Oculus

Winter 2025

A Publication of
AIA New York
Volume 87, Issue 1
$12

ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNICATION

ABC STONE

EXTREMOS MARBLE

MAs MICRO CONCRETE

New York 646.707.3065 Brooklyn 718.389.8360 Hicksville 516.997.9412

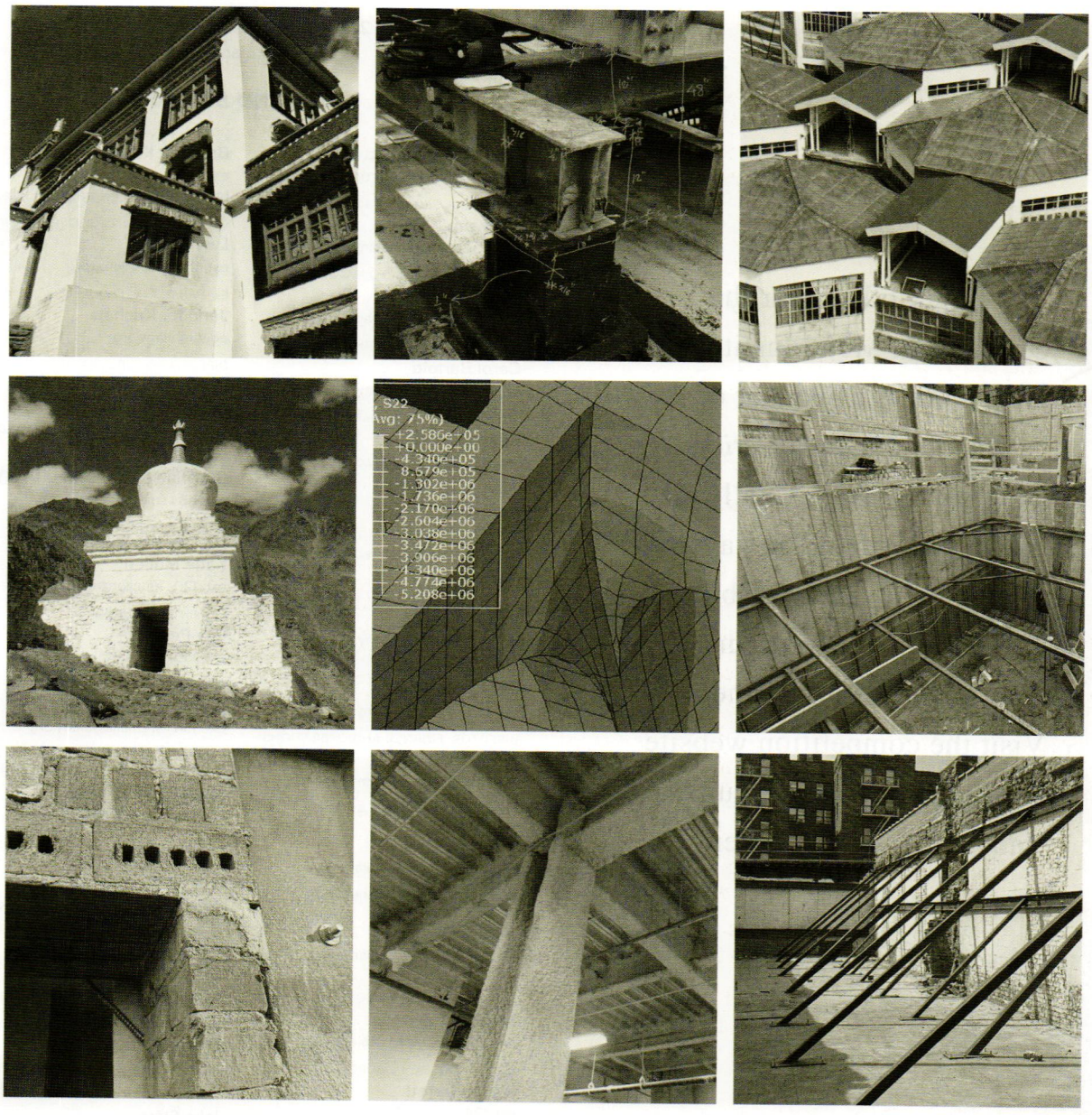
This space was designed by John Beckmann of Axis Mundi, featuring the Cerebral Matter mantle from his Altared States collection exclusively for ABC Stone.

Take the journey

Oculus

A Publication of the
American Institute of Architects New York
(AIA New York)
WINTER 2025 Vol. 87, Number 1

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING • SPECIAL INSPECTIONS • PRESERVATION ENGINEERING



ང་ཚོས་བཟོ་བགོོད་ཀྱི་གཞི་རྩ་ནི་བཟོ་སྐྱན་ཀྱི་སྐྱ་རུལ་དང་ཚན་རིག་གཉིས་ཟུང་དུ་སྦྱལ་བ་ཞིག་ཡིན་པའི་ཡིད་ཆེས་བརྟན་པོ་བྱེད་བཞིན་ཡོད།

STUDIO NYANDAK IS A CERTIFIED MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE IN NYC AND NEW YORK STATE

STUDIO **NYANDAK**

tenzin@nyandak.com
(646) 398-8548
www.nyandak.com

AIA NEW YORK

Center for Architecture

536 LaGuardia Place
New York, NY 10012

212.683.0023 | info@aiany.org
www.aiany.org

STAFF AND SERVICES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Jesse Lazar, Assoc. AIA
ext. 108 | jlazar@aiany.org

SENIOR SECURITY GUARD
Deshaun Allaway
ext. 121 | dallaway@aiany.org

DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
Iyabo Babatunde
ext. 117 | ibabatunde@aiany.org

ACCOUNTING MANAGER
Carol Bartold
ext. 128 | cbartold@aiany.org

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
Felicia Butler
ext. 119 | fbutler@aiany.org

