

Architecture SOUTH

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER THREE

SEVEN-FIFTY



ARCHITECTURE AND HOUSING

in this issue:

CITY IN THE TREES

WENZEL'S AFFORDABLE WONDERS

LITTLE ROCK DREAM HOUSE

ARCHITECTS' HOMES IN MEMPHIS

SHREVEPORT'S McADOO HOTEL

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FROM THE EDITOR

STAGES FOR HUMAN DRAMA

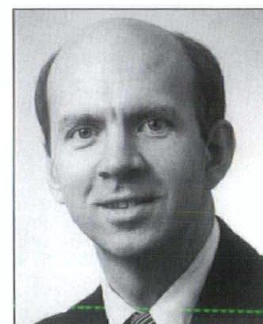
If you ask schoolchildren what architects do, they answer, "design houses." It may sound fatuous, but it's a fact: the public perception of architecture often begins with the American house. Great architects are often remembered for their residential design, from Frank Lloyd Wright's "Fallingwater" and Jefferson's "Monticello" to the Poet's House at Venice, California by Frank Gehry. Shelter magazines, such as *Architectural Digest*, rarely stray beyond the family hearth.

Why? Shelter remains a fundamental need. We all live in houses, whether freestanding or conglomerate, so we are all experts. Our bodies and psyches relate to the scale of houses in a way we find more difficult in grander buildings: we understand how houses should *feel*. Our homes are the stages for the individual human dramas of our lives. We spend our money and fuss and play there, expend our passion and recreational energy and, increasingly, work there.

In a world of fast-food and real-time, custom houses, most often associated with wealth and choice, still offer craft and custom assemblage. Even when a corporation demands that you wear a button-down shirt, you can acquire just the view, just the color, just the ambiance that you want in your own home. If you can afford it, your home can reflect your own taste, even your own personality, which an architect can help you achieve.

Yet all God's people need shelter. When architects approach the design of low-income housing, the challenges may be different in degree, but the results can be equally creative, as architect Billy Wenzel's housing developments for the Farmer's Home Administration attest. Wenzel's powerfully arresting forms seem more like expensive condominiums than moderately-priced apartments.

Houses and housing demand creativity across the economic spectrum, ranging from houses for middle-income families, for billionaires, and for the poor. When architects succeed, as these pages illustrate, the value of the dwellings they touch increases and human potential is enhanced.



Robert Ivy
Editor

Robert Ivy

OUR APOLOGIES

In our last issue (Volume 2, Number 2) the article entitled "Designing Wonders" contained an two errors in attribution. Nathan Evans Pounders & Taylor were architects of record, with Louis Pounders serving as project designer for the Napoleon and Catherine the Great exhibitions (pp. 4-5). In the same article, Alan Ulmer photographed the LeBonheur play area (p.5, top); Jeffrey Jacobs, the Children's Museum of Memphis (p.5, middle and bottom).

CITY IN THE TREES

How do you design forty units of zero lot line housing for entry-level homebuyers when others have tried and failed? When such a project in Auburn, Alabama, faced bankruptcy, a strong new developer named Charles Weissinger turned to architects Dan Bennett and his collaborator Behzad Nakhjavan for a fresh start.

Bennett and Nakhjavan recognized that earlier efforts had ignored the site's steeply sloping topography. Instead, they viewed the 32 acres of hickory and pine forest, named "Hickory Woods", as an opportunity to plan in harmony with nature. In the architects' scheme, the houses are fitted carefully into the landscape, "disturbing as few trees as possible." In addition to the naturalistic ambiance, trees provide cooling shade during hot Auburn summers.

Hickory Woods reflects a concern for community-building. Some houses will be close together for the countryside: there is an 18 foot minimum distance allowed between houses. All of the houses will be related through design. The influences for all four prototype buildings include the artifacts and indigenous buildings of the rural South. The architects mention barns, silos, and farm houses as inspiration for their designs.

Construction of the houses was wood frame with stucco. Simple systems kept costs to a reasonable \$95,000-110,000 per unit, producing a manageable mortgage for first-time home buyers. Although Bennett subsequently left Auburn to become Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Arkansas, Nakhjavan has remained in Alabama to shepherd the project through to completion.

So far, others have recognized the architects' and the developer's efforts. Hickory Woods won a 1994 Arkansas Chapter AIA Award of Excellence and a 1995 Gulf States Regional AIA Citation of Merit. ●



BRIDGES span steeply sloping terrain at "Hickory Woods" development in Auburn, Alabama (above). Peaked roofs like familiar barns soften contemporary stucco houses.



