



Scott L. Melnick

My oldest brother, Garry, is quite an accomplished photographer (in fact, he took the picture that accompanies this column). Before the first of his three kids was born in 1983 (and before his medical practice was as busy, his bountiful produce garden as big, and his fish collection as large), he spent a lot of time in the darkroom producing wonderful works of art.

A few years ago, however, he discovered digital photography and his hobby was reborn. He no longer needed a darkroom (for which he didn't have room in his basement). He didn't need large blocks of uninterrupted time to fiddle with chemicals and film. He simply needed a computer, a large (now two) monitors, a copy of Photoshop, and the best printer he could find.

While I'm incredibly appreciative of the many photos and albums he's gifted me and my family with over the years, I'm even more impressed by the ease of his transition and the willingness with which he's embraced the change in technology—despite the need for large investments in both time and training. I think a lot of the willingness was because the benefits were so obvious, most notably in the ability to shoot large quantities of pictures and immediately see the results, but also in the ease and precision with which pictures can be adjusted, scaled, and printed.

The building team is going through a similar adjustment to changing technology and the benefits for design and technology are at least as impressive as for photography (and we're all positioned to take advantage of it). Almost everyone has an incredibly powerful computer sitting on their desk (we use more computing power on a daily basis than the entire computer system used by NASA to land the first man on the moon) and almost everyone has access to amazing software. And if you skip ahead a few pages to a letter from Mark Holland of Paxton & Vierling, you'll read that for the first time we're

seeing people embrace the concept of interoperability and look for ways to incorporate it into their work rather than looking for reasons not to do it.

One key is the development of Appendix A to the 2005 *Code of Standard Practice*, which lays out guidelines for projects based on the sharing of electronic models rather than of paper drawings. If you're not familiar with Appendix A, I urge you to download a copy of the updated *Code*. You can download a copy for free by visiting www.aisc.org/code (as with all AISC codes and specifications, AISC has made them available at no charge as .PDF files). And if after reading it you want to know more, block your calendar on February 8, 2006 when AISC will offer a short course on the integration of operability—including work flow and contractual issues—immediately prior to the North American Steel Construction Conference in San Antonio.

Currently, a number of software companies offer interoperability through the steel industry's preferred neutral file format, CIS/2, including: Frameworks Plus, SDS/2, Structural Triforma, SAP2000, ETABS, Fabtrol MRP, 3D+, RAM Structural System, Tekla Structures, ROBOT, RCAD, StruCAD, GT Strudl, RISA-3D, and RISAFloor (visit www.aisc.org/edi for more information).

And later this month the bar will be raised once more. Autodesk is introducing Revit Structure, powerful product that will create a Building Information Model based on the architectural design that can directly import and export structural information to/from analysis programs (which, of course, can then export electronic files to detailing and fabrication software).

The digital revolution can't be turned back—whether you're taking pictures or designing buildings.

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