GRANTS MANAGER
Ruth Cole
ext. 125 |
rcole@centerforarchitecture.org

EXHIBITIONS AND PROGRAMS ASSISTANT
Sophie Cooke
ext. 138 | scooke@aiany.org

FACILITIES ASSOCIATE
Charles Cortes
ext. 130 | ccortes@aiany.org

DIRECTOR, FINANCE AND OPERATIONS
Mary De Rosa
ext. 131 | mderosa@aiany.org

SENIOR GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS MANAGER
Bria Donohue
ext. 116 | bdonohue@aiany.org

MEMBERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR
Shreya Dwibedy
ext. 118 | sdwibedy@aiany.org

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL CONTENT AND STRATEGY
Meghan Edwards
ext. 136 | medwards@aiany.org

AV TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR
Lucas Garrett
ext. 124

LEAD DESIGN EDUCATOR
Tim Hayduk
ext. 137 |
thayduk@centerforarchitecture.org

PROGRAM AND EVENT MANAGER
Salmata Kaba
ext. 139 | skaba@aiany.org

DESIGN EDUCATOR
Breanna Katsman
ext. 127 |
bkatsman@centerforarchitecture.org

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
Lynn Kim
ext. 114 | lkim@aiany.org

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, *OCULUS*
Jennifer Krichels
editor@aiany.org

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
Lisa Mazzola
ext. 135 |
lmazzola@centerforarchitecture.org

MANAGING DIRECTOR, AIANY
Suzanne Mecs, Hon. AIA NYS
ext. 115 | smecs@aiany.org

DIRECTOR OF EXHIBITIONS AND PROGRAMS
Katie Mullen
ext. 120 | kmullen@aiany.org

FACILITIES MANAGER
Ray Perez
ext. 130 | rperez@aiany.org

ASSISTANT DEVELOPMENT MANAGER
Samantha Remulla
ext. 134 | sremulla@aiany.org

EVENTS & ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR
Marielle Sarmiento
ext. 113 | msarmiento@aiany.org

YOUTH PROGRAMS MANAGER
Mary Lib Schmidt
ext. 133 |
mschmidt@centerforarchitecture.org

SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER
Rachel Serkin
ext.132 |
rserkin@centerforarchitecture.org

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER
Evelyn Serrano
ext. 110 | eserrano@aiany.org

AV TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR
Jake Slater
ext. 124

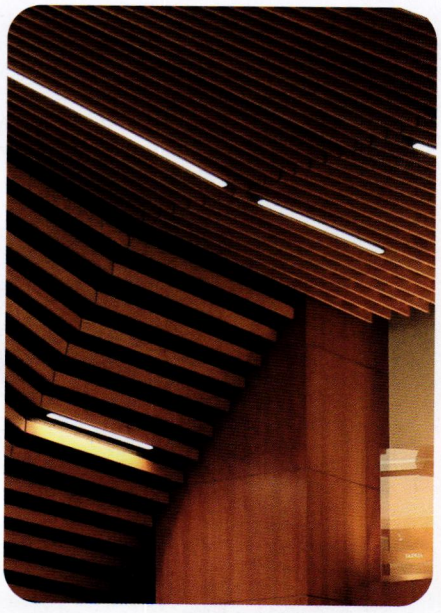
IT/AV TECHNOLOGY MANAGER
Philip Stevens
ext. 124 | pstevens@aiany.org

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
Annie Trowbridge
ext. 124 | atrowbridge@aiany.org

PUBLIC INFORMATION ASSISTANTS
Victor Alvarez, Jamie Teich
ext. 111 | frontdesk@aiany.org

Oculus is a benefit of both American Institute of Architects New York (AIA New York) and Center for Architecture membership. For information on professional and public memberships, please call 212.358.6118.

Oculus is published by BNP Media II, LLC, four times annually (spring, summer, fall, and winter) for AIA New York, 536 LaGuardia Place, New York, NY 10012. Printed in the U.S.A. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement #40612608. GST account: 131263923. Send returns (Canada) to IMEX Global Solutions, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON, N6C 6B2. Change of address: Send old address label along with new address, name, and phone number to info@aiany.org.