BEHZAD NAKHJAVAN (2)

HIGH STYLE FOR LOW INCOME HOUSING

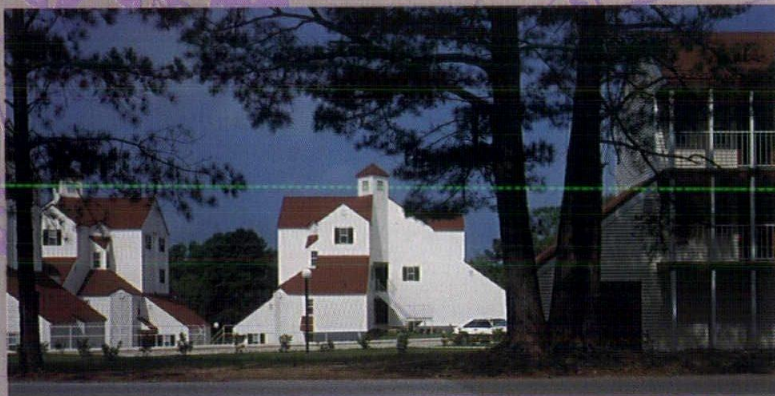
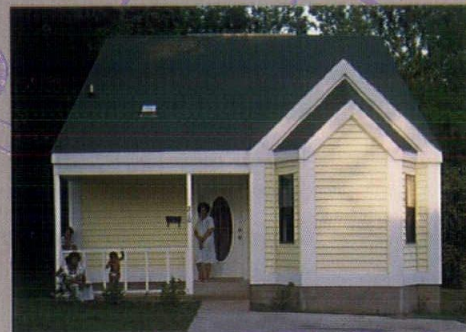
WILLIAM WENZEL'S
AFFORDABLE DESIGNS

BY ROBERT M. FORD, FAIA

In Norman Maclean's book, *A River Runs Through It*, the river serves as allegory for tenuous forces which connect, lead, generate, and give meaning to life. In like manner the Cumberland, the Pearl, the Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Tombigbee and Mississippi flow through the lands reached by *Architecture South*. These forces are eloquently given form and substance in the life and work of architect William Wenzel, Jr., AIA, of Tunica, Mississippi.

Raised on the river in Helena, Arkansas, and educated in the urban East (B.Arch., Pratt Institute), Wenzel was drawn back to the river. Practicing first in Memphis, then in Tunica, he made his skills available to affluent clients wishing the best colonial, Mediterranean, or Tudor style houses. But as in Maclean's book, Wenzel became increasingly sensitive to a wide spectrum of people and to their diverse situations.

A small watercourse flowing through Tunica had been identified in 1986 as "sugar ditch," bringing national attention (and shame) to the housing of a large segment of humanity in the Mississippi Delta. Wenzel saw Tunica's problems as opportunities and felt a responsibility to his community.



WILLIAM WENZEL'S palette: traditional southern front porches, tree-shaded gables and bays at Dermott Villas (above and opposite center), powerfully massed clusters at DeQueen Villas (below and opposite top), sensitive siting in a Mer Rouge, Louisiana, pecan grove (bottom). Simple materials like vinyl siding and shingle roofs take on importance in Mountain Home, Arkansas (opposite, bottom).



TIMOTHY HURSLEY/THE ARKANSAS OFFICE (6)

His intense involvement in Tunica led him to demonstrate how a creative and dedicated architect might weave a myriad of complex governmental programs and grants together to enhance the blighted environment of a small Mississippi Delta town. Involved in urban revitalization and low cost housing developments, he devoted ten years and accomplished five major projects, helping resolve the miserable conditions at "sugar ditch." He was inspired to involve himself in providing quality living environments for the less privileged, the poor, the elderly, and the disadvantaged. Participating in a 1986 FmHA design competition for innovative affordable housing, Wenzel won the commission and an AIA Mississippi design award.

