

DAILY JOURNAL OF COMMERCE

Architecture-Engineering Section (Excerpt), Wednesday, December 23, 1992

Architects are dealt a winning hand

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Journal A/E Editor

Many architects leave their interest in the fine arts behind when they enter the real world of professional discipline and practice. They may never expect to see art and business mixed, especially not by mechanical engineers. Mechanical engineers?

Notkin Engineering Inc. has completed a novel promotional project that has brought out the graphic artists in professional architects. The firm has produced a set of playing cards that immortalizes its artistic expressions in a ubiquitous deck.

But players beware: this is a whole different card game.

The 54 participating architectural firms worked individually and with few rules to produce the set. Part of the game is identifying each card. "Architecture in the Northwest" was the theme to be interpreted in the card designs. Notkin did not require suits, numbers and faces to appear as standard figures -- only that they be indicated in some way in the composition.

The artwork was reduced and reproduced for the completed card deck. Decks of cards were distributed to participating firms at an "artists' opening" last month that featured a display of the framed original artwork. The collection, now the property of Notkin Engineering Inc., will be made available to galleries for exhibit. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) will present the exhibit in the chapter office in January.



Principals Susan Boyle and Bob Wagoner peer out from this Jack of Diamonds, designed by Jay Taylor for their firm.

Kas Smiley, marketing manager at Notkin, noticed the connection between playing cards and art when she encountered a set of playing cards designed by a collaboration of artists in England. The deck was sold through the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

She thought of the many architecture firms the consulting engineering firm works with -- and the well-developed talent waiting to be tapped.

She convinced the principals at Notkin that a creative challenge such as the deck of cards would become a personal expression for architect clients, a tribute to their firms, and a very distinctive marketing program for Notkin Engineers. The objective for Notkin was to "communicate an appreciation for our clients and keep our firm name in their vocabulary."

It wasn't cheap. The whole effort cost in excess of \$15,000, not counting the value of the principal's time. Notkin assumed responsibility for printing the works in the playing card format according to the strictest standards of color reproduction.

A year has passed since the firm committed to the project, with many hours communicating with participants, reviewing proofs from the printer in Hong Kong, and preparing for the opening.

But even the earliest returns show satisfying results.

"We could have spent the same amount on a brochure," said Notkin principal John Rowland, "and how many would have had Notkin's name on their lips?"

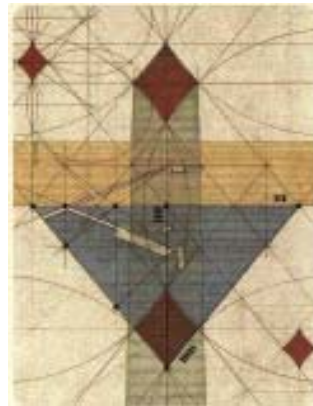
"We've had letters from people we don't know," he said, requesting card decks or a chance to design a card for the "next one."

"It's better than a calendar," said principal Tom Ferlan.

The two men spent uncounted hours planning the project, contacting the principals of architectural firms and inspecting printers proofs.

The participating firms were invited to submit in any media. Although the original pieces of 10 inch by 14 inch artwork are the property of Notkin, the decks will not be sold because the firm is committed not to profit directly by the artists' work.

Individual artists include architectural interns and principals of the region's largest firms, such as David Wright (Bumgardner Architects), Gerald Gerron (Callison), Karlis Rekevics (Bassetti Norton Metler Rekevics), and David Hewitt (Hewitt Isley).



A compass has traced the proportions of the Washington Monument and the Great Pyramid on this Two of Diamonds by Karlis Rekevics.



A painted Queen of Hearts glares from her watery background in this playing card designed by Young Erroll Smith of Kober/Slater Architects.

The artworks range from the freely expressive to the abstract concept to the purely whimsical. Oil painting, computer generated images and all forms of point media are included among the originals.

The Ace of Hearts design by Stan Lokting of ARC Architects, presents a cryptic group of plans of the modernist patriarch Mies Van der Rohe along with the plea "all we are saying . . . is give Mies a chance."

The staff of Streeter Dermanis Architects developed an elegant reference to the Ten of Diamonds by overlaying the tracery of a gothic vault to show diamond-shaped geometry.

For the Five of Hearts, BJSS's John Lindstrom produced a kaliedoscope photographic image of open heart surgeons at work in a hospital that the architect had teamed with Notkin in designing.

The famous Hat and Boots service station on First Avenue South is commemorated on the Four of Spades, designed by Conan Gale of Fulton Gale Architects.

Other firms participating in The Deck of Cards include: The Tsang Partnership, INTEGRUS Architecture, Arai Jackson Architects & Planners, The Bumgardner Architects, Martin Henry Kaplan, Clayton R. Joyce Associates, JKS Architects, Giffen Bolte Jurgens, Hamilton Architects, Loschky Marquardt & Nesholm, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership, The Gjerding Company, Ben G. Sharpe Architectural Illustrator, Arman R. Marion Architects, Hewitt Isley, Buffalo Design, Daly & Associ-

ates, Cooper Architects, The Portico Group, Edberg Christianson Architects, NBBJ, Moore Ruble Yudell, SLR/Health Care Consultants, CNJJ, Schreiber & Lane Architects, Retail Planning Associates, Anderson Koch & Smith, Meng Associates, Stewart Associates, GEISE Associates in Architecture, Lane Williams Architects, Vaughn/Knudson Architects, McLellan & Copenhagen, Curtis Beattie & Associates, Mandeville Berge Box, Moore Anderson, Botesh Nash Hall Architects, G.R. Bartholik, David Nordfors Architects, and Bernie Baker Architects.



The Renaissance meets the Northwest as the Queen of Spades receives architect-visitors in this rendering from Mahlum Nordfors. Robert Lober won an intra-firm competition to produce this card.