



photograph by Albrecht Bangert, courtesy of JAHN

NEWS

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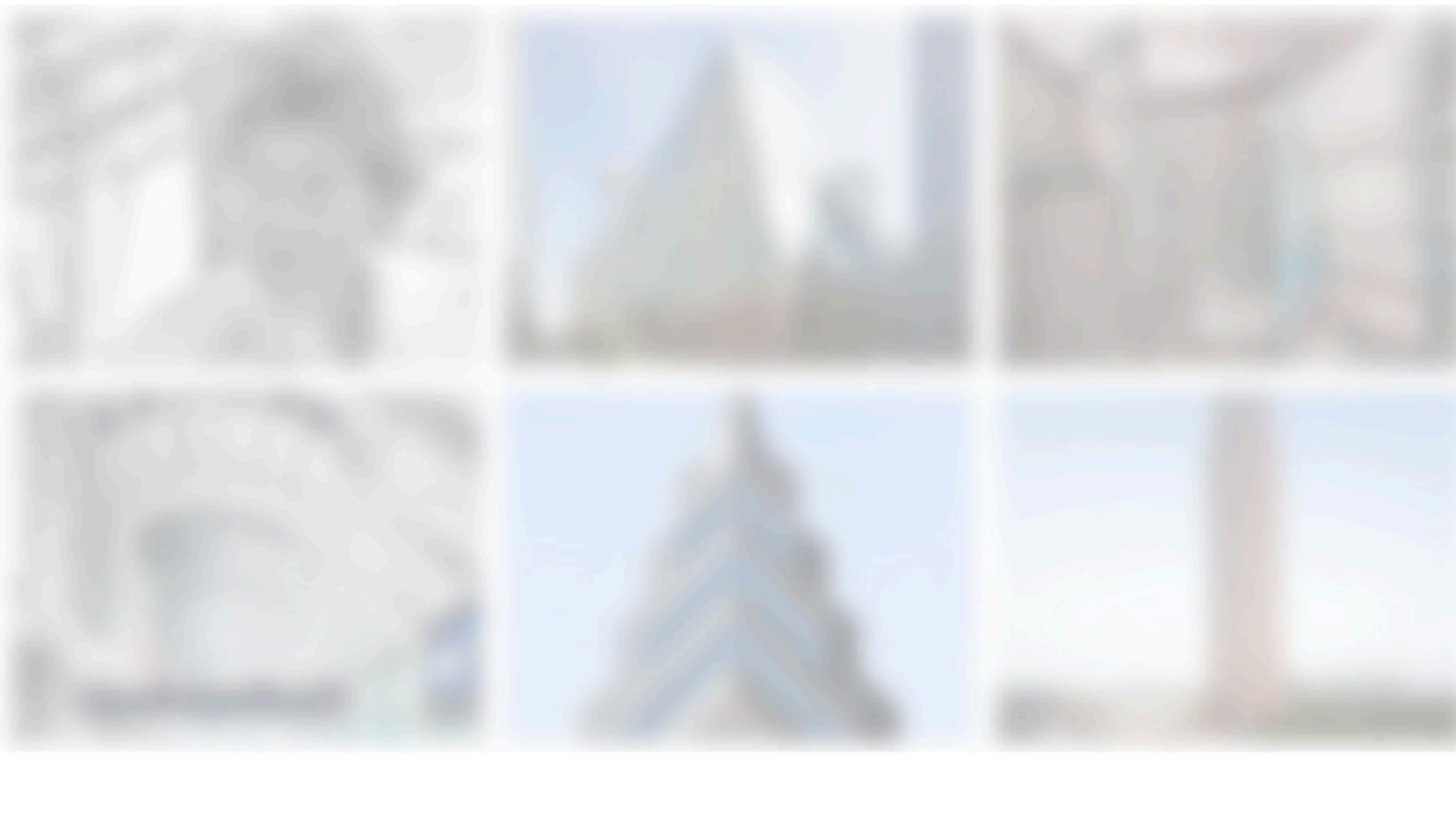


Goodbye to Helmut Jahn

Bradley Wheeler

The German-born form-giver leaves the world a grand legacy of more than 45 years of exhilarating light-filled spaces, elegantly slender towers and finely integrated urban pieces that captured the zeitgeist of the times

On Saturday, May 8, 2021, a tragic accident felled one of the great architects of both the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. At 3:30 PM, the internationally esteemed Helmut Jahn was struck down by two separate motorists while he was cycling in the bucolic environs near St. Charles, Illinois (approximately 64 kilometers/40 miles west of Chicago) where he and his wife, Deborah, lived on a 19th-century horse farm he had renovated. The German-born form-giver, who was also a sportsman and avid competitive yachtsman, leaves the world a grand legacy of more than 45 years of exhilarating light-filled spaces, elegantly slender towers and finely integrated urban pieces that captured the zeitgeist of the times.

