Washington Street, Middletown

The Washington Street Skatepark makes use of a wasteland beneath a freeway overpass, transforming it into a concrete playground for the rad and gnarly. Built by skateboarders themselves, there is a hand-made and improvised quality to Washington Street that sets it apart from other skate parks. It is a magnet for skateboarders from all over the county and a vibrant example of what can happen when young, energetic citizens communicate with city authorities.

People's Choice awards

1. Onion for Golden Hill Elementary School

Recipient: San Diego Unified School District

Location: 1240 33rd St., Golden Hill

This new school deserves an Onion for waste. It wastes designated open space; it wastes an opportunity to enhance a diverse and vibrant community; and it wastes \$30 million dollars that could have been used to create several smaller community schools. Its harsh, generic style has nothing to do with the environment or the Golden Hill community. It arrived on the scene complete with weeds, graffiti, and low performance. The school is a sea of concrete and fences that recall a 1950s state prison rather than a 2006 elementary school.

2. Orchid for Petco Park

Recipient: San Diego Padres


Location: 100 Park Blvd., downtown San Diego

The designers of Petco Park didn't try to recreate a traditional East Coast ballpark or knock-off of Balboa Park's Spanish-Revival style. The Padres and lead designer Antoine Predock were intent on creating a ballpark for today that connects and reflects San Diego. Unique materials like sandstone and white steel shine in the afternoon sun. The seating bowl opens up to the north to capture views of downtown. Open terraces overlook the bay and the “Park at the Park” provides year-around green space for East Village's growing residential population. The public has spoken – Petco Park is a hit!

Source: Orchids & Onions Committee, San Diego Architectural Foundation

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