

FACT SHEET



National Building Museum

Chartered by Congress in 1980 as a private, nonprofit institution, the National Building Museum opened to the public in 1985 and has rapidly grown into America's premier cultural organization dedicated to the built environment. The Museum explores architecture, construction, design, engineering, landscape architecture, and urban planning.

The National Building Museum focuses on informing audiences about the world we build for ourselves, on celebrating America's past and present achievements in areas related to the building arts, and on encouraging excellence in these areas. The Museum provides a vital forum for topical issues, such as environmentally sustainable building practices, managing suburban growth, preserving landmarks and communities, revitalizing urban centers, and much more. By addressing such a wide and varied array of topics, the National Building Museum connects the vast and often complex web of issues related to the development of the built environment in the past, present, and future.

Since its opening, the Museum has presented more than 135 temporary exhibitions, covering an extensive spectrum of topics. In the past few years, the Museum originated a number of widely acclaimed exhibitions, including *On the Job: Design and the American Office* and *Stay Cool! Air Conditioning America*. A long-term exhibition currently on view, *Tools as Art: The Hechinger Collection – Instruments of Change*, crowns a series of exhibitions from the well-regarded collection of hardware pioneer John Hechinger, Sr. The exhibition traces the use of tools as a hallmark of civilization and as a source of artistic creativity, featuring artists who have incorporated tools into their pieces in various ways.

In 2002, the Museum launched the virtual exhibition *Building America*. This comprehensive Web site — accessible through the Museum's main site at www.nbm.org — explores the broad scope of American achievement in the building arts and celebrates such American themes as ingenuity, grandness, and mobility. Photographs, video clips, interactive programs, and much more pinpoint important events in a series of timelines, which document the evolution of America's built environment. This framework is divided into four categories — House and Home, Commerce and Community, Land and Landscape, and Connecting the Continent — reflecting the National Building Museum's forthcoming permanent exhibition, also titled *Building America*, which will open incrementally, beginning in 2004.

The Museum further engages its audience through an active schedule of publications, lectures, group tours, symposia, a Web site, and a wide variety of educational programming. Renowned architects, critics, and scholars, including Frank Gehry, Robert A.M. Stern, Tadao Ando, Jane Jacobs, Robert Campbell, and Rem Koolhaas, have challenged and entertained audiences with lively discussions of their work and key issues of the day. Award-winning school programs and family events present the basics of building and urban planning by providing hands-on activities. All of these programs combine to provide an inter-disciplinary and interactive forum for learning about the built environment.

The National Building Museum is proud to recognize professional distinction in the building arts and sciences through three honorary prizes awarded each year — the Apgar Award for Excellence, The Vincent Scully Prize, and the Henry C. Turner Prize for Innovation in Construction Technology. In

addition, the annual Honor Award gala has grown in stature, generating significant support for the Museum. The 2002 Honor Award raised nearly \$1,000,000 to benefit Museum's programs.

Through its permanent collections, the National Building Museum strives to illuminate the building process and to document changing styles and techniques in the building arts. The Museum's current collection numbers over 100,000 objects, including photographs, drawings, and artifacts related to the built environment. Highlights include the *Kress Collection* – a record of nearly a century of building activity for the Kress five-and-dime variety stores, the collection of the *Wurts Brothers*– architectural photographers that captured mainly East Coast subjects for nearly a century, and the *Northwestern Terra Cotta Collection* –which demonstrates the extensive and varied use of ornamental terra cotta throughout the United States.

The National Building Museum's historic home, which originally housed the United States Pension Bureau, is one of Washington's major landmarks. Designed in 1881 by civil engineer and U.S. Army General Montgomery C. Meigs, the building was based on an Italian Renaissance palace and was completed in 1887. This National Historic Landmark, from the outset a sought-after spot for gala events including numerous presidential inaugural balls, exemplifies the great achievements of the building arts in the United States.

The National Building Museum today fosters America's collective memory and experience of the building arts. It offers to students, teachers, scholars, and the general public, opportunities to gain a fuller understanding of the history of building and design in America, encouraging consideration of and appreciation for diverse perspectives on the past. The Museum also works to inform and contemplate the influence of contemporary forces on current developments in America's building arts.

National Building Museum, 401 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20001
Museum Hours — Monday to Saturday, 10am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-5pm
Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day
Admission is free. A donation of \$5 per person is suggested.
Visit the Museum shop and café. 202/272-2448 ▪ www.nbm.org