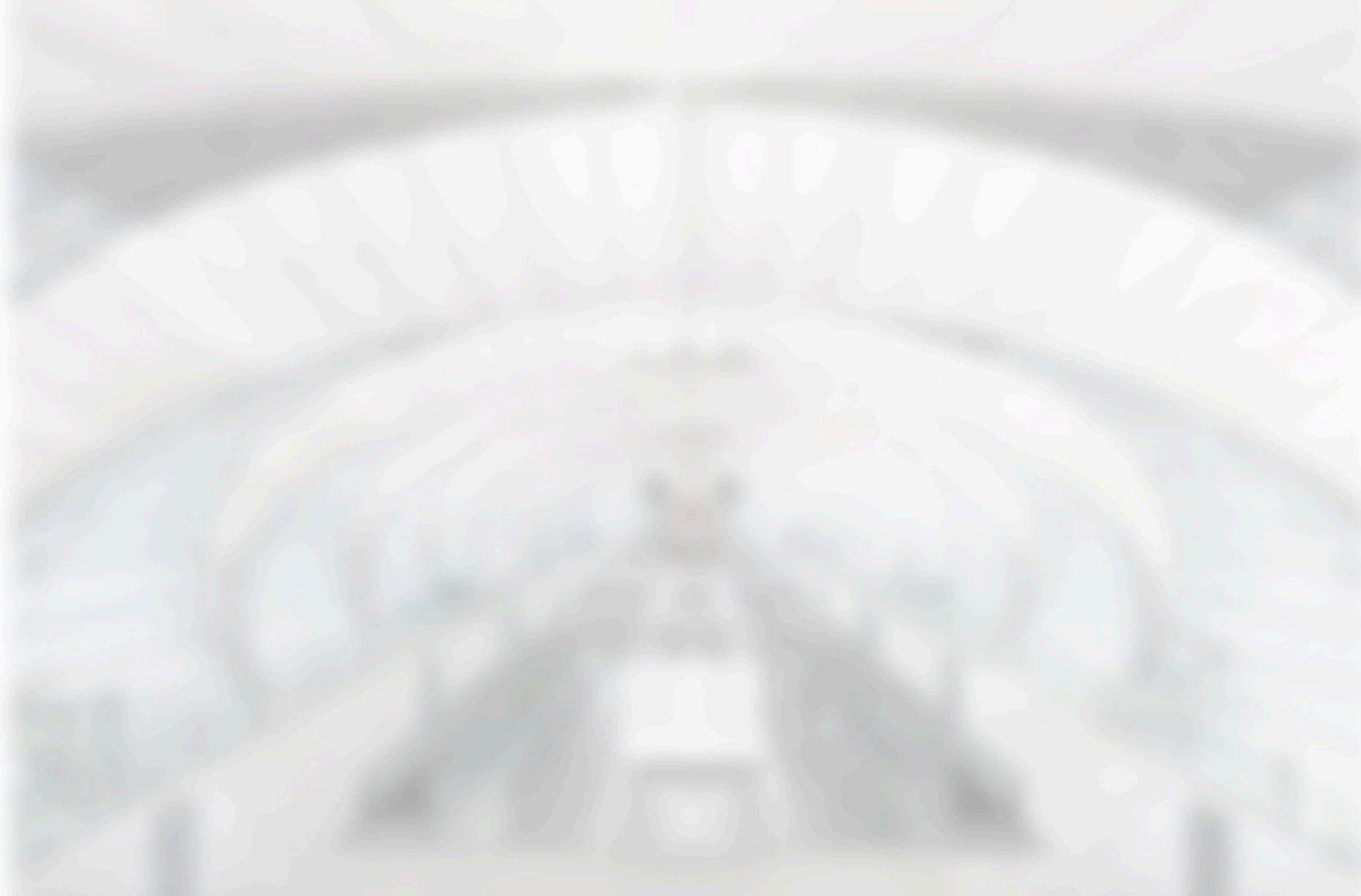


Characteristic of Helmut Jahn's work is a celebration of life with a *joie de vivre* expressed in the harmonious scale, sophisticated tectonics, advanced materials, state-of-the-art engineering, proportional form and distinct attention to detail — all elements of Jahn's critical design vocabulary, which he exhibited prolifically in the great cities of the world. The James R. Thompson Center in Chicago, One Liberty Place in Philadelphia, Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok, the United Airlines Terminal in Chicago, and Sony Center in Berlin are only five projects that immediately come to mind from a list too long to enumerate here.