Devoted to delivering your vision

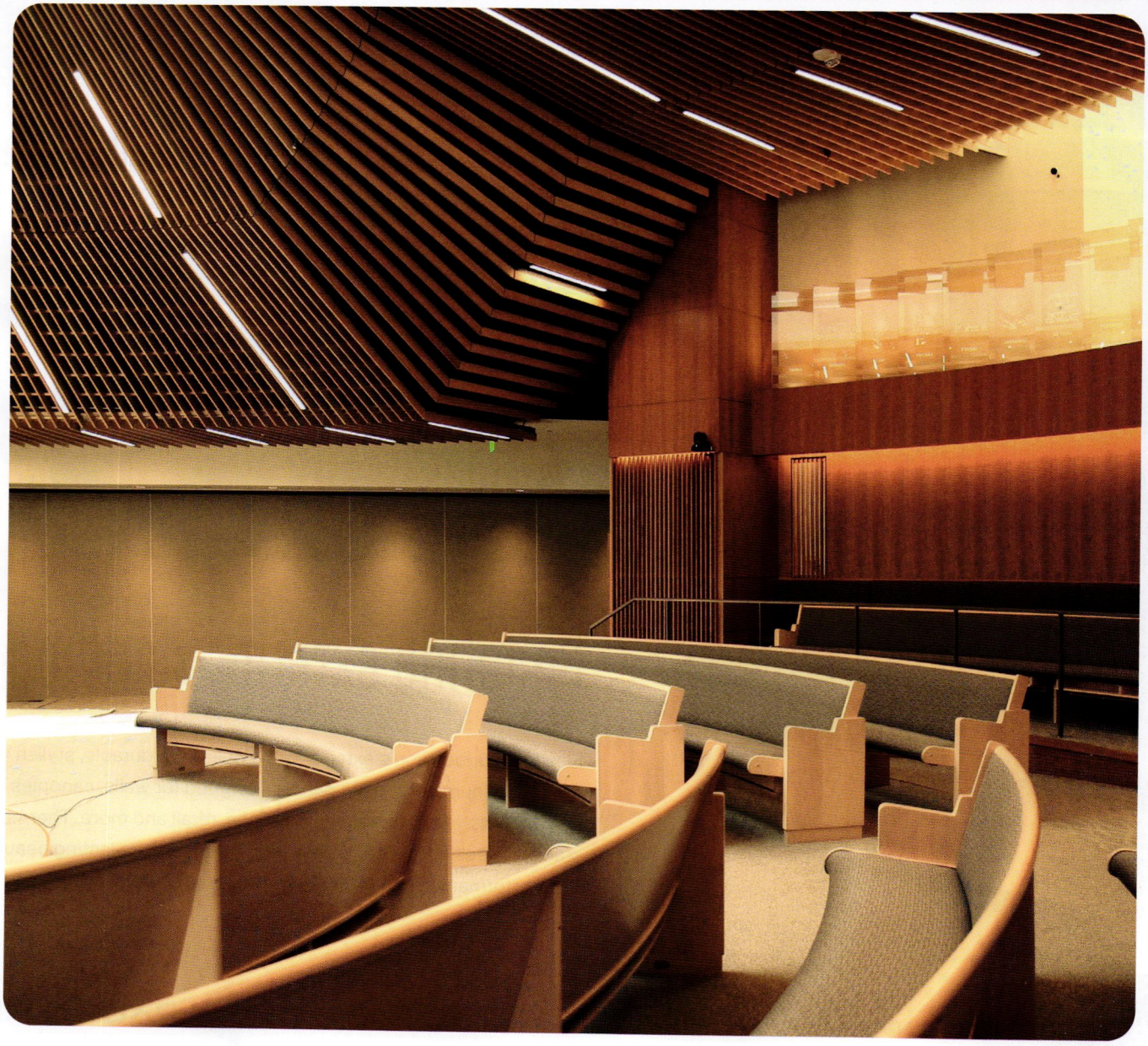
9 WOOD

We are more than an award-winning custom wood ceiling manufacturer.

We're a dedicated partner who works with you every step of the way to bring your design vision to life, on spec and at speed, every time.

How can we help you?

