



**Scott Johnson** is one of the most highly respected and well known architects in California. He and William Fain acquired the firm now known as Johnson Fain in 1987, and has created many designs that have become widely published and/or public landmarks, such as the Opus One and Byron Wineries in Napa Valley, as well as the San Francisco Rincon Center. Mr. Johnson and his firm have worked on projects in China with a focus on housing and master planning, and have participated in competitions held by China, winning the plan for the central business district of Beijing in 1999-2000.

### **Where are we as architects in China?**

Mr. Johnson explains that in China, “architects are really hired to communicate certain values.” He observes that the Chinese are “building a middle class and upper middle class at lightning speed and they’re very aspirational,” and with the money, they want new things and lifestyles that western cultures already have. “What we do as architects,” Mr. Johnson says, “is that we convey those things [they want] and what they mean from a lifestyle point of view in China. So we’re almost like authors writing books, but we’re not writing books, we’re making buildings.”

### **What direction is architecture taking in China now and in the near future?**

Mr. Johnson’s immediate answer was that “China in that regard is probably like every growing country. Of the amount of buildings that are being produced, they don’t all equate to architecture.” He says how “some of the American or western models [of architecture] have just been landed into China and so they’re like objects on a moonscape.” “There’s contextual and historic culture then there’s a modern thing,” Mr. Johnson says as he emphasizes the issue of western architecture used in China without substantial thought, giving a loss of context. He goes on to explain how China does have very noteworthy positives. “The positive is that their projects of scope and of vision and scale in China you will never get in the United States,” Mr. Johnson explains as he gives examples, “we’re, to plan 30 square miles of regional planning and wetlands, to rethink a entire inner city of 10 million population city, do recreational planning outside major cities or satellite towns or some of the transfer and development of their high speed rail nexus, these are huge projects.” He notes that “Those are the same projects the west needs. We need transit we need land use we need recreational, we need open space, we need housing, we need to rebuild our cities, we need to do that stuff too, but right now we don’t have the dollars. The politics is too high and the dollars is too low.”