



Peter Eisenman's stadium design for the Arizona Cardinals of the National Football League has a facade of shimmering aluminum panels and a field that can slide in and out of the arena as needed.

## Now Taking the Field: Bold Stadium Designs

By CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORNE

**T**HE 70-year-old New York architect Peter Eisenman has spent most of his career engaging in rarefied debates about design theory and producing a small group of complex buildings to match. But the design he may become most famous for is a football stadium in Arizona, filling a plot of land where alfalfa used to grow.

Mr. Eisenman, a diehard football fan who has held New York Giants season tickets since 1957, unveiled the latest version of his stadium for the National Football League's Arizona Cardinals at a press conference in March. The stadium is set to open in Glendale, about 10 miles from downtown Phoenix, in 2006 and will hold concerts and conventions as well as football games. Sectioned like a barrel cactus or a grapefruit, it has a facade made of huge shimmering steel panels and is topped by a steel-and-fabric retractable roof. Also mobile, remarkably enough, is the field itself: It will sit in the sunshine just outside the stadium and then, on game days, slide inside like a rug on a conveyor belt.

Mr. Eisenman told reporters that the project, which he is working on with the hugely successful Kansas City firm H.O.K. Sport + Venue +



**New sports stadiums have generally been staid and faux-historical. So will fans embrace an architectural trip to left field?**

Event, will be "a signature stadium" and "something not only to play ball in, but also to bring people to the area to visit." The notion of combining architectural celebrity and high-design fireworks to attract visitors is commonplace now in the planning of everything from museums to Prada boutiques. But in stadium design the notion is new. Given that the Cardinals have had just one winning season since moving to Arizona in 1988 — and routinely draw far fewer fans than the N.F.L. average — maybe it's a gambit worth trying.

Mr. Eisenman's design is among a group of forthcoming projects promising to shake up the staid, risk-averse realm of American stadium architecture. For more than a decade, what's new in sports design has been what's old — or at least old-fashioned. This is especially true for the dozen major league baseball stadiums that have opened since 1992. Their architectural formula has been simple and depend-

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able drape the thing in as many nostalgic touches as possible, then wait for fans to rush the turnstiles.

From Baltimore, where the first of baseball's new-but-nostalgic stadiums, Oriole Park at Camden Yards, opened 11 years ago, to San Francisco, where the Giants set up shop in Pacific Bell Park in 2000, the list of key elements has stayed the same: brick facades and old-fashioned signage; real grass instead of peeling artificial turf; nooks, crannies and other imposed eccentricities in the outfield. Even football, a sport less in thrall to the past than baseball, has welcomed a few antiquated stadiums, including the new Ford Field in Detroit, with features designed to look 75 years old.

The retro ballparks arrived on the scene as an unmistakable reaction to the dozen or so multipurpose stadiums that had opened in the 1960's and '70's and rank among the more dreadful examples of late-modernist American architecture. Though these post-war stadiums, mostly charmless concrete bowls surrounded by oceans of parking-lot asphalt, were never beloved by fans of any sport, they were particularly ill-suited for baseball. Modernist architecture is about symmetry, contemporaneity and the idea of universal solutions; its marriage with base-

instead, it would be tough to overestimate just how desperate major-league fans were by the end of the 1980's for a return to baseball-only downtown stadiums with real grass. At the same time, owners of older, beloved ballparks, like Wrigley Field in Chicago (1914) and Tiger Stadium in Detroit (1912), were finding them not only cramped and rickety, but lacking a key revenue source: luxury boxes, which are de rigueur in new stadiums and can be leased for tens of thousands of dollars per season to corporate clients.

When it opened on April 6, 1992, H.O.K. Sport's Camden Yards seemed to solve both problems, combining old-school charm and up-to-date amenities in one compact, brick-wrapped package. On the heels of its success, H.O.K. was hired to produce baseball-only downtown parks — in Cleveland, Denver and Pittsburgh, among other cities — that deliver what the firm calls "that year-year feel." Other new stadiums — like the Seattle Mariners' Safeco Field and Miller Park in Milwaukee, both by N.B.B.J. Architects — were engineering marvels, with soaring retractable roofs. But N.B.B.J. made sure to trim them in plenty of brick and arched openings.

By one estimate the baseball stadiums built since 1989 have cost more than \$5 billion, with two-thirds of that charged to taxpayers, making the ballparks very expensive gifts to team owners. And the degree to which they have succeeded in reviving the neighborhoods where they were built remains an open question. But fans have welcomed them ecstatically. "The date of April 6, 1992, is to baseball what July 4, 1776, was to the Enlightenment," proclaims a fan site called baseball-statistics.com.

H.O.K. Sport, a division of the St. Louis-based Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum,

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A rendering of the Arizona Cardinals' new football stadium in Glendale, top, designed by Peter Eisenman, and views of H.O.K. Sport's Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati, above and below.



among the largest design firms in the world, has gone on to become perhaps the most successful spinoff in architectural history. "People would literally walk up to me on the street and say 'I love so-and-so ballpark, and I just want to thank you,'" said Joe Spear, a founder of H.O.K. Sport.