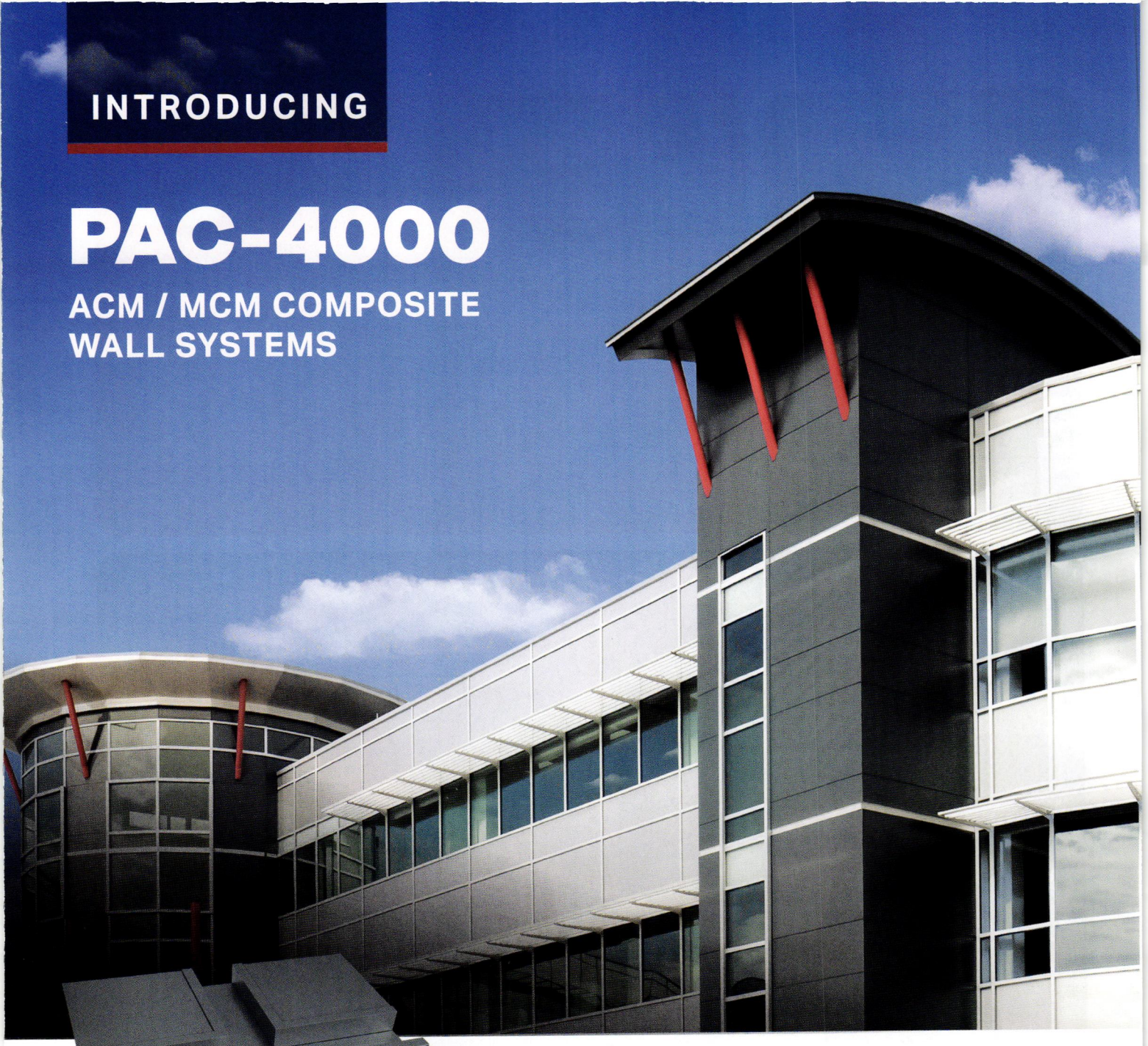
9wood.com/customfast

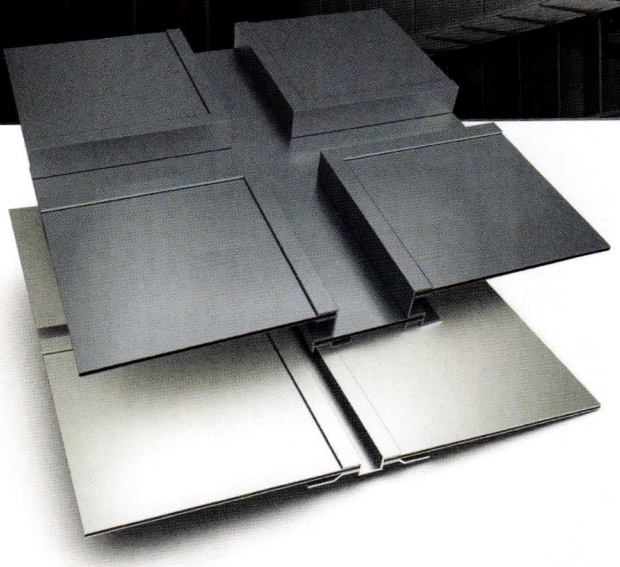


INTRODUCING

PAC-4000

ACM / MCM COMPOSITE WALL SYSTEMS





Redefine exterior cladding

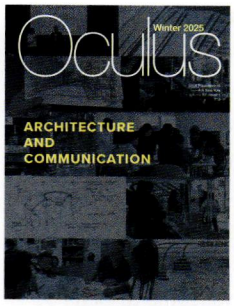
Elevate your building's exterior with PAC-4000: durable, stylish 4mm aluminum composite panels designed for walls, canopies and accents. Ideal for hospitals, offices, retail and more. Thermal stability, sleek finishes and easy installation ensure lasting beauty and performance. PAC-4000—where design meets innovation.

Learn more

PAC-CLAD.COM | 800 PAC CLAD

PAC-CLAD
PETERSEN
A CARLISLE COMPANY

ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNICATION



Cover: Communication abounds: Architects are working with communities and within their own firms to understand and communicate a variety of viewpoints.
Top: Dattner partner Ruth Ro, right, works alongside team members Troy Lacombe and Allexxus Farley-Thomas. The firm has made a commitment to communicating inclusivity internally and to valuing diverse perspectives in every design.

Features

Departments

Starting the Conversation

BY *OCULUS* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **JENNIFER KRICHELS**

When we set out to create an issue about architecture and communication, we hoped these pages would offer some timely, and timeless, thoughts on how architecture professionals are both collectors and disseminators of untold amounts of information. We see the word "communication" as encompassing a huge range of formats: not only words, images, and messages relayed in built work, but also myriad intangible gestures related to culture, inclusivity, and equity. We knew this issue was bound up with our own work in the media, and hoped it would shine a light on our internal best practices as a traditional print publication as well.

If there is a lesson to this issue, however, it is that we need to stop and take in the world around us before putting pencil to paper, fingers to keyboard, or face to screen. I paused writing this letter because, at our press deadline, we found ourselves watching an unprecedented tragedy unfold for our friends in Los Angeles. As of this writing, the wildfires there are minimally contained, and a full death toll is unknown. Most of us have family, friends, and colleagues who have been displaced from their homes and offices, and more than 10,000 structures have already been destroyed, according to California's fire services. As this profession knows well, each one of those structures, whether a landmarked building, an elementary school, or a bus shelter, represents a vast amount of history, infrastructure, labor, and resources lost.

Hours ago, AIA Los Angeles Chapter put out a social media statement on the formation of a Wildfire Disaster Response Task Force, and I know many in New York will be devoting themselves to LA's recovery in the days, weeks, and years to come. While the work ahead seems unfathomable at this moment, the New York community will undoubtedly be a wellspring of support for our friends and collaborators on the opposite coast, as they have been for us in times of disaster. As we contemplate the ways in which the design profession takes part in structures of communication, architects, urban planners, and civic leaders are about to embark on one of the most important communication and collaboration efforts of their careers, as they contemplate aiding devastated communities and rebuilding a city that is forever changed.

When I spoke with Jesse Lazar (see his words on "Architects as Storytellers and Listeners" on page 40) about the unfolding crisis, like many of us he thought about it in terms of the global issues faced by the profession: "We know that the climate crisis will continue to present more intense and acute challenges like this, especially in major cities and places that have not had these problems in the past. Architects are indispensable in society's response to these conditions, by the innovation they will bring to rebuilding efforts, disaster mitigation, and resiliency, and even more importantly by our profession's long-standing commitment to climate action."

As we learn during any unfolding emergency and our workaday tasks alike, communication and the information inherent in it is not one-directional output—it is a weblike system of collection, analysis, and output. Architects are in a position to elevate their own voices and share the value and purpose of their work, but if we have learned anything from this issue and our current times, it is that with that responsibility comes the enormous task of working to understand the broadest possible variety of viewpoints and goals. This magazine hopes to be a conduit for this work, and we hope that the year ahead will allow us to prove our worth as communicators in the community.

I would also like to extend the magazine's warm welcome to Ben Gilmartin, AIA New York Chapter's new president, and am excited to see more of his thoughts in our pages in the year to come. Thanks, as always, to Greg Switzer, as he moves into his role as immediate past president. We will not forget his thoughtful contributions to our conversations over the past year, and will carry them well into the future.

