

WHAT'S MODERN NOW

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DETAILS

THE LIBRARY'S NEW JEWEL

LAST WEEK, MEN crouched on scaffolds under a magnificent domed skylight, applying gold leaf to the columns in the New York Public Library's newest jewel: the Celeste Bartos Forum (formerly Room 80), which opens this week after a two-year, \$4.6-million restoration.

The Forum—named after a major contributor—will be used by the library for films, concerts, and lectures. (Tom Wolfe speaks September 22 on "Fiction in an Age of Non-Fiction"; on October 19, Joan Didion talks about her book *Miami*.)

The space may also be rented for conferences, receptions, fashion shows, and, best of all, parties—such as a seated dinner-dance for 400. What will make a Forum



Celestial Forum.

party special is the beauty and power of the room, with its cast-iron, glass-domed ceiling. Period skylights are hard to find in New York's conference rooms, and the

Bartos's is a beauty.

When Room 80 was built, in 1911, it was intended by the architecture firm Carrère & Hastings for use as the Circulating Library. The

dome provided reading light while other treasures were meant to lure the readers: bronze wall ornaments, walls sheathed in rare, yellow-streaked Siena marble that shines like a cat's eye. Under the glass dome are four arches, painted off-white and adorned with 94 rosettes, each with a light bulb in its heart.

"A Victorian whimsy," says architect Lewis Davis of Davis, Brody & Associates, which did the restoration.

There are first-rate food-preparation facilities, rare in a public building. And there's an enclosed courtyard where a caterer can park his trucks.

The charge to rent the Forum for an event is \$18,000. BARBARA COSTIKYAN

COMING UP

DESIGNER PHONE BOOK

AFTER THREE YEARS OF art-history study at Brown University, Lisa Krohn was getting frustrated. "I realized I'd rather be *doing* than *looking*," she says. "I wanted to design toasters, household things." So in 1984, she started sneaking off to the Rhode Island School of Design—where she found a group of doers who design industrial objects.

Now halfway through a graduate course in industrial design at Cranbrook Academy of Art, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Krohn spent the summer at Manhattan's hot Smart Design firm. But she wasn't just another intern: Her design for a telephone-answering machine called Phonebook—it resembles the ubiquitous Filofax—won first prize this summer at Forma Finlandia, a prestigious international plastics-design

competition run by Neste, the Finnish petrochemical company.

It is rare for an American designer to be hailed overseas, rarer still for an American designer who is 23. But Krohn and her contemporaries are winning praise for bringing about a revival in American product design by replacing the characterless wood-grain-and-smoked-Plexiglas look with what they call "product semantics," or "demonstrative" design.

"Phonebook is asking people to look at what a normal, everyday product represents in their lives," says Krohn. "Everything

carries meaning. It's up to the designer to take that meaning and sculpt it into something specific to the product."

Phonebook—so named by Smart Design's Tucker Viemeister, who worked with Krohn on the project—means what it says. The book metaphor is both a visual



Krohn and phone.

joke and a clue to operating the product: rigid plastic "pages" are turned over to change functions—make calls, record and replay messages—just as flipping through a Filofax turns up its different uses.

"It's really very expressive of its meaning," says Italian designer Mario Bellini, a Forma Finlandia juror whose own expressive designs were shown at the Museum of Modern Art this summer. "It tells you what it is and how to use it without reading too many instructions. It's well designed—in the best sense of the word. It looks more like something European."

Indeed, a European electronics firm is now talking to Krohn about putting Phonebook into production. Until then, New Yorkers can only judge from a model of the product-to-be, on display with other Forma Finlandia winners at the International Design Center of New York (IDCNY), in Long Island City, October 7 through 10.

HUGH ALDERSEY-WILLIAMS