ACADIA'S BROWSER: CROSSING CENTURIES, BLURRING BOUNDARIES

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New years are inspiring; they are times for new beginnings. As we are now starting a new century, I am inspired… and it looks like I am not the only one: Two graduates from Columbia University have recently launched a web- business and people are taking notice. (*http://www.kdlab.net/webdocs/main/index_ns.htm*.)

k+d.lab was founded in 1999 by Joseph Kosinski and D Dean J. DiSimone. They launched their web site last September and it was immediately noticed and listed in Architettura's catalog of best sites (*http://www.architettura.it/goodsite/welcome_e.html*.) The quality of their work also won them an Award of Distinction in Visualization and Illustration at ACADIA's 1999 Conference in Salt Lake City (see figure 1).

k+d lab's web site is jazzy. You are taken from one area of the site to another via a flowing decision tree. One option is picked to open up a new group of possible paths to follow. Curiosity leads you in all directions and new options constantly appear, reminding you of the flow of creative thought processes.

The work is grouped into four modules including academic, competition, professional, and publication types of projects. The firm offers architectural services, research, digital design, animation, web design and other multimedia services.

Boundaries are blurred across time and space, for example, when Kosinsky presents a project involving the former site of Berlin's spectacular Anhalter Bahnhof. This 19th Century train station was severely damaged during World War II. Here it is transformed into the Anhalter Digitalbibliothek, a library for the next millennium (see figure 2). It provides a portal into a global digital network and intends to bring about an important public forum for learning and social interaction. The project is accompanied by a discussion on the new millennium and flipping through the pages really gets my mind into gear.

Throughout the web site, intuitive links guide you from projects to projects. Images, text and multimedia are organized in a rhythmic and easily viewed structure that stimulates interest. In Cybersites, for example, Quick Time VR helps clients imagine how a given space could potentially be used (see figure 3). It serves to help clients visualize the office space they want to take over. The impressive part is that the total project was completed in 72 hours, from survey to delivery. Quick Time VR is used in a similar way in Suite 1552 (see figure 4) to help clients visualize a rapid conceptual re-design of their existing office space.

After a whirl around in VR, you can click on a Quick Time movie and watch as the action continues. Carefully chosen soundtracks accompany these movies and add swing to the viewing experience. This attention to detail is expanded throughout the web site. It gives confidence to the viewer and encourages further exploration of the ideas presented. The Pedestrian Bridge project is another example of detailing in design (see figures 5 and 6).

The whirling continues when you read about SOUNDLAB (see figures 7 and 8): A concert hall design based on the concept of a whirling dervish (Mohammedan monk). In a sacred dance ceremony, a dervish rotates in a precise rhythm. The ritual whirling helps the dervish empty himself of distracting thoughts and get into a trance. As with the dervish whirl, the proposed concert hall confronts the visitor with a series of spatial configurations that gradually dampen distraction and enhance concentration. This process prepares the visitors' awareness to focus completely on the concert performance.

Excitement and whirl are an integral part of this web site. Unfortunately, the viewing experience is slightly dampened various formatting problems. The site also locked up a few times as I was visiting it and it crashed Netscape. However, the site is brand new and I expect that the authors will take care of these minor problems.

I remain impressed with the visual and organizational quality of the design as well as with the flow of the content. I can't stop playing around with the decision tree the leads me from one area to the next. The overall experience is pleasing for the eyes as well as for the mind. Kudos to Kosinski and DiSimone for an impressive web site. What an inspiring way to move into the new millennium!

Figure 1: 1998-99 Joint study award: ACADIA Award of Distinction in Visualization and Illustration. Frank Lloyd Wright's National Life Insurance Building (1924) modeled and animated by Dean DiSimone and Joseph Kosinski, Columbia University.

Figure 2: Anhalter Digitalbibliothek: By Joseph Kosinski. Accomplished with Form Z, Quick Time, Adobe PageMill, Image Ready & Image Styler.

Figure 3: Cybersites by Joseph Kosinski.

Figure 4: Suite 1552: By Dean DiSimone & Joseph Kosinski. Project served two venture capital firms needing separate workplace while allowing collaboration. Partitions running parallel to the outside wall are either transparent or translucent to allow natural light to filter through.

Figures 5 and 6: Pedestrian Bridge: By Joseph Kosinski and Robert Quevedo. The concrete mass at the end of the bridge balances tension from the mast with axial force from the steel torsion tube. A detail was developed that allowed the axial force to pass through while resisting torsion.

Figures 7 and 8: SOUNDLAB: By Dean DiSimone. The ideas of rotation and gravitation borrowed from the whirling dervish were integrated in the site study, yielding a series of bubble like spaces that inhabit the surface. These pockets of interior space were programmed into practice and performance chambers, located under the skin of the campus, thereby responding to the severe climate of Northern Minnesota.

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