Jennifer Krichels, Editor-in-Chief
editor@aiany.org

AIANY HONORS AND AWARDS 2025

Please join us to celebrate the recipients of the 2025 AIA New York Design Awards, Medal of Honor, Champion of Architecture Medal, Architecture in Media Award, and New Perspectives Awards.

RSVP by March 27th, 2025
aiany.org/designawards

April 25, 2025
Cipriani
Wall Street

11:30am Reception & Networking
12:30pm Awards Program

AIA New York

Thank You, and See You IRL

BY 2024 AIANY PRESIDENT **GREGORY T. SWITZER**, AIA, NOMA, NCARB, AND 2025 AIANY PRESIDENT **BENJAMIN GILMARTIN**, AIA

Serving as president of this Chapter has been one of the most fulfilling and exciting periods of my professional journey, and I want to thank everyone who has supported me during this time. I have such fond memories of last December 12, when Chapter members, committee chairs, and students responded enthusiastically to the vision behind my presidential theme, Belonging and Beyond. This message, rooted in the idea of feeling recognized and connected to a community or space, truly struck a powerful chord.

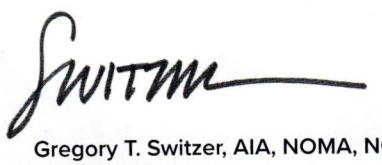
I engaged with AIA New York committees, educators, non-profit think tanks, students, allied professionals, and other community members to collaboratively refine and explore the potential of this theme. Together, we identified two key through lines: The first was establishing design practices and engagement standards to shift systemic patterns of exclusion, harm, and mistrust; the second was prioritizing the intentional inclusion of community engagement to nurture a shared sense of belonging through authentic dialogue, self-awareness, and inclusive design practices. From these ideas, we developed two critical priorities to guide AIANY's focus over the next two years:

Priority 1: Supporting Practitioner Learning, Mindset, and Practice Shifts to enhance community engagement by equipping practitioners with essential resources and training. Initiatives include creating a virtual library of engagement tools and principles that reflect AIANY's values. To support professional growth, AIANY will develop continuing education unit courses highlighting the importance of engagement, and evaluate awards programs to celebrate exemplary practices. Fostering a network of practitioners and specialists will also encourage knowledge-sharing and drive innovation in community-centered design.

Priority 2: Advocating for Funding and Reforming Community Engagement Processes to transform and support how community engagement is executed. Efforts include exploring grants to fund engagement activities throughout all project phases, from design to post-occupancy. Building coalitions with like-minded organizations will amplify advocacy for meaningful reform. Leveraging the Political Action Fund and engaging public officials, AIANY will champion policy changes and improvements within public agency engagement practices

We've already begun implementing these priorities through lectures, programming, and collaborative opportunities across AIANY's network. We've embraced every chance to advance the goals of Belonging and Beyond, and we'll continue to do so as I step into my role as immediate past president.

It has been an extraordinary honor to serve this Chapter, and I look forward to supporting Ben as he steps into the leadership role.



Gregory T. Switzer, AIA, NOMA, NCARB
2024 AIANY President

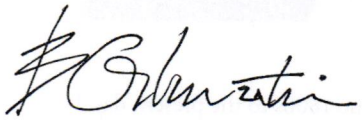
It is inspiring to have been part of this year's programs at AIANY under Greg's leadership, and to have supported his vision of making meaningful change in how we design and practice with greater mindfulness, collaboration, inclusivity, and direct engagement with the communities for whom we design. I am committed to helping advance his initiatives in the coming year.

I wanted to give a shout-out to Greg's collaboration this past year with Ann Marie Baranowski, FAIA, and the Cultural Facilities Committee on the panel series, The Future of Public Space and Art, which examined from multiple perspectives how design of the public realm can elevate our shared sense of belonging. This dialogue resonated deeply with me.

The experience of being together "in real life," in the physical spaces we designers create, is powerful, particularly right now. This post-election moment has amplified individual feelings of uncertainty and division. AIANY will remain steadfast in its commitment to advocating for just and sustainable communities. In this pivotal moment, we can reimagine New York's public spaces—the theaters of our public life—to be lively, distinctive, engaging, and places of belonging for all.

My presidential theme, See You IRL: Designing for Public Life, will honor and extend Greg's vision, continuing collaboration with our

committees during 2025 to amplify the important theme of belonging to our shared civic, cultural, and social life in the city's great public spaces. In the fall, we will stage an exhibition at the Center for Architecture showcasing projects around the city that exemplify new design approaches to large-scale civic and social spaces, and offer speculative ideas that probe the nature of our public contemporary sphere. I am grateful to Greg for striving to make meaningful change in our daily practice, and I look forward to the honor of serving our community in 2025.



Benjamin Gilmartin, AIA
2025 AIANY President

Contributors to This Issue

CRISTOBAL CORREA, P.E., ("Sketching as Communication") is a principal in Buro Happold's New York office. With over 30 years of experience, he has led the design of innovative structures around the world. He is also the director of technology and a professor at the Pratt Institute School of Graduate Architecture and Urban Design, and an active board member of Open House New York.

ZACH MORTICE ("Building Culture") is a Chicago-based design journalist and critic focusing on architecture and landscape architecture. His work examines the intersection of design and public policy.

CLIFFORD A. PEARSON ("Let's Talk") is the co-author, with A. Eugene Kohn, of *The World by Design*, and writes about architecture and urbanism. He is the director of the University of Southern California's American Academy in China and a contributing editor at *Architectural Record*.

