

Introduction

Integrity

SOM's project to conduct a series of external criticisms of current work has met with a variety of responses outside SOM itself. In the general media, the opening of one of the world's largest practices to critical, external eyes has been described by one journal as a "courageous" approach (*ArchNewsNow*, April 16, 2002) and by another as an attempt at a "more objective assessment" (*New York Times*, September 29, 2002). Free from the influence of those assessed, the resulting publication is seen to be different from the more normal "self-congratulatory monographs" (*NYT*).

Among architects, reactions have been more mixed, ranging from the unquotable to that of grudging respect. Certainly this form of external review has charted new territory, casting other practice profiles in a more critical light, or, to quote Fred Bernstein from the *New York Times*, "makes a typical architecture firm's monograph read like a high school year-book."

Just over a year after the first adjudication of current SOM projects by external critics had taken place in New York, a new jury of five individuals convened on June 10, 2002, at the Chicago office of SOM. This time the selection panel consisted of the architect and critic Doug Garofalo (Chicago), the structural engineer Werner Sobek (Stuttgart), the artist James Turrell (Flagstaff), the architect and critic Wilfried Wang (Berlin), and the architect Tod Williams (New York).

Following the intense debate within SOM since the results of the first selection had become known (*SOM Journal 1*), the original intention to maintain

the jury for the second round was dropped. It was a decision made by the Chicago-based partners of SOM in response to the concern that the first set of jurors (three out of five from New York) might have been too close to the issues developed at the New York office. Since concerns of partiality often cross competitors' minds, and despite the participating jurors' insistence that they did not know the origin of the submitted projects, a newly composed jury reassured the doubters of the independence of the selection process.

As in the first event, a majority of projects that were selected originated in the New York office (six out of nine). While this question might not interest the reader outside the world of SOM, it goes without saying that the repeated success of the New York office is further intensifying internal debates.

The *Journal* might thus become a source of reflection on central questions facing any practice. How does one achieve a high degree of quality in design in the face of an often limited interest and capacity on behalf of client bodies in this aspect? How can a project synthesize the advancement of legitimate client interests as well as long-term issues of programmatic, aesthetic, and material durability? How can a claim be made for architecture to have a wider socio-cultural relevance beyond spectacle or speculation?

The selection process followed the pattern of the first occasion. The jurors individually spent a good part of the morning digesting each one of the sixty-two submitted schemes. Subsequently selection criteria were loosely debated, which, in the course