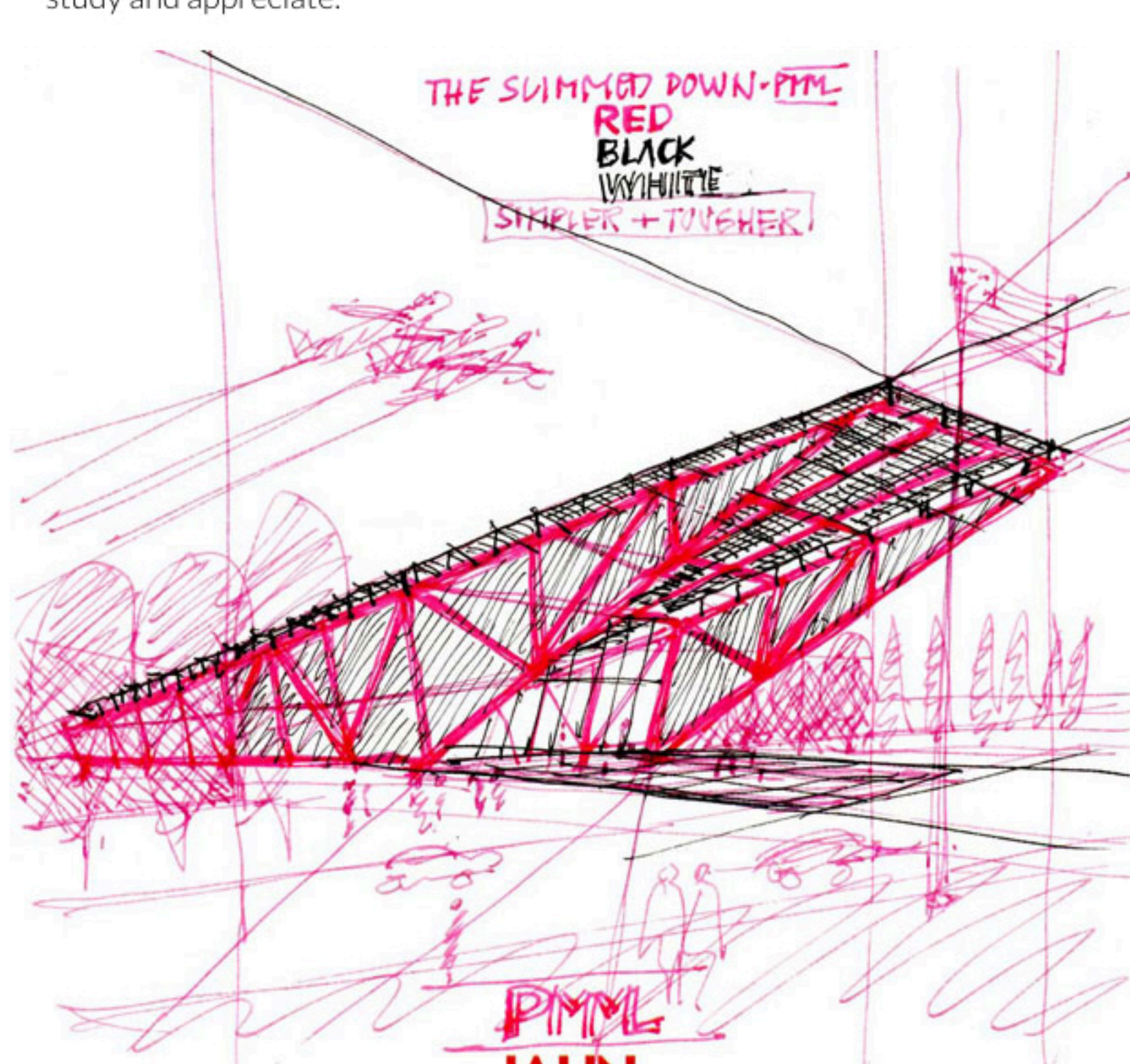
James R. Thompson Center, Chicago, 1985. (ph. Rainer Viertlboeck, courtesy Jahn)

While his work speaks for itself in the grand scope of things, it is the personal impression Helmut Jahn made on me in 2019, that I will long remember. It was a typically hot August day in Chicago, and I had been granted the privilege of spending more than an hour with Helmut in his U.S. studio at 35 E. Wacker Drive. Inside his private office, he took me through models and renderings of recent and upcoming projects. Beyond his architecture, I was taken by the boundless energy he had for each commission as well as his enthusiasm for future work.



Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Bangkok, 2006. (ph. Rainer Viertlboeck, courtesy Jahn)

Outside his door, in the heart of the studio, he revealed one of his most recent endeavors — a model of the 873-square meter (9400 sf) Pritzker Military Archives & Memorial Park Center, now under construction in Somers, Wisconsin. The project is an exposed, red steel frame structure, which creates an inclined continuous roof plane, the highest point (14 meters/45 feet) culminating above the entrance. The transparently engineered composition recalls a raising drawbridge lifting high into the air and inviting visitors inside with an implied upward motion. Helmut also showed me some of his unique ink sketches that he was known to draw with a Montblanc pen. The detailed trademark drawings would often be propelled straight into a three-dimensional mock-up to support the design campaign that later would be built and eventually become an iconographic architectural symbol of the city in which it was created. Truly, the world is the poorer without this energetic, innovative giant of a man whose spirit can never be vanquished and whose work will live on for future generations to study and appreciate.



Pritzker Military Archives & Memorial Park Center Somers, Wisconsin, under construction: Helmut Jahn sketch. (Courtesy Jahn)

Thank you, Helmut, for everything you have given. You will be missed. *Auf Wiedersehen.*