ANJULIE RAO ("Architecture on the Air") is a Chicago-based journalist and critic covering the built environment. Much of her work addresses the intersections between architecture, landscapes, and cultural change. She teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

DAVID SOKOL ("Street Level") is a Hudson Valley-based design journalist whose *Oculus* assignments go back 23 years. His recent books include *Hudson Modern* and *Hamptons Modern*, both published by Monacelli, as well as collaborations with Workstead, Desai Chia, and Debbie Millman. He contributes regularly to *Dwell*, where he helped launch its "Deep Dive" vertical, and to *Architectural Digest*.

On View

AT THE CENTER

Why Design?

Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Place
Through April 5, 2025

Center for Architecture
centerforarchitecture.org

"Why Design?"—the Center for Architecture Education Department's latest exhibition—showcases the incredible design work of students and families from all its education programs. The exhibit not only highlights the outstanding creativity and innovation of young minds, but also emphasizes the importance of design education and its impact on our future leaders.

At its core, "Why Design?" is a celebration of the project-based methodologies that have become the hallmark of the Center's educational approach. Through its in-school residencies and engaging workshops, students have the opportunity to explore the world of design in a hands-on, meaningful way. These experiences empower them to think critically and creatively, developing skills that are vital in today's ever-evolving landscape.

As the Center marks its 20th anniversary, the exhibition also pays homage to the rich history of Learning By Design: NY, which was pioneered in the late 1990s by the organization's former director of education, Catherine Teegarden, who initially ran the program out of her home.

During the preparation for this exhibition, Design Educator Breanna Katsmann and Director of Education Lisa Mazzola delved into the archives, uncovering a treasure trove of projects that illuminate the growth and evolution of the program. The stories of past and present students, teachers, and school communities resonate deeply, showcasing how design can transform educational experiences and foster collaboration.

Throughout the duration of the exhibition, select projects will be spotlighted, providing insights and narratives that reveal the thought processes behind the designs. Each project represents not just a creative endeavor, but also a journey of exploration and discovery that nurtures students' abilities to envision and shape the world around them.

BEYOND THE CENTER

Visible Vault: Open Collections Storage

The National Building Museum
Washington, D.C.
Permanent Exhibition

"Visible Vault: Open Collections Storage," a new permanent exhibition at The National Building Museum, provides unprecedented access to thousands of artifacts that have been stored behind closed doors, some of them for decades. Opened in December, the exhibition showcases both significant and commonplace historical artifacts ranging from the 1800s to the present day. It offers a rare opportunity for visitors to experience the breadth and depth of the museum's permanent collection, shedding light on America's architectural and design heritage in a dynamic, accessible way.

"By bringing thousands of artifacts—many of which have never been on display—out of storage, we are not only celebrating America's architectural and design legacy, but also transforming how we engage with and understand the built environment," said Aileen Fuchs, president and executive director of the museum. "Every artifact has a fascinating story, and we are excited to share them with the public. By opening our vaults and allowing visitors to do a deeper dive using digital tools, we are creating a more inclusive experience that invites audiences to explore, learn, and connect with the history of the places and spaces that shape our lives."

"Visible Vault" features more than 2,500 artifacts that have previously been inaccessible due to their size, scope, and material complexity. The display represents highlights from the museum's massive collection of 500,000 artifacts, and includes objects such as architectural blueprints and models,

Facing: The Education Department's latest exhibition showcases the work of students and families who have come through the doors over the past 20 years.
Right: The National Building Museum has put its vast archive on permanent display, allowing visitors to open file drawers to discover light-sensitive treasures.

bricks, plaster molds, photographs, building fragments, toy collections, souvenir buildings, drafting tools, and historical building equipment.

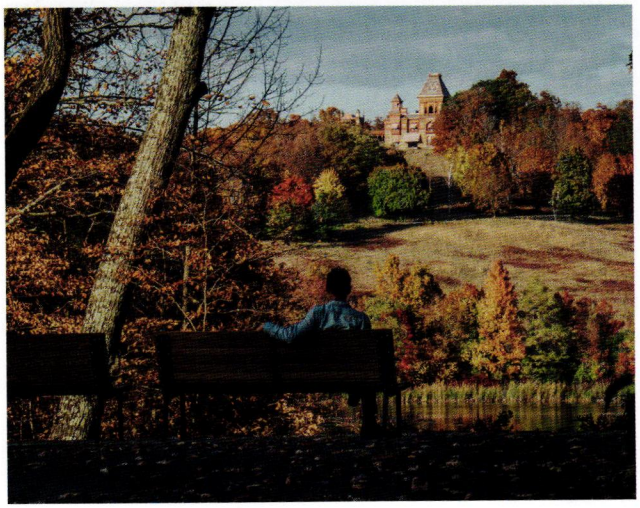
In addition to custom display cabinetry, the exhibition contains numerous file drawers that visitors are encouraged to open to discover light-sensitive pieces, such as drawings, construction toys in their original boxes, and small items like product samples and dollhouse furniture. The museum will rotate artifacts regularly to share new acquisitions and work contributed by its partners.

A special highlight of "Visible Vault" is the museum's beloved Architectural Toy Collection, the largest collection of building toys in America. It includes over 100 years of educational play materials, such as Lincoln Logs (designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's son, John Lloyd Wright), LEGO brick sets, Erector sets, Froebel's kindergarten bricks, dollhouses—including the Petite Princess collection from the 1960s—and specialty items like Meccano models and Walt Disney Frontier Logs. ■

The Frederic Church Center for Art and Landscape at Olana

The new ARO- and NBW-designed gateway to the historic campus is a quiet triumph in communicating old and new intentions alike.

BY **DAVID SOKOL**



In 1826, as Frederic Edwin Church was just entering this world, Thomas Cole was turning one part of it on its head. The painter had just completed a headline-making series of depictions of the Catskills that established America's first homegrown style and Cole its founding father. Eighteen years later, Church joined Cole at his home on the western edge of the Hudson River to learn from the visionary, and over two years the pair would often ferry to its opposite bank and sketch on a hillside south of the city of Hudson, New York.