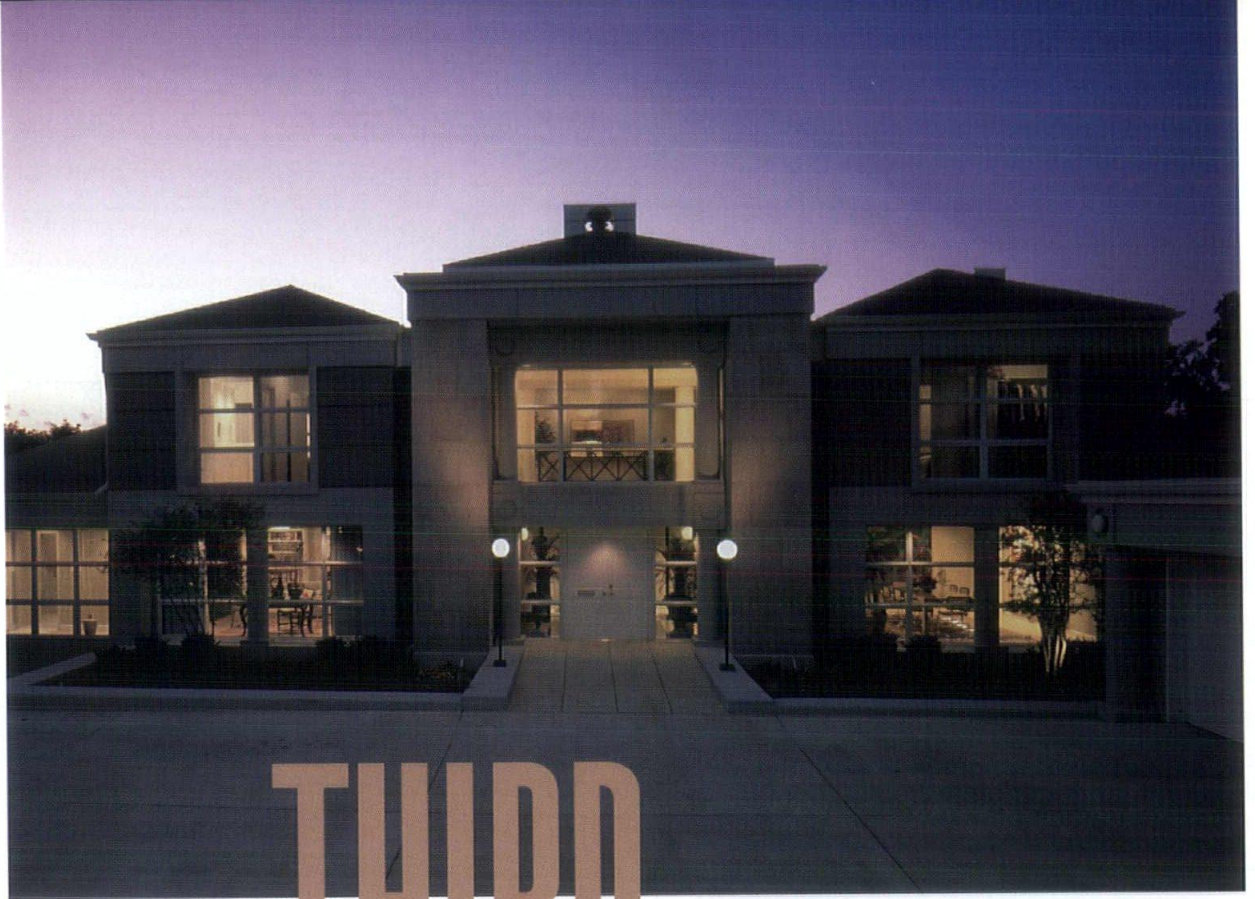
A creative and visionary FmHA staff across the river in Arkansas and Louisiana recognized his abilities and allowed Wenzel to design a variety of larger award-winning projects. Examples of his innovative work include the following:

- *DeQueen Villas in DeQueen, Arkansas...*a 37 unit project near the Oklahoma border which draws heavily on rural residential prototypes.
- *Lakeview Estates in Lakeview, Arkansas...*a 33 unit project set between a state highway and a cypress-filled bayou, expressing the scale and towers of nearby agricultural buildings.
- *Keystone Apartments in Mountain Home, Arkansas...*a 42 unit project with high density units staggered to preserve extensive trees along the edges of the site.
- *Dermott Villas in Dermott, Arkansas...*a low scaled, tightly structured village woven into a dense grove of oak trees.
- *MerRouge Villas in MerRouge, Louisiana...*a 33 unit public housing project woven tightly into a pecan grove. In 1993, the affordable (\$36,000 per unit) MerRouge Villas were honored by President Clinton with a Presidential Design Award for having demonstrated design excellence in federally sponsored projects.

As President-elect of AIA Mississippi, Wenzel influences his colleagues by example and through quiet leadership along with his consistent ability to garner design awards. With the quality of work flowing from his ten man office in Tunica, Mississippi, architect Billy Wenzel has now contributed to improved housing in 40 of the 50 states. Wenzel has demonstrated the challenge from Mina Berryman, Director of the Design Arts Program, "that good design is essential, especially for the population that can afford it the least."

