

PLAY

'THE PROPOSAL'

Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds take the plunge in this romantic comedy opening Friday in theaters. **Read the review, 5D**



THAI TASTES

A new Monkey Junction restaurant offers Asian flavors with the right amount of spice. **Read the review, 2D**

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WILMINGTON | *Inspiration and Transformation*



Architects Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel designed the Bechtler residence in Zumikon, Switzerland, which is featured in Cameron Art Museum's exhibition 'Gwathmey Siegel: Inspiration and Transformation.' Photos courtesy of Cameron Art Museum

Architecture as art

Exhibit features buildings by pair that designed Cameron Art Museum

By JOHN STATON
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Architecture can be a sensitive subject at the Cameron Art Museum.

Since taking the helm in 2005, museum director Deborah Velders has gotten used to fielding slights from the public about the design of the expansive building. Once, when she was on a local radio show, "some guy called in," Velders said, "and he said, 'I want to tell you I think it's the most god-awful (thing). I saw that building going up and I think they should've torn it down a long time ago.'"

Never mind that she's gotten many compliments over the years on the building's modern design, which is accented by primary, but functional, shapes such as its distinctive rooftop trio of pyramid-shaped windows. The museum seems to emerge from the pine-dotted landscape, where it appears, despite its considerable height, to lay low and hug the ground.

Before she had even started her job at the Cameron, Velders had been thinking about how to draw attention to the building's well-respected architects, Charles

Gwathmey and Robert Siegel of New York's Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects.

On Monday, the Cameron Art Museum will have a public opening for "Gwathmey Siegel: Inspiration and Transformation." It is the first museum exhibition dedicated to the work of the prolific and prominent architecture firm, which is perhaps best-known for the critically acclaimed renovation and addition to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

"Before I actually even got to this job I went to see Charles Gwathmey," Velders said. "Part of the reason I interviewed here was because (the Cameron) was a Gwathmey Siegel building. It's not that I'm so knowledgeable about architecture, I just knew they were an important architectural firm and it impressed me that the leadership here was serious about having an important art museum, just (by) their choice of architect. So I thought a good show sometime would be an exhibition devoted to their work, because I understood that people here didn't like the building."

After their meeting, Velders said, Gwathmey "walked me to the door and said, 'I'll help you.' And now here we are, four years

GO

What: "Gwathmey Siegel: Inspiration and Transformation," featuring the work of American architectural firm Gwathmey Siegel and Associates Architects

When: Public opening is 7-8 p.m. June 22, and the show will remain on display through Jan. 10, 2010

Where: Cameron Art Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington

Details: 395-5999 or www.CameronArtMuseum.com. Museum hours are 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.



Mud Circle, a piece by Richard Long, was created using River Avon mud on Douglas Fir plywood in the Bechtler residence.

Inset: This is a model of the Gwathmey residence in Long Island, N.Y., which Charles Gwathmey designed for his parents.

later."

"Inspiration and Transformation" takes a detailed look at five buildings that mark turning points in the architects' careers, which span more than 40 years.

Curated by a former architect, Douglas Sprunt, who lives in Portland, Ore., but whose father's family hails from Wilmington, the exhibit pairs photos, models and drawings of the buildings in

various states of planning and completion with artwork that is in some way connected to each building.

"A lot of architecture shows I think can be very specific with regards to just showing the architecture," Sprunt said. "But by having more of a broad scope, I hope this (exhibit) is more accessible."

Because of Gwathmey's North

See CAMERON | 8D

CITY STAGE



Fredrik (Dick Bunting) tries to resume an affair with Desiree (Jenny Wright) in 'A Little Night Music.' Photo by Paul Stephen

Cast makes beautiful 'Music'

Sondheim play is meaningful, funny

By JOHN STATON
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"Rent" is getting all of the attention, but the funniest and most poignant musical in town right now ("best" is such a subjective term) might just be "A Little Night Music."

Over at City Stage, Opera House Theatre Company has quietly come in and is staging a riveting performance of Stephen Sondheim's playful take on the messy love lives of some randy Scandinavians.

Based on the movie "Smiles of a Summer Night" by the Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman — whose biting social commentary comes through clearly in Hugh Wheeler's book — "A Little Night Music" features songwriting by Sondheim that is often spectacular. There are layers of unforced meaning and its characters' personalities are expertly woven into their songs. (No doubt Jonathan Larson, the late writer and composer of "Rent," who died at the young age of 35, would acknowledge as much; he was an avowed Sondheim fanatic.)

Much of the music, with the exception of the show's signature song, "Send in the Clowns," isn't particularly memorable, but it is intricate and beautifully written. Under the direction of Ray Kennedy, the cast of "Night Music" takes on this material with gusto.

