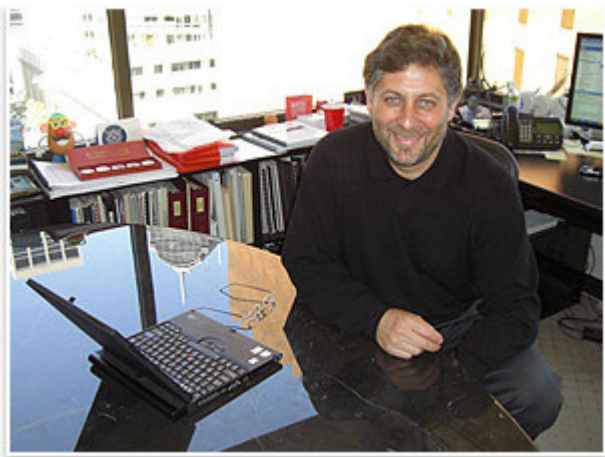


Clark D. Manus, FAIA

by Heather Livingston
Contributing Editor

Summary: Clark Manus, FAIA, is CEO and design principal of Heller Manus Architects in San Francisco and a vice president on the AIA Board of Directors. Among his firm's notable projects are the renovation of San Francisco City Hall and residential towers in Rincon Hill. Manus is well recognized inside and outside the profession for



his extensive community/urban design leadership in San Francisco. He recently returned from Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where he attended the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat congress and conference.

What was your impression of the CTBUH conference in Dubai?

My partner and I have been members for years. It was a logical place to have a discussion about tall buildings. One of the themes was “tall building—green typology,” so Dubai was a remarkable place to host the conference, because they're building the tallest building in the world now. It was a cross section of great information that was both technical and social—and it included practitioners, academics, and government officials. There are a lot of very seasoned people coming to these congresses who are interested in sharing information and their experiences from every part of the world.

It's markedly different, in my mind, from the AIA conventions, which are mostly for and about architects from North America. This was an opportunity for architects, engineers, and contractors to gather and talk about green building, be part of sessions, and learn about things that are happening throughout the world. United Arab Emirates government officials were involved in some of the themed discussions about UAE and Dubai, what their challenges are, and what they're seeing on the horizon.

As you know, the AIA is diligently promoting the sustainability agenda. What is the Council on Tall Building's stance?

They're really pushing it too. My firm and I do tall buildings, and I joked when I came back that I felt like I did single-family houses compared to some of the buildings in Dubai. We do buildings that are 300 or 400 feet in height typically, because this is San Francisco, although we do have a 900-foot-tall project that is going through the planning process on a major re-zoning.

For the Council on Tall Buildings, it's not about getting people to understand why sustainability is important. They've already taken the leap to talk about some very sophisticated means. The substance of the congress is what I would describe as intermediate to advanced dialogue on building issues that people really wanted to hear about. The group has always focused on density as a great thing for sustainability.

How has public perception on tall buildings changed in San Francisco?

I would say it's changed significantly. Pre-1990s San Francisco was epitomized by what it used to be like in the '30s or '40s. Herb Caen, a very well known columnist, articulated that. I believe the tipping point in the city—and I had some significant involvement in the leadership role—was the removal of the Embarcadero Freeway. I believe that was the beginning of a new look at what a compact urban city could be like.

The height dialogue conversation started with changing heights from 200 feet to 300 or 400 feet, and then it began to get a more traction. In the last five or six years, the planning department has really begun to push an agenda for heights that are significantly taller, with the essential piece at the center of the city being a transit terminal tower of 1,000 or 1,200 feet, which is 400 or 500 feet taller than the TransAmerica Pyramid. The image of the San Francisco skyline is beginning to change, and people are actually feeling pretty good about it.

What initiatives are you working on for the AIA Board?

I was selected in San Antonio as a vice president after having served three years as a board member representing California. My portfolio is advocacy, which is one of the things that I've been involved in for more than 25 years, particularly urban design advocacy. After the Loma Prieta earthquake, I was an advisor to the mayor on planning for areas that were damaged. The elevated freeways were damaged in the earthquake, and I was involved in the long-range planning part of the removal of those. So what I've been bringing to the Institute in my role is the increased importance of everyday advocacy on a range of issues that span from legislation to urban design to housing policy to sustainability. Those are issues on which the membership adds great value when we share our views with the public.

What's been most rewarding in your career?

I'm a very strong believer that local advocacy and AIA involvement has a huge impact. As I said, removal of the elevated freeways has dramatically changed San Francisco. For instance, the area known as Rincon Hill and Transbay is blossoming into a new neighborhood of 10,000 housing units. Many projects are going up there, so that's one of the areas where I feel I've been able to have the greatest visible impact, in addition to being involved in the organization and trying to encourage people not to be shy about sharing their opinions on changing things that the architecture community has the ability to offer.

Do you have a best practice tip for your colleagues?

Stay up on technology. Embracing building information modeling and sustainability are really important things to do. I would say at a practice level, diversity is really a great opportunity to be involved in a wide range of projects and feel professionally satisfied about the range of things that you can offer.

When you speak of diversity, do you mean in projects or staffing?

Both, and in every way. Diversity means everything. It's not just a cultural diversity. It's a diversity in every possible way, which means that things tend to be more interesting, and you get a different thought process or mindset or experience in doing that. Those are the things that make it more exciting, at least in my mind.

What are you currently reading?

Not much more than AIA materials: all the stuff in this advocacy portfolio! I'm trying to make sure that I'm up on the latest things that are being discussed at every level.

I would say, though, that I'm a closet fan of politics, so I've been reading a lot about the elections. No general fiction for me at the moment, but I have been listening to podcasts from Ted.com on my Itouch and also listening to Rhapsody on Sonos.