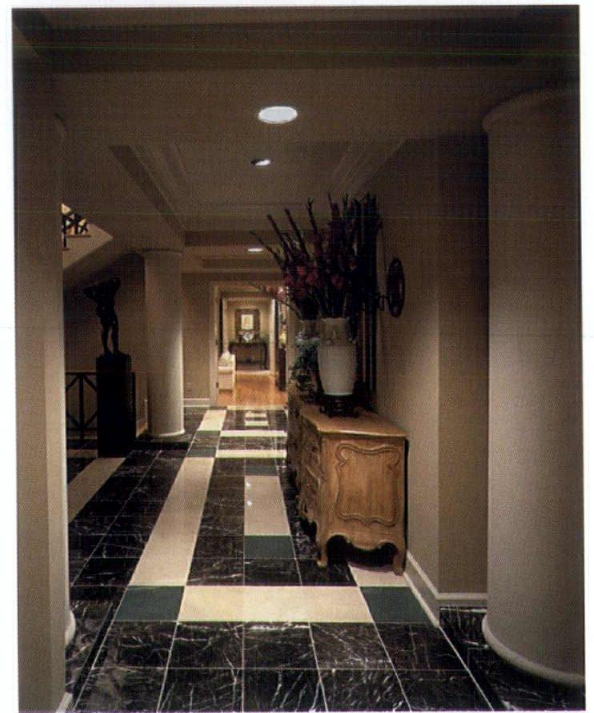
His work recognizes the potential inherent in rigid 4' and 12' planning modules, efficient

(continued on page 18)



THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

GASKIN RESIDENCE
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS
BY GEORGE WILDGEN, HON. AIA



DREAM HOUSE Bill and Sue Gaskin's entry glows in Little Rock sunset. Large windows open landward and out to river views (above). Sleek interiors provide understated setting for fine art in foyer (opposite, bottom); kitchen is cool and airy (opposite, top). Luxurious materials (marble, fine woods) anchor passageways.



After six months in design and eighteen months under construction the Gaskins moved into their dream house. As is so often the case in highly successful projects, the design is simple and straightforward. It is clear that a pervading consideration was to provide as many spaces as possible with a view of the river

When it's the third time around you really want to get it right.

This was the philosophy of Little Rock architect Bill Gaskin and his wife Sue, a state agency executive, as they set out to design their third "dream house" in twenty years. It was not that there was anything wrong with the first two houses. The earlier houses were justifiably acclaimed as outstanding examples of their particular styles. But they failed to provide the one thing that Bill, Sue, and their two daughters found to be increasingly compelling as years went by: an expansive view of the Arkansas River, distant mountains, and the ridges and valleys.

In choosing the site and programming the house, Bill Gaskin had learned well during an internship period in the office of preeminent Arkansas architect, E. Fay Jones, renowned for his sensitive respect for and response to a project's site. The Gaskin house nestles into a high ridge in western Little Rock in a manner that takes maximum advantage of the spectacular views while carefully providing its environs—both natural and man-made—utmost respect and minimal intrusion.

Bringing the spectacular house with the sublime view to fruition was fraught with mundane problems that would have caused the more timid to turn away. The steeply sloping lot contained massive boulders that had to be removed; blasting was not an option. In addition, numerous zoning requirements involving setbacks and site restrictions had to be dealt with, and a major underground gas main traversing a portion of the lot complicated the building placement. Solutions to these problems were certain to be complex and expensive. But this was a site to fall in love with. The Gaskins were hooked and eager to respond to the challenge.

The Gaskin residence has an unusual foundation for a house. From the upper decks it is approximately sixty feet to the ground. Because of the rigorous site requirements, the base of the building demanded concrete, with steel and wood above.

The main portion of the house is divided into three sections in order to reduce the roof's impact in the neighborhood, since one of the building restrictions required that the neighbor across the street maintain an unobstructed view of the river. The highest roof elevation corresponds to the uphill neighbor's door threshold height.

and valley below. Most rooms open on to a deck at all three of the house's levels.

The plan provides a main level—actually the middle of three levels—which is reached from a driveway and what Bill describes as "the perception of a front yard" with garden areas on either side of the front door. There is a minimal elevation change from the driveway to the front door. A step-free entrance plus wide doorways on the main level are a conscious response to accommodating the needs of physically disabled individuals with whom Sue Gaskin works.

(please see next page)

SHIELDS MARLEY STUDIOS (3)



THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

(continued from previous page)



SHIELDS MARLEY STUDIOS

FURNISHINGS include an eclectic mix of antiques and contemporary objects.

This main level, designed for living and entertainment, includes the master bedroom and a large kitchen for family cooking as well as catering. Entertaining is helped by rooms that flow easily into one another, free of dead ends.

The upper level contains the Gaskins' daughters' bedrooms plus offices for both Bill and Sue. The lower level provides the largest expanse of deck space, a screened porch, and an indoor swimming pool.

The eclectic taste of the owners is evident throughout, from the design of the traditional trim and materials to the juxtaposed collection of antique and highly contemporary furniture. A remarkable array of equally diverse art collected over a twenty-five year period provides a highly agreeable complement to the various spaces and furnishings.

There appears to be—at least in the case of the Gaskins' quest for their ultimate dream house—that the third time is the charm. It looks as though the Gaskins really did get it right this time.



