



Sir Peter Quimsley, FRIAS

Design Champion

My post over the last few months has included inquiries of why you Yanks haven't heard from me since the August, '08 issue of the Commentaries. Sad to say, we Scots are experiencing a bit of the old economic meltdown ourselves, which prompted my employer not only to cut off my supply of aged single malt, but to (can you believe it?), lay me off. Me. The "Design Champion." For six months! As you might imagine, I have been at wits end. You may think it would be relaxing, what with all the thinking a Design Champion could do with a half-year of unstructured time. But no! Rather, it was a nightmare, or to be more exact, nightmares, every night.

A recurring dream was that all over the city, people were building big, impersonal boxes in the center of our historic town, without any thought of good design, without any thought of the historic context in which such edifices were to stand.

The worst of the nightmares

featured completely undistinguishable monolithic cubes, evocative of that big impersonal, unidentifiable slab in the movie, 2001, a Space Odyssey (odd choice of year).

The worst dream was just the other night, when a new structure loomed in my subconscious—built of sheet steel on a concrete base, without any windows, without doors, without any identification of what the building was, or stood for. Perhaps this was a bunker to be used by a society under siege, perhaps a building housing a secret business. But why so monumental and uninviting? So private? It was as if it emerged from a ground cleared of any trace of history with nary a glance-back to its predecessors, its neighbors. Not at all consistent with the old city's heritage, or character.

In my dream, I ran (but only with difficulty) to City Hall and demanded to see the Prefect of Development. "Is it possible that this could happen everywhere, that

the whole downtown could lose its identity, abandon its heritage, to impersonal bumps of concrete and steel?"

"Well, Sir, we are a tad short on police protection, and people have to protect their businesses."

Still dreaming, a cold sweat building, I then crawled (but only with difficulty) to see the Prefect of Public Planning.

"Sorry, Sir Peter, but you see, the schools are gone, residential building a thing of the past, but we do have a lot of surface parking. We need to play to our strength, you know. And frankly, I'm annoyed that only the suburbs get the new strip malls and industrial parks!"

One last stop (but only with difficulty). To the High Commissioner of Historic Weelainge.

"How about you, Sir?"
"Tell me it can't happen?"

"Not to worry, old boy. Better to not have any windows. Out of sight, out of mind, you know."

I awoke with a start, beads of sweat forming on my brow. The phone was ringing. It was Sir Makin Parkum, of Weelainge City Council.

"Sir Peter, we think we may have been a bit hasty in laying you off. Seems that some of our colleagues have been having nightmares themselves. We're willing to put you back to work, with a peace offering of Highland Park, aged 18 years, to be exact."

"Thank God, Sir," I replied. "And thanks for ringing me up!" 

[Any resemblance of the city of Weelainge to any existing city in the United States of America is strictly coincidental.]