

Thomas Erben Gallery

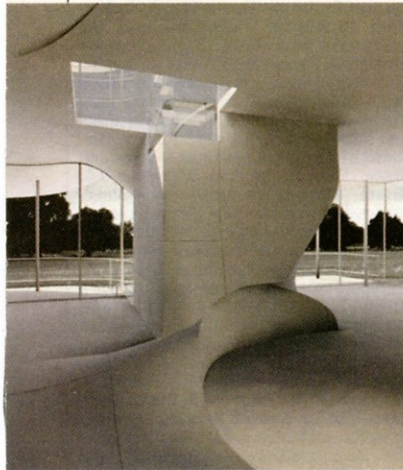
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Preston Scott Cohen,
"Toroidal Architecture"
Thomas Erben Gallery,
through Dec 22
(see Chelsea).

Computers can be kind to architects with big ideas and a shortage of built work. Preston Scott Cohen's renderings and drawings display a subtle technical mastery that, while never flashy, works to illuminate, rather than gloss over, some fairly esoteric thinking about architecture. Cohen, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, is fond of dense thickets of academic language—a predilection that might in



Preston Scott Cohen, *Torus/Wolf House*, 1999.

other circumstances leave the uninitiated with little to appreciate in a gallery show like this. Here, however, the luminous computer-generated images of his often curving, formally complex interior spaces are easily understood. By using programs that calculate relative amounts of direct, ambient and reflected light, form is revealed through subtle gradations of shadow and highlight, creating an effect more akin to an Edward Hopper painting than to traditional architectural eyewash.

Three projects are on display: a design for the Eyebeam Atelier new media art museum competition and designs for two residences, the Torus House and the Goodman House—all of which remain unbuilt. They are related by a conceptual framework that draws on the shape of a torus (usually called a donut) to generate spaces. Notable in all the projects is their focus on interiors—even the exterior views of the Eyebeam building appear to be missing enclosing curtain walls. This stands in fairly sharp contrast to a pervasive interest in exteriors and facades that is typical of contemporary architecture, and explains why Cohen's Eyebeam project stood out among the other entries. It may also be one of the reasons it wasn't selected as the winner. Still, that doesn't invalidate his approach. At a time when it seems like every architect on the planet is pushing some half-baked gee-whiz scheme for the reconstruction of lower Manhattan, Cohen's quiet, cerebral studies are a breath of fresh air.—Kevin Pratt

COURTESY OF THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY.

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Reviews

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