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THREE FOR MEMPHIS

ARCHITECTS' HOUSES
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
BY ANGIE KING, AIA

When architects design for themselves, they often find the seemingly endless interpretations of a design frustrates the commitment to construction. Three Memphis architects have not only completed their own designs but also managed to build them.

Winner of *Builder* magazine's 1994 Project of the Year and a 1994 Memphis AIA Excellence Award, the house of Darrell Russell, AIA, was designed for the long-term needs of a specific client: himself. Russell, a principal with Looney Ricks Kiss Architects, used such details as 10-foot ceilings with oversized doors and windows in the 1,650 square foot house squeezed on a 35-by-100 foot lot. The extra height and abundant natural light creates an openness which Russell notes "others could not necessarily live with."

While the wood trim and cedar siding satisfy the design criteria of the neo-traditional, residential development known as Harbor Town, the interiors reflect the owner's appreciation for the classic Modernist details: boldly colored accent walls, ship's railing, and hardware designed by Mies van der Rohe.

An obliquely angled wall opens the central hall into the living room where large glass openings face the pool which encompasses the back yard. The three-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath house cost \$72 a square foot and was constructed by R. L. Speck and Associates.



JEFFREY JACOBS/ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY, INC. (2)

Another house built for the specific needs of an architect and his family is that of Mark Weaver, AIA. When the city of Memphis abandoned plans to run a controversial interstate through the center of town, it was left with an entire neighborhood of vacant lots. Weaver purchased one, as did several other architects.



A principal with Hnedak Bobo Group, Weaver used a local building type, the four-square Craftsman-style house, as inspiration for fulfilling the requirements of the Evergreen Historic District. The 3000 square foot, brick house has a two-story triangular side bay which hints at the less than traditional interior spaces. Heavily detailed with stained oak moldings, chair rails, china rails, and window frames, the interiors flow in an open contemporary way. The four rooms on each floor of the square plan are organized around passageways aligned like an equal-legged cross. At the center of the cross, curved walls encircle the full height of the stairs. Natural light flows from a Wright-inspired dormer and second story lightwell. Built by Mark Stratton, the house cost approximately \$57 a square foot.

Taking more the developer's approach by emphasizing resale value and ease in construction, John Harrison Jones, AIA, designed a single family residence with specific yet affordable details. After working several years in California, Jones returned to Memphis as an architect at Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects. Using Arts and Crafts style roof overhangs, his house

is a solar-passive design in which all the openings are shaded in summer, sunny in winter.

A tower-like two story corner piece and a split-level first floor create an open living/dining/kitchen area while answering the height requirements of the Harbor Town development and the limits of the skewed, sloped corner site. The hand-crafted front door introduces the classical wood details throughout. As simple as standard contractor's stock, the moldings are sized to recall an older, farmhouse tradition. Built by Saratoga Investments, the 2400 square foot house with three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths includes a sleeping porch and workroom and cost \$57 a square foot.

MARK WEAVER'S four-square masonry house fits into historic Evergreen district (opposite). Wood-trimmed interiors reinterpret Craftsman-era details (above). DARREL RUSSELL residence (top right) squeezes onto narrow lot at Harbortown with Modernist energy. JOHN HARRISON JONES'S house (middle & bottom right) recalls Arts and Crafts era through high ceilings, wood details in entry hall.



JEFFREY JACOBS/MIMS STUDIOS



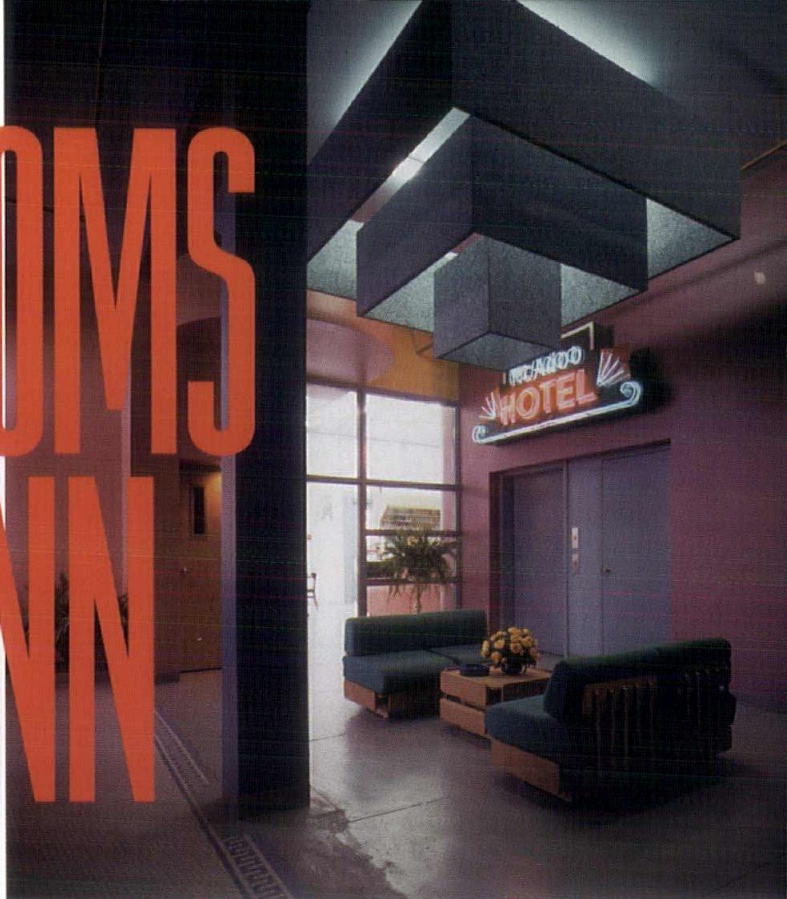
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NEW ROOMS AT THE INN

