

(from *F/A march.april 1999*)

**The conference was a truly remarkable meeting of minds and tent talent**

by Gery Warner

It's funny how ideas often trot around in your head, rarely standing still long enough for you to get a good look at them. Lives are too busy today, filled with business, family, friends and all the hurly-burly they bring along. You have to step off the train from time to time just to see, if you are on the track. Last June, our family's trip to Europe was like that, crowded with activity: meetings and a project in London, a rendezvous with friends and business associates in Belgium, and attendance at the Textile Roofs '98 symposium in Berlin (June 18-20, 1998).

Hosted by Technet and Ferrari, the Berlin conference was a reflection of the companies' global views and contacts. Technet, located at the Technical University of Berlin, pioneered the development of fabric-structure computer analysis on PCs. Technet's founder, Professor Lothar Gründig, worked so many years ago on patterning the Montreal Stadium roof in the 1960's before forming Technet to translate his knowledge and passion for form-finding into a computer program for tent shapes. Ferrari, worldrenowned for its high-quality fabrics and professionalism, called upon its vast resources of industry contacts to make the conference a truly remarkable meeting of minds and tent talent.

Both Ferrari and Technet have a way of gathering people together, ostensibly for the purely commercial reason of selling product, that opens them up to new ideas and concepts far beyond buying a yard of vinyl. Between lectures and tours to view Berlin's "garden of construction cranes" [*Editor's note: As a result of the Germans government's plans to relocate from Bonn to Berlin in 2000, the city is experiencing its biggest construction boom since the late 1940s*] and other more intriguing delights, the organizers put attendees to work building models of computer-generated shapes. Even Ferrari's director of export sales, Françoise Fournier, pregnant with her first child and up to her elbows in modeling fabrics, puzzled her way through construction of her first fabric creation.

Crammed into lecture halls too small for the eager, polyglot assembly of tent techies, some of us were forced-fed more than we ever wanted to know about complex fabric attachment details. Many reveled in the stuff. Ambushed on the first day by Professor Gründig to fill in for a no-show on a technical panel discussion, I was suddenly jolted awake from a time-zone-induced slumber. Somewhat like the dormouse in Alice in Wonderland, I tried to make some obscure point about fabric design no longer being a problem, but sensible framing systems needing work.

Various conference subjects had one either on the edge of their seat or slumped into it. Dr. David Wakefield, principal of Tensys Ltd., Bath, England, who showed us fascinating slides of his vast tent city project in Mina, Saudi Arabia (see *F/A Jan/Feb 1999*, page 6), was followed by Barcelona School of Architecture Professor Josep Duran's technical trip into the field of first principles of tensile-structure design.

American, Chinese, Hungarian or French, all in all, most of us came away wiser and in awe of the busy-ness of the human animal in the fabric-structure field.

Oh, that idea running around in my head like a horse in a spring windstorm? In an Orlando, Fla., dinosaur shop with my eight-year-old son after the IFAI tent renters' convention, it occurred to me, that, just like those dinosaurs of long ago, every conceivable shape of tents was possible and had indeed worked.

This year, the annual workshop on the design and realization of textile roofs (June 17-19) will be cohosted by the Technical University of Berlin and the Lightweight Structures Research Unit of the University of New South Wales. The workshop will be again held at the Technical University of Berlin, Germany. As with previous workshops, Textile Roofs '99 will invite specialists from both industry and academia to present papers during the mornings; the afternoon sessions will be devoted to hands-on physical and computational modeling.

A final list of lecturers is being compiled and will be announced in the May/June issue of *F/A*.

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