In most recent baseball parks, however, the retro trend has grown stale, as if the architects are simply going through the retro motions. The low point came this spring in Cincinnati, where H.O.K. Sport's 42,000-seat Great American Ball Park opened on the shores of the Ohio River as the new home of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team. Great American's historical touches, like the reproduction riverboat smokestacks that sit behind the center-field fence, have a bland, even rote, feel. Where it faces downtown Cincinnati, the stadium is covered in a brick facade with a stone base, a flimsy show of tradition that the broad-shouldered steel frame of the stadium, rising up behind, seems simply to be shrugging off.



The Street Porter for The New York Times

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there," David Niland, a retired architecture professor, told Mr. Bauer. "What we have all responded to at the new ballpark is the lack of a harmonic order on which coherent variations can be worked."

"Great American won't be the last of the retro stadiums. Along with the Philadelphia firm Ewing Cole Cherry Brott, H.O.K. Sport is working on a neotraditionalist park for the Phillies that will open next spring.

But elsewhere fans are already getting used to stadiums with a more contemporary feel. In the Southern California city of Carson, a new soccer stadium, centerpiece of Rossetti Architects' Home Depot National Training Center, opened earlier this year. Home to the Galaxy of Major League Soccer, and recently named the site of the women's World Cup finals this fall, the stadium is appealingly, refreshingly straightforward. There is no brick, and its white roof, a Teflon-coated fiberglass canopy covering most of the stadium's 27,000 seats, adds a dash of high style.

Outside the United States, in places where unapologetically contemporary public buildings are more common, stadium design hasn't been held back by the tug of the past. Several stunning examples of the genre were built in France, Japan and South Korea for the 1998 and 2002 World Cup soccer matches, and the Swiss duo Herzog & de Meuron recently won a competition for an Olympic Stadium in Beijing with a design for the 2008 games that has been compared to a giant bird's nest.

In London, an ambitious new Wembley Stadium, designed by Norman Foster with H.O.K. Sport and budgeted at \$1 billion, has broken ground. With its soaring steel arch, a semicircular engineering marvel that loops over the field like a handle over a bucket, it

The soccer stadium in the new Home Depot National Training Center in Carson, Calif., by Rossetti Architects is unapologetically contemporary.

promises to set a towering standard for contemporary sports architecture, though some Londoners already seem wary that it will be an expensive reprise of the recent Millennium Dome folly. And in 2000 the Montreal Expos baseball team unveiled a coolly minimalist new park design by two Canadian firms, though that plan appears doomed by the franchise's uncertain future.

In the case of both Mr. Eisenman's work for the Cardinals and a new stadium for the San Diego Padres baseball team — designed by Antoine Predock and scheduled to open next spring — the architects are joining forces with H.O.K. Sport. The division of labor seems clear: H.O.K. is responsible for the meat and potatoes — all the structural and logistical issues that make building a sports complex a hugely complicated undertaking. (These hulking buildings, after all, combine elements of theater, retail and public-works architecture — along with worries about bugs, thunderstorms and grass fertilizer.) The big-name architect's job is to give the stadium some sex appeal, along with the kind of architectural coherence so lacking at Great American Ball Park.

Mr. Eisenman, whose firm is also working on stadiums in Spain and Germany, has little doubt that sports fans are ready for architectural daring. "You couldn't find a more conservative ownership than the Cardinals," or a more conservative community than Phoenix," he said. "But this is a radical

scheme for the United States, it has a handful of throwback elements, including an existing warehouse that will be incorporated into the left-field stands. Yet in spirit Mr. Predock's design is resolutely, if calmly, contemporary. And because his client is a baseball team, it may be represent a bigger step forward even than Mr. Eisenman's.

Without resorting to sentimentalism, Pezco Park will incorporate local materials and motifs including stucco, sandstone, palm trees and trellises. It pulls out the team offices and other infrastructure that's usually buried in the bowels of a stadium to fill two stone towers fronting the grandstand. In its relaxed charisma, Pezco resembles one of the very few 1990's stadiums that continue to appeal to fans: Dodger Stadium, a 56,000-seat baseball-only park carved elegantly into the side of Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles.

"Traditional aspects in ballpark design can be overt and cloying, but they can also be more subliminal," said Mr. Predock, who is based in Albuquerque, N.M. "I didn't think about doing any retro detailing with this ballpark at all — that would be the last thing that would come to mind. For me, the power of the old ballparks isn't gimmicky, but something more authentic. When I think of Wrigley, I think of how you move through one of the thresholds and then the green field just explodes in front of you."

Mr. Predock's best designs, mostly public buildings in the West and Southwest, feature the clean lines and spare appeal of modernist architecture without its sometimes dismissive disregard for site or local tradition. In that sense, Mr. Predock and baseball, whose fans are so averse to change that they still complain about rule changes made 30 years ago, appear well matched. He may be just the architect, in other words, to reverse the sport from its decade-long retro reverie. □