McADOO HOTEL
SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA



Every community requires decent shelter for its people. One shining example of architects participating in community problem solving for housing occurred in Shreveport, Louisiana. The McAdoo Hotel, a three-story 1920s vintage brick building, once a hotel for oil field workers, had almost deteriorated beyond rehabilitation. Determined that the building should not fall victim to the wrecking ball, both architect (Morgan, Hill, Sutton, & Mitchell) and client (Nesbitt Management Company) began to search for possible uses.

Saving the McAdoo could address three community concerns: historic preservation, neighborhood revitalization, and homelessness. With help from the

American Institute of Architects, the architects began to dream by asking the question, "what if." In order to broaden community participation, the architects convened a four day public gathering to define Shreveport's homeless problem. Diverse ideas came from the coalition of talent—citizens, architecture students from Louisiana Tech University, service providers (government and non-profit), housing experts, politicians, developers, and architects.

As part of the method, students lived in a single-room occupancy hotel (known as an "SRO" in housing jargon) that served a homeless clientele, ate in a soup kitchen, and worked 48 hours in a concentrated design effort (known as a "charrette") to generate ideas for possible uses of the

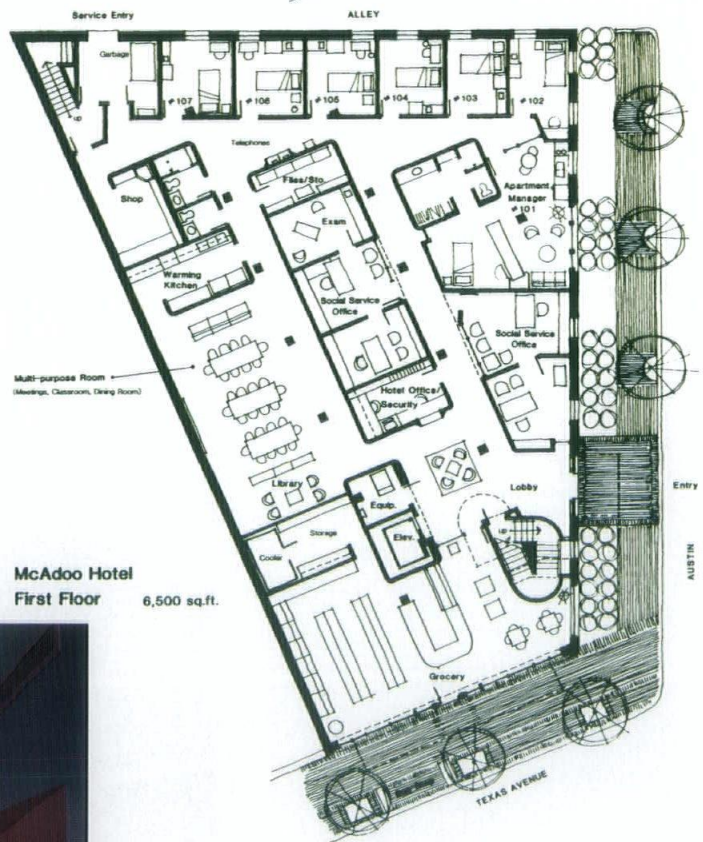
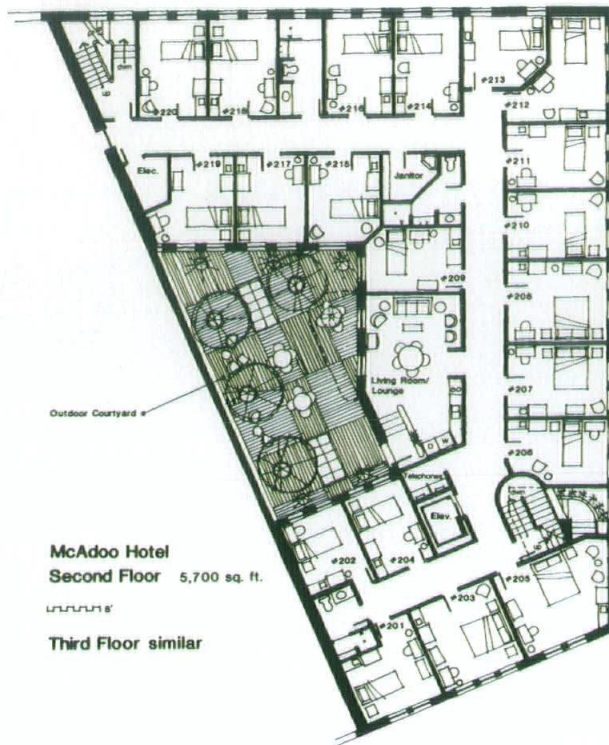
*BEFORE AND AFTER
at McAdoo Hotel in
Shreveport, Louisiana,
converted from ruin to
handsome low-income
housing (right). Lobby
(above) and interiors
(opposite) shine with
saturated color and
care.*