In 1860, newly married and an art-world luminary in his own right, Church purchased 126 acres of this farmland, for which he commissioned a Richard Morris Hunt-designed cottage orné. Six years later, he bought the adjacent hilltop and partnered with Calvert Vaux to erect a residence for luxuriating in the annexed site's vistas. That fantastical and painstakingly orchestrated building, Olana, would not be fully complete until 1891, and Church continued expanding and landscaping the entire property as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* almost obsessively until his death in 1900.

The recently opened Frederic Church Center for Art and Landscape, realized by Architecture Research Office (ARO) in collaboration with Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects (NBW), bestows much-needed space at Olana State Historic

Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects created an outdoor pavilion and amphitheater that flows from the new ARO-designed center.

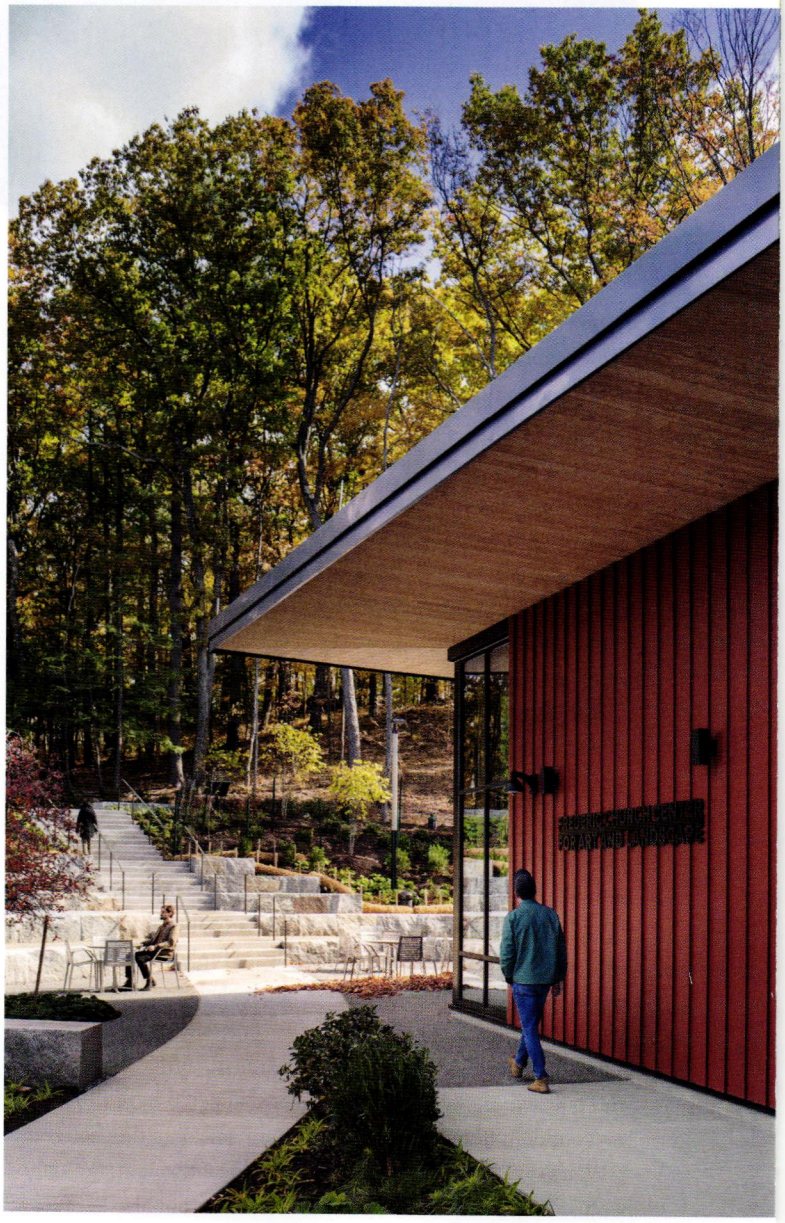
The sustainably designed, all-electric visitors center is the first structure built at Olana since Frederic Church's lifetime.

Site to share Church's story with the detail and nuance it deserves. And, thanks to its deeply considered design, visitors to this 4,500-square-foot gateway structure can better grasp the artist's most ambitious project as he had intended.

Since Olana was plucked from potential destruction and transferred to New York State ownership in 1966, its namesake home, grounds, and vistas have advanced America's preservation movement almost as profoundly as the Hudson River School impacted its art. For decades, a legion of public and private entities has worked to restore the 250-acre property and safeguard approximately 3,000 acres within its viewshed. Today, more than 200,000 people visit the Olana State Historic Site annually.

Yet, among its fiercest defenders as well as day-tripping guests, few enthusiasts have truly known Olana. In recent years, approximately 16% of public visitors have toured the property's main residence; 90% engaged with just 1% of the total landscape. "I think asphalt is to blame," says landscape architect Thomas Woltz of the gulf between attendance and immersion. The state-run site's existing road system, which shuttled visitors to the rear of the house, he explains, failed to pique greater curiosity about Olana as a cultural landscape. The NBW senior principal adds that ecological progression since Church's death exacerbated that shortcoming; reforestation of negative spaces "meant you had no opportunity to understand the depth of Church's intention, to realize that you were a participant in the tableau."

Woltz recognized this disconnect as early as 2014, when NBW was tapped to create a strategic plan for restoring Olana and improving its visitor infrastructure. The plan proposed an



The mass timber center—the first public building of its kind in New York State—has dark red vertical wood siding and generous eaves.

The center orients visitors to the the Olana State Historic Site.

all-new visitors center that, besides accommodating storytelling, could simply give folks a place to comfortably orient themselves while awaiting a house tour. Perhaps more importantly, NBW steered the visitor center's placement to the campus entrance on the state highway. Positioning the building here would encourage interaction with the far-flung woodlands, meadows, roads, and ancillary structures that Church conceived with the same meticulousness as Olana itself. Because Church had never envisioned such a facility, Woltz explains, such siting allowed the building's future architect to tuck it out of the viewshed from the Ombra—an indoor-outdoor space that is arguably Olana's signature room.