The story centers on Fredrik Egerman (the always-solid Richard Bunting), an aging Swedish lawyer trying to hold on to his youth with a marriage to an 18-year-old, Anne (Amy Davis, all innocence), a marriage that has yet to be consummated. When Fredrik tries to resume a long-dormant affair with the actress Desiree Armfeldt (Jenny McKinnon Wright), a conflict is set in motion that ensnares everyone around the illicit couple, including Desiree's married, jealous lover, Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm (Jeff Phillips, playing the imperious fool) and his wife, Charlotte (Debra Gillingham, outstanding).

In the second act, all parties come together at the country home of Desiree's acerbic, nostalgic mother (Michelle Reiff, doing a nice job of playing older) with results that are predictably volcanic, although the play does not resolve itself in a

CAMERON

Continued from 1D

Carolina connections – he was born in Charlotte, where his mother was from, and spent summers as a child on Wrightsville Beach (“He was actually a soda jerk at Newell’s,” Sprunt said, referencing the bygone beach shop) – the exhibit tends to focus more on Gwathmey than on Siegel, even though Sprunt said their process is highly collaborative.

The exhibit begins with work by Gwathmey’s renowned artist parents – his father was social-realist painter Robert Gwathmey and his mother was Rosalie Hook, a photographer – next to photos and models of his first commission, an almost futuristic-looking house and studio he designed for his parents on Amagansett, Long Island.

Gwathmey is a modernist, and in architectural Modernism the most important consideration is function. Modernist buildings are typically lightly ornamented and composed of man-made materials such as concrete or various metals. Gwathmey was heavily influenced by such architectural masters such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Kahn, Paul Rudolph

(Gwathmey’s mentor at Yale) and most especially Le Corbusier, whose work, with its open floor plans and freestanding support pillars, Gwathmey intensely studied while in Paris on a Fulbright Scholarship.

The Cameron exhibit includes Gwathmey’s notebooks from his Fulbright days, and it even includes an architectural scrapbook he made as a precocious 11-year-old.

“(Gwathmey) was very generous and open with those kinds of materials,” Sprunt said. “At the beginning he was a little bit wary and he was kind of testing us out. When he came down here, within a day he had kind of sized us up. At the end of the day, he told us, at the airport, that he trusted us to do a good job, and that was just extraordinary.”

From the home Gwathmey designed for his parents, the exhibit progresses to the deMenil residence, an expansive house on Long Island owned by an art collector that has become emblematic of Hamptons opulence; the Bechtler residence, in Zumikon, Switzerland, a structure that incorporates an art gallery for the family’s art collection; and Glenstone, near Washington, D.C., an art museum and residence that won an

American Architecture Award in 2008.

“There’s a progression from a house for artists to a house for a collector to a house for a collector that incorporates a gallery to a major campus for a collector that includes a private museum,” Sprunt said.

The exhibit culminates with Gwathmey Siegel’s most recent triumph, the Yale School of Art and Architecture renovation and addition in New Haven, Conn., which was completed in 2008. Featuring a stunning photograph of the building illuminated by a lightbox, the display also includes a series of paintings of squares by Joseph Alpers, an artist who also taught at Yale. (The paintings are owned by Gwathmey and are usually housed in his New York apartment.) A video loop will show the 3-D modeling that was used to design the complex project, which Sprunt said might not have been possible without the aid of computers.

The video loop addresses one of the major themes of the exhibition, which is the impact of evolving technology on architecture. But at its heart, “Inspiration and Transformation” is an exploration of the connection between art and architecture, a connection that

is inherent but “is a little more direct” with Gwathmey, Sprunt said. “He was born into it.”

And while the Cameron museum is not directly addressed in the exhibit, it is included almost by default because Gwathmey Siegel designed it.

For Velders, “Inspiration and Transformation” has “the potential of trying to inform people in this community, and visitors, about the importance of architecture,” she said. “Having had the great privilege of working in buildings by significant architects, great buildings I would say, I’ve seen the difference (in) how you work and live and feel just being in it.”

Working in a building specifically designed to be an art gallery, Velders said, no matter what one might think of its outward appearance, just makes everyone’s life easier. At a former job in a building that wasn’t designed to be an art gallery but was being used as one, “We would have to take works of art out of windows via crane to get them to another floor. I feel like we work better and display and care for the art better because of good design.”

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THE SCENE

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CAMERON ART MUSEUM | Gwathmey Siegel Premiere Party



Robert Siegel, of Gwathmey & Siegel Architecture Firm, delivers a speech from his partner Charles Gwathmey, who could not make the Gwathmey Siegel Premiere Party due to illness. The event took place at the Cameron Art Museum to celebrate the opening of “Gwathmey Siegel: Inspiration & Transformation.” Photos By Jeff Janowski



Ned Irvine, Holly Tripman and Joey Toler



Bruce Cameron and his grandson Bruce Cameron IV



Tina Williamson, Hazel and Robert Siegel and Fred & Pat Nasserli



Kaycey Helmold, Heather Loesch and Steve Ward



Susan Gsell and Jeannie Carlson