



Embracing the Modern

Benjamin Forgey correctly says [Style, Nov. 6] that the design for the National Realtors Association's new building at 500 New Jersey Ave. NW drew "a lot of vehement, articulate" criticism. But he inaccurately suggests that this was "partly stimulated by affection for a traditional design proposed by Jay Hellman" and partly by "a dogmatic dislike of modern architecture." The first part of this statement is misleading. The second is egregious nonsense.

My design's distinguished supporters, including Post columnist Roger K. Lewis and Don Kennon, chief historian of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, reflected not wistful emotion but rational, professional assessment of suitability to site. Forgey claims the Realtors' building is "environmentally responsive." Oh? The building looks out on the U.S. Capitol, one of the world's most desirable scenes, but the architects removed the balconies and operable windows from which to experience it.

As for "dogmatic dislike" of the modern, this comment is astonishingly ill-informed. Anyone even slightly familiar with my work



National Realtors Association Building on New Jersey Avenue in Washington, D.C.

Photo Credit: Katherine Frey -- The Washington Post
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knows that I've crusaded for decades to infuse design with the quintessence of the modern: technology. How many developers does Forgey know who so embrace the contemporary that they've acquired a PhD in systems engineering? As a matter of historical fact, the National Realtors Association, far from being knights of modernism, rejected this site when I proposed it years ago for the first (of two) times. They eventually built on it only after I proved, by persisting against archaic skepticism, that high technology made it viable in spite of its unusual footprint. But true modernism requires more than infatuation with the sleek and shiny; the latter aesthetic is merely a superficial cartoon image of modernism, as dated as the quaint images of Metropolis in old pulp sci-fi magazines. Real modernism means intelligently taking advantage of technology to enhance sense of place. It also requires patient research.

By the way, I'm a Realtor too.

-- **Jay Hellman**
Potomac

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A15594-2004Nov26.html>

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