First let me say Happy New Year, and as most computer geeks are pleased to report, little went wrong around the globe.

Overseas Drafting Services
After last month's fiasco at the WCO conference in Seattle I thought I would take a look at a company called http://www.advanceinformatics.com/ Advance Informatics. They specialize as an overseas drafting service. It occurred to me that with all the problems Nike and other companies have had with overseas workers I thought I'd go straight to the source and find some answers for myself. I was curious if this was to be a sweatshop or an actual workplace. Considering their prices I was anxious to see what they could do. If you have any questions of your own, feel free to email Sanjay Agarwal at sanjaya@giasdl01.vsnl.net.in and he'll be happy to tell you all about his business and offer you a first time free drafting service. Here's the synopsis of his reply to my questions:

They have 12 drafters who work there, along with "one Architect and one Assistant Architect who also drafts and supervises. Two of the drafters are also Assistant Engineers" and "all draftspersons are diploma holders in Architectural Engineering." They work 8.5 hours a day and sometimes more if required." They also work in 2 shifts and with the time zone differences your project can normally be turned around in 24 hours. Their office is "up to international standards as it is not possible to deliver quality without a proper environment. The machines are all HP or Siemens with 128 MB ram and most with 17" Monitors, UPS and Power backups. They are all paid in the range of US $200.00 to US $300.00 per month which is almost 25% to 33% higher than in the market." Currently they are charging between $6 and $10 per hour for most work. See the site and email specific pricing questions to them for more details.

Many large, multi-national corporations use offshore workers to do their work, and soon we might see this same sort of attitude being picked up by the smaller companies with the help of the Internet. "As such it is inevitable that CAD and drafting work would be done in larger volumes [over seas]. The fear of the Drafters in US is true."

In the coming weeks I'll try sending them a file and see what sort of quality work they do. I know at first I was skeptical, but after to talking with Sanjay it seems that he is running a decent operation in which people on both sides of the ocean can win. Truthfully CAD operators over here may loose jobs, or be forced into lower pay levels. However, if we look historically at drafters in the US over the past 100 years, you will see that only in the past few years with the advent of CAD did we see entry level CAD operators earning

almost as much as a good designer. This is because architects are becoming increasingly dependent upon their skills unlike previously where any architect could pick up a pen and paper and draw a building if need be. In the next 20 years this may flip back to a normal level as architects learn CAD more proficiently. Till then, we will see a business model where the CAD drafter does not have room to learn, explore, and work as they used to, because architects no longer can afford to have a drafter loose a day or two of work to learn a new but worthy skill or to visit a site and watch as something the drew is built. The way to change this now is to use overseas workers who charge $4 per hour rather than as much as 5 times that here in the states, and rely on people like Sanjay to run a good business with competent drafters.

Nifty Stuff
In keeping with the idea of highlighting items of interest to architects here's a few goodies. As you try to build a web site to show off your projects, especially large architectural buildings, you'll want a way to display more than a static picture, and instead have something that is interactive. Better still you might visit a site and take a bunch of pictures that need to be spliced together. At http://www.fh-furtwangen.de/~dersch/ PANORAMA TOOLS you'll find a photo stitch program and a PhotoShop plug-in for creating panoramas.   You'll also get a chance to see the same picture in multiple formats to get a good idea as to which browser plug-ins you will prefer to use, including JAVA, SmoothMove, RealVR, QTVR and VRML.

Cool Sites
While the https://grc.com/x/ne.dll?bh0bkyd2 Shields Up! Web site is not AutoCAD related, many of you probably have subscribed to DSL, Cable modems, ISDN or other high speed access paths to your ISP. If you have a static IP address in your office and you are connected you should check this site out and see just how well your office is protected from others online. While there, check out the rest of their site for other cool stuff. While on this topic, if you are using the new Norton Anti-Virus 2000 you should know that if you turn on the email scanning you are opening you computer up to hackers online to break into your computer and cause it to crash. On the other hand if you don't run it, you can be susceptible to viruses in emails like the bubble boy virus. For more info on this see http://www.bugnet.com/alerts/bugalert_122299.html Bug Net

Books
Here's a few books on AutoCAD 2000. These are all linked over to Amazon which has added a "wish list" so you can add books and stuff that you would like, and then send the wish list out to people who don't know what to get you for Christmas or Chanukah:
Book 1

Book 2

Book 3