

EDITORIAL

City of big shoulders and quirky thinkers

Where would Chicago be without crazy ideas? Daniel Burnham's credo, "Make no little plans," was the "Go big or go home" of its day, and Chicago has always embraced the philosophy. We like our skyscrapers to be the tallest, our airports to be the busiest and our rivers to run backward.

That's why plans to build a 300-by-100-foot floating island off the shore of Lake Michigan warmed our hearts—even if we're pretty sure it'll never see the light of day. A 365-day-a-year party barge, complete with a pool, restaurants, a marina and shops, may be an eccentric idea in a city that's hardly a tropical paradise, but it's not the most outlandish notion the city has ever seen. Don't forget, Mayor Richard Daley (the first, not the second) wanted to float an airport out there. If he had succeeded, would his son have later spiked it, Meigs Field-style? Sadly, we'll never know. And Groupon Inc.'s ex-CEO, Andrew Mason, actually wanted to build a Jetsons-esque dome over the city, for Pete's sake. A party barge looks rational in comparison.

For every nutty idea that gets shot down, there's one that squeaks through and be-

comes a treasured civic asset. We hated the Picasso at first. ("It has a long stupid face and looks like some giant insect," is how Mike Royko described it at its unveiling.)

Some people thought A. Montgomery Ward was a loon to insist that Chicago's lakefront remain forever open and free—but thank goodness he did. Despite its price tag, Mayor Richard Daley (the second, in this case)



Rendering of the proposed party barge

kept going on Millennium Park. Yay for that. And who knew mixing cheese and caramel popcorn would be such genius?

Still, it's hard not to mourn the flaky Chicago concepts that died on the drawing board. Mayor Jane Byrne wanted to bring Formula One racing to the streets of the Windy City. Fun! Some folks wanted to build a Spanish Steps-style staircase near Illinois Center. Why not?

And all we have to show for the Chicago Spire developer's dreams is a watery hole in the ground. Will anything get built there someday? If it does, we'll enjoy gazing at it from the deck of the party barge—while raising a toast to Chicago's quirky thinkers past, present and future.