McAdoo. The public was invited to view and critique the ideas both during the process and finally at a presentation in a public forum which concluded the event. The 1987 workshop created the momentum that pushed the project to reality. Results of this group exercise created a community vision that guided the design.

Joint planning succeeded. Today, the renovation of the McAdoo makes a positive statement to the neighborhood and the city. The project included necessary repairs, the addition of stairs and elevator, air conditioning, electrical, and fire sprinkler systems—all the things that provide shelter. However, the McAdoo is a special place because of gathering spaces, appropriate support areas, daylighting, indirect lighting, and creative use of color. These characteristics are contributors to rebuilding the confidence and self-worth of forty-five homeless individuals that now have a home. Architecture contributes to an environment characterized by a spirit of healing and a sense of community.

The McAdoo was the pilot project for the Louisiana AIA "Search for Shelter" program and the first project funded by the McKinney Act that provides rental assistance for housing for the homeless. The project has received special recognition from numerous organizations including the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, the Louisiana American Planning Association, and the American Institute of Architects. Collective thinking combined with architects' creativity to solve a community problem in a way that one juror found, "attractive, functional, dignified, and cost effective... This project is a real winner."



JOHN REYNOLDS (5)

Plans illustrate single-room occupancy and ample public space (above). Project architects were Kim Mitchell and Kenn Babin.

THE TRAVELING ARCHITECT



NESHOBA COUNTY FAIR Philadelphia, Mississippi

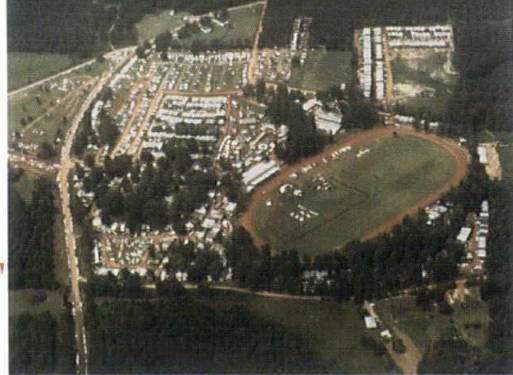
Situated among the pines of rural eastern Mississippi lies a most unusual place. Most of the year, this settlement, its streets empty and its buildings vacant, resembles an abandoned Colorado mining town. But in late July, it bursts to life as thousands converge in the century-old ritual of reunion and renewal known as the Neshoba County Fair. The "progeny" of this place visit, eat, party, and sleep day and night for a solid week. Then it all ends as abruptly as it began, leaving the fairgrounds home only to memories.

The origin of this extraordinary place was a harvest picnic held by a group of farmers in 1889. In time, the wagons that they had drawn up around a brush arbor were replaced by rudimentary cabins organized to form a square with a pavilion at its center. Subsequent generations added a race-track, a midway, numerous streets, and hundreds more cabins. A hundred years of ad hoc growth have created a town-like assembly that may very well be America's best continuing exposition of the principles of vernacular architecture and urbanism.

This unique environment, possessed of a sense of place that can only be the product of historical circumstance, will be appreci-

ated equally in terms of its cohesion and its variety. All but a few of the seven hundred cabins (or Fair houses) are of a single type, but each owner/designer/builder has reinterpreted its components so as to rightfully claim authorship of an original. Streets oriented more to the land than to a grid enhance the overall effect by producing picturesque walks.

—Robert Craycroft, AIA



KEITH BRANTLEY



ROBERT CRAYCROFT



LINDSEY BUTTE



LINDSEY BUTE

FAIR FROM AIR: Race track and heavy peppering of cabins characterize Neshoba County Fair (opposite, top). Seven hundred houses share similar construction (above) but sport

personalized color and insignia (opposite below). Fair has grown from 1890s farm gathering to enormous annual house-party and instant-urban event (below).

