

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR



Scott L. Melnick

Have you ever read something, stopped, re-read it, and still ended up scratching your head? That's how I felt when I read a recent article by architecture critic Blair Kamin in a recent issue of the Chicago Tribune. The article, "A Business School for the Post-Enron Era," discusses the \$62 million Peter B. Lewis Building for the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University—designed, of course, by Frank Gehry. (In the interest of fair disclosure, AISC gave the project an Engineering Award of Excellence this year.)

While I have mixed feelings about Gehry's work (the Guggenheim in Bilbao was brilliant, but do we really need one of these sculptures in every city?), I was shocked by one passage in the article: "The towers, which rest on concrete stilts framed in wood, each house two-tiered classrooms. Other classrooms are reached by curving corridors that are intentionally disorienting. 'I made a building that even I get lost in,' Gehry said at the dedication ceremonies. 'And so do the students. They'll have to ask directions. Maybe they'll get to know each other.'"

Now I haven't yet had the opportunity to visit the new building, and perhaps Gehry is exaggerating, but I'm amazed that any responsible owner would create a structure that intentionally confuses its users.

Of course, seemingly intentional confusion isn't confined to the built environment. I've also seen my share of confusing web sites. Hopefully, no one ranks www.aisc.org with those difficult sites. During the past year, AISC has worked hard to transform itself into an invaluable resource for the design and construction community—and our efforts have ranged from the development of an extensive online library to the active efforts of the Steel Solutions Center.

One of the intriguing parts of the web site are the large number of documents that formerly were only available on a fee basis, but which are now available as a free download. For example, you can purchase "A Guide to Engineering and Quality Criteria for Steel Structures for \$30—or you can search by topic and view the answer for free on the web site. Another free-to-all technical resource is "Steel Tips." Published by the Structural Steel

Educational Council (SSEC) of the California/Nevada Ironworkers Union, Steel Tips feature papers on such topics as "Seismic Behavior and Design of Composite Steel Plate Shear Walls" and "Practical Design and Detailing of Steel Column Base Plates" from some of the most respected Engineers in California. The website also includes a Steel Availability Database and free downloads of almost all of AISC's Specifications, including the *Code of Standard Practice*, *LRF Specification for Structural Steel Buildings*, and the *Seismic Provisions*. In addition, visitors can download FEMA 350 and the Proceedings from the Connections IV Workshop.

Visitors also can visit the "Innovative Ideas" or "Technical Answers" sections of the website. You can click on a myriad of topics from an incredibly detailed list (for example, Flexible Moment Connections) and see a list of available resources (including answers from AISC's FAQ list, *Engineering Journal* articles, *MSC* articles, Steel Tips papers, and AISC and other books).

I'm also impressed with AISC's Steel Tools. These include useful spreadsheets (such as "Clean Columns," a tool to help eliminate the need for column stiffeners, which helps to reduce the fabricated cost of a building, and "Surface Area," which calculates the surface area of a steel structure to determine how much paint is needed), as well as SteelWise datasheets (such as "Estimating the Axial Capacity of Compression Members" and "Chevron Bracing in Low-Rise Buildings").

AISC members receive even more benefits, most notably free access to all *Engineering Journal* articles (if you're not an AISC member, you can still download articles for a nominal \$10 fee).

However, if you can't find what you're looking for on AISC's web site, the Steel Solutions Center is available to answer any and all questions about structural steel. And now you can reach them via a toll-free number—866.ASK.AISC (866.275.2472).

Hope to hear from you soon,

(P.S.—Mark your calendar now for the 2003 North American Steel Construction Conference, April 2-5, Baltimore, MD.)

Editorial Contacts

Editorial Offices

Modern Steel Construction
One E. Wacker Dr., Suite 3100
Chicago, IL 60601
312.670.2400 tel
312.670.0341 fax

Editor & Publisher

Scott L. Melnick
312.670.8314
melnick@modernsteel.com

Senior Editor

Keith A. Grubb, P.E., S.E.
312.670.8318
grubb@modernsteel.com

Assistant Editor

Beth S. Pollak
312.670.8316
pollak@modernsteel.com

Address Changes/Subscriptions

312.670.5444 tel
312.670.5403 fax
kingston@modernsteel.com

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Scott L. Melnick

Advertising Contact

Account Manager

John A. Byrne
847.699.6049 tel
847.699.8681 fax
byrne@modernsteel.com
2400 E. Devon Ave., Suite 380
Des Plaines, IL 60018

To receive advertising information, contact John Byrne or view it online: www.modernsteel.com

