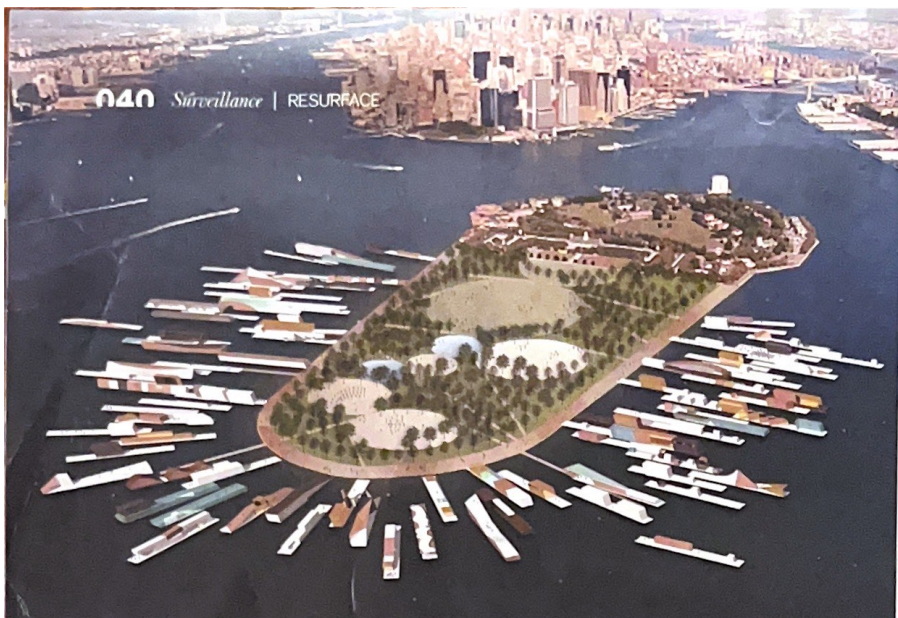




NYC Surveillance | RESURFACE

Leisure Island

A proposal to host the 2015 World's Fair takes aim at American isolationism and turns New York's Governor's Island into a global gateway

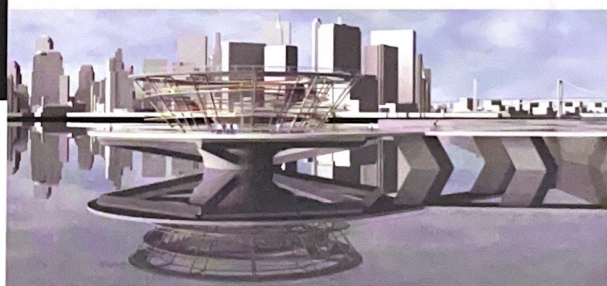
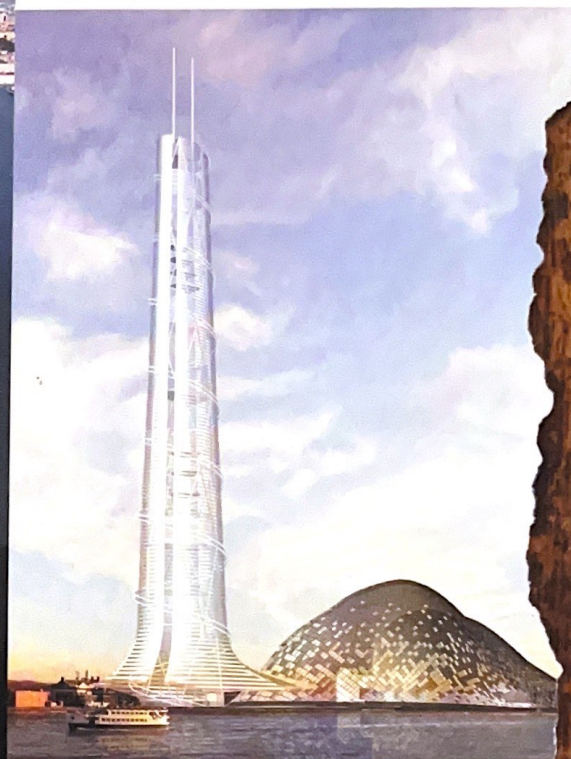
Story SUSANNA SIREFMAN

Imagine a structure as distinctive as the Eiffel Tower rising from the New York skyline – a building that stands out among the monoliths, marking the city as an inviting international cultural destination and not merely a capital of commerce. This is the concept behind a plan conceived by New York-based journalist Fred Bernstein to host the 2015 World's Fair on Governor's Island. His grand vision, as outlined in a brief entitled "Connections," was a response to the latest request for proposals issued by the Governor's Island Preservation & Education Corporation (GIPEC) this past winter.

Governor's Island, a 172-acre slab of land located roughly half a mile from the southern tip of Manhattan, has long been a strategic piece of New York real estate. Sold by Native Americans to a Dutchman in 1637 for two ax heads, a string of beads and a handful of nails, the island became a British military outpost a decade later. After the American Revolution, the state of New York received the property; and then transferred the island to the federal government in 1800. In 2003, it was sold back to the state, and GIPEC was formed to determine the best possible use for the land.

Bernstein, a World's Fair maven since childhood, solicited seven architectural firms to imagine what it might look like to hold the exhibition on the island. Ranging widely in both quality and style, the schematic strategies submitted through the proposal span the brilliant – Chad Oppenheim's moveable game-board of barges that each house a separate national pavilion – the mundane – Alexander Gorlin's enormous outdoor performance space, shaped like a double-helix – and the intimidating – a mile-high tower designed by Craig Konyk.

As a purely political gesture, such ideas could not be more timely. Since 1851, when the first Fair was held in Hyde Park, London, world expositions have influenced art and architecture, urban infrastructure, multinational cultural exchange and international policy, as well as science and technology. Today, they generate nearly as much excitement as the World Cup and the Olympics – except in America. Japan's 2005 World's Fair drew a record 22 million visitors, and the planners of the 2010 World's Fair in Shanghai expect



several times that number of attendees. Yet the U.S. is no longer a member of the official World's Fair sanctioning body, the Bureau of International Expositions, due to budget cuts: Congress won't cover the annual membership fee of \$20,000. In a Governor's Island expo, Bernstein saw the opportunity to help America positively engage the international community, both culturally and politically. "A Fair would work on many levels, but perhaps the most important would be reaching out to the world," he says.

Despite the inconsistency in the responses and the fact that none of them will ever be realized, Bernstein's overall concept is undeniably potent, offering great promise as a catalyst for inventive, iconic architecture. After all, some of the world's most lauded destinations – London's Crystal Palace, Paris' Eiffel Tower, the Barcelona Pavilion and the Seattle Space Needle – are all World's Fair legacies. **SS**

GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES: (Clockwise from left) Visions for a potential World's Fair exhibition on New York's Governor's Island may never be realized, but are nonetheless extravagant: Chad Oppenheim assigns each participating country a moveable barge; Frederic Schwartz recalls the three-sided steeple, Tylon, and the globe-like Perisphere from the 1939 World's Fair in the form of an 1,800-foot tower; while Alexander Gorlin proposes Vortex, an outdoor performance space with ramps and platforms that double as gallery spaces