WHAT TO DO

The usual attractions of county fairs (though the Neshoba County Fair is actually a privately sponsored event) such as midway rides, carnival food, livestock displays, horse races, and country music entertainers can be found there, but the true purpose of the Fair is revealed in the lingering conversations that mingle with the creaking of the swings on cabin porches.

WHERE TO STAY

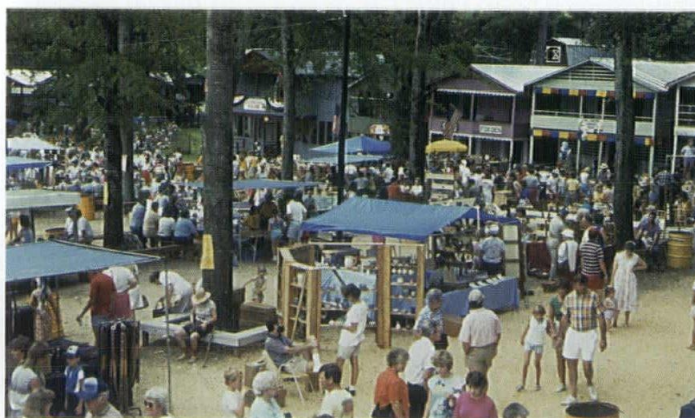
Nearby Philadelphia, a small town otherwise known for its timber industry, is also home of the Silver Star Casino, owned by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Hotel and restaurant accommodations are adjacent.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Neshoba County Fair is located on Highway 21 near Philadelphia, Mississippi. It was held during the last week of July this year (an election year in Mississippi); other years, it is held during the first week in August. Admission is approximately \$10.00.



COURTESY ELLEN SPENDRUP



LINDSEY BUTE

ARCHITECTS

Looney Ricks Kiss Architects, Inc., a client-centered firm recognized for design excellence, with regional and national practice in diverse project types, offers excellent career opportunities. Candidates must be highly motivated, talented individuals who are interested in professional and financial advancement as team members in our expanding national practice.

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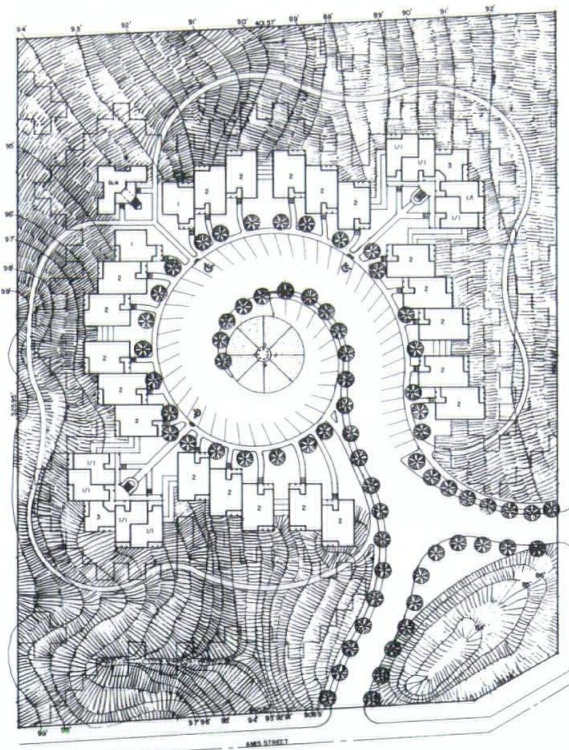
Residential projects include planning, single-family, multi-family, development design guidelines with a special emphasis on Traditional Neighborhood Development.

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HIGH STYLE FOR LOW INCOME HOUSING (cont'd)



SITEPLANS Wenzel uses spiral geometry to create community on sloping lot in Rison, Arkansas (above).

planning, and simple stock materials used directly with integrity. He welcomes geometry as an organizing element and has a gift for lively repetition. The recurring siting of buildings in a 45° rotation ensures a richness and dynamic not normally associated with low cost housing. The massing of his projects provide strong definition and identity. The tightest budgets seem to bring out his most creative yet ultimately rational work.

On a deeper level, Wenzel values

people and how they live and interact. The porch, the walk, sense of community, and "place" mark his work. He is sensitive to environment, seeking inspiration from an existing pecan orchard, a bayou, vernacular structures, or a specific urban context.

Does Wenzel have a secret method? Is he a better fisherman who has honed and developed his skills to a level of perfection? Or is he driven to compete to prove some deep things to himself? "Billy" is modest, humble and unpretentious about his work. He is quick to point out that he finds challenge in tight budgets or governmental regulations and pleasure in creatively rising above them.



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