

Pecha Kucha

By Michael Bordenaro

Chicago AIA members figured prominently in the Chicago debut of Pecha Kucha, a thought-provoking evening of entertaining education.

Founded in Tokyo four years ago by architects Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham, MBE, Pecha Kucha calls for artists to address a topic with 20 slides, with each slide shown for 20 seconds.

The 400-second presentations tend to be so humorous and poignant that Chicago is the 83rd city to have hosted Pecha Kucha – which means “chit-chat” in Japanese and is pronounced ‘pet-shah coot-shah’ or ‘peh-chak-cha’ depending on local dialect.

Peter Exley, FAIA, president of ArchitectureIsFun, Chicago, met Pecha Kucha co-founder Mark Dytham on their first day of architectural design school at University of Newcastle upon Thyne in England.

Exley hosted the event, held May 29 at Martyrs on North Lincoln Avenue and Dytham flew in from Tokyo to make the final 6 minute 40 second presentation of the night.

The main theme running through the Chicago debut was how each of the 13 architects, painters, photographers, artists and designers impact their environment.

Marc Teer, AIA, co-chair of the AIA Chicago Young Architects Knowledge Community presented some of his work outside of his day job with Gensler. Teer’s definition of space with acrylic dowels that outlined a dancer’s previous movement through an art gallery explored the frozen music potential of architecture. His other work expanded on this theme of defining space usage for its highest purpose.

Natalie Banaszak, a key member of the design team for the new AIA Chicago

office, entertained the audience with her 20 slides. Included in Banaszak’s presentation were images of the AIA Chicago office as well as image/quiz multimedia slides. The 200-person audience was encouraged to participate by shouting out answers to the quiz. The person who called out the correct answer first was rewarded with a Pez dispenser flipped through the crowd.

Garofalo & Associates was represented by Grant Gibson, who gained audience-wide approval for humorous perspectives of “green-roofed” downtown El tracks that supported grazing sheep eye-level with fourth story office workers. Sometimes, helping people laugh at a visionary idea is the best first step to the quickest solution.

Jon Langford’s presentation was cited by founder Dytham as one of the Top 10 Pecha Kucha performances he has seen. Langford is an English-born, popular musician/painter/social activist who played electric guitar and sang 20-second segments of his songs paired with images of his paintings. Combined, they presented his personal history of social activism through art.

Exley says, “Pecha Kucha is a platform for young people. It shows you don’t have to be from the old school to

‘make no small plans.’ There are great, visionary ideas coming out of young artists and this gives an opportunity for those voices to be heard.”

Exley’s presentation showed how his company’s work lives up to its name, architectureisfun. Numerous examples of museums, religious education spaces, classrooms and more showed how architecture can enrich life in a way to make every step a celebration that surprises and delights with firmness, commodity and economy.

As it is with poetry that penetrates to the heart of a matter with the fewest words, the best architecture often uses the fewest resources to fulfill its program.

And presentations that use only 400 seconds can be the most powerful.

The next Pecha Kucha Chicago is tentatively set for September 25, 2007 at Martyrs. For more details visit www.pechakuchachicago.org. ■



Marc Teer, AIA, presenting at Pecha Kucha in Chicago

Photo by Visualized Concepts/Erma Exley

Michael Bordenaro is an architecture and technology writer who has established a publishing company to assist BIM education and green building.