"Visibility was something we worked hard to study in terms of siting the building, along with its massing, scale, and height," ARO Principal Kim Yao says of shepherding the conceptual diagrams to a full-fledged design. In turn, the single-story volume as realized is wedge-shaped in plan, and wrapped in red cladding that subtly reinterprets traditional board and batten. The center's massing and skin reference the structures of Church's farm complex; overtures toward replication they are not. A slight fold in the building's north elevation and a similar twist in its cantilevering roof are soft yet assured expressions of our time. "It has a very engaging dynamism," observes Woltz, who quickly notes another parameter that could have thwarted a less confident design team: "This is a miracle on a tiny budget."

Woltz's positive reflections carry significant weight, not only because he participated in architect selection, but also because ARO's work is so keenly integrated with NBW's treatment of the surrounding landscape. (He says he would "walk through fire for ARO.") Consider that inflection in the north elevation, which reconciles the interface of the building, its parallel parking lot, and the planted circulation between them. The gesture also coaxes exterior pedestrian movement toward the east elevation, where NBW created an outdoor terrace and amphitheater that feels almost indivisible from architecture by way of those broad eaves.

The Frederic Church Center for Art and Landscape is its own total work of design, which invites further exploration—leading perhaps to discovery of the project's own multiple dimensions, such as its all-electric performance and use of cross-laminated timber, and certainly of Olana more widely. "It's a portal to a larger experience," says ARO Principal Adam Yarinsky, who adds, "Engagement with existing fabric is not a constraint but a really interesting way of calibrating your formal and conceptual approach to architecture."

"The site and the architecture belong at Olana," Woltz asserts. "They're living in a 21st-century world, but they haven't forsaken their heritage. They've embraced it and turned it into something else."■

WINTER 2025 FEATURES

ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Architects are expected to communicate to many different audiences: to clients and potential clients, to the public and community stakeholders, to colleagues and consultants, to students and educators, and to the press. Of course, all these audiences are sources of feedback and information themselves, leaving practitioners to sort out what and how they filter information back into their practice and ultimately the built world. Our Winter 2025 edition asks architects to consider issues of communication in areas that the editors felt were of particular importance today: How do they communicate with the public and incorporate public feedback into their work in a substantive way? How do firm leaders of various-sized practices establish the culture of their firms and invite their colleagues to co-create it? Where are some of the most challenging and transparent conversations around ethics, sustainability, fees, clients, and creativity happening in a shrinking media landscape? (Spoiler alert: podcasts!) If there's an underlying theme here, it's about talking only after doing a lot of listening. *The Editors*

Let's Talk

BY **CLIFFORD A. PEARSON**

How architects are engaging communities in their work through dialogue, surveys, and ongoing collaboration.

Architects today know they need to reach out to users and the people who live in the communities where they build, but often struggle with doing so effectively. Interviews with architects in both practice and academia reveal some strategies they are employing to bring the voice of the public into their work.

"It's about empowering, not just inclusion," says Claudia Herasme, a partner at Partners in Public Design (PPD), a Manhattan-based urban-design practice led by people with deep experience in the public sector and law. Herasme, who served as managing deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Planning and Design at Chicago's Department of Planning and Development and as chief urban designer at New York City's Department of City Planning before joining PPD, explains that architects and planners must do more than just listen to the public. They must use what they hear to shape their designs.

"We need to really understand how people perceive a place, how they feel about it," says Herasme. "That means talking to all kinds of constituents—from elected officials to regular folks just trying to live their lives, from advocates to dissenters who don't want any change." Confrontation is often part of this process, she admits, but it can help architects design a project that "brings everyone's concerns to the table." No project can resolve all the competing concerns, she admits, but each should at least address them and find solutions that accommodate most of them.

Herasme's firm often breaks free of meeting rooms to experience sites with the people who will be using them. For a recent job to develop a concept design for revitalizing a park and main street in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, PPD and SCAPE

"We need to really understand how people perceive a place, how they feel about it. That means talking to all kinds of constituents—from elected officials to regular folks just trying to live their lives, from advocates to dissenters who don't want any change."

CLAUDIA HERASME
Partner at ***Partners in Public Design***

Courtesy the Place, Memory, and Culture Incubator, Spitzer School of Architecture

The Place, Memory, and Culture Incubator, a new initiative within the Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York, transforms the ways in which students engage and connect with Harlem communities and their deep-seated histories.

As part of the development of a concept design for revitalizing a park and main street in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Partners in Public Design and SCAPE Landscape Architecture held meetings with community members outdoors in public spaces and toured downtown in wheelchairs with an accessibility advocate.

Work on the Johnstown project began with an open house at the town's visitors center on Main Street, which had been advertised in the local newspaper, on social media, and via the city's existing Main Street Committee.

Landscape Architecture held some meetings outdoors in public spaces, including Gazebo Place; biked parts of the town with residents; and toured downtown in wheelchairs with an accessibility advocate. Such exercises allowed residents to point out aspects of their town that might not have been addressed in a traditional indoor meeting, and let the designers explain how they approach public space. "Lots of architects see engagement as something that needs to be done, but we really enjoy it and feel it's the richest part of the design process," says Herasme.

To explain their initial design strategies, the PPD principals use a lot of hand sketches and renderings that evoke the feeling of a place rather than declaring, "This is the design," says Herasme. The drawings tend to show the project from a pedestrian's perspective to emphasize the experience of being in and moving through the project. "We start with sketches and then develop design principles based on what the public brings to the table," she says. "At architecture school, we're trained to be owners of our design, but we try to open that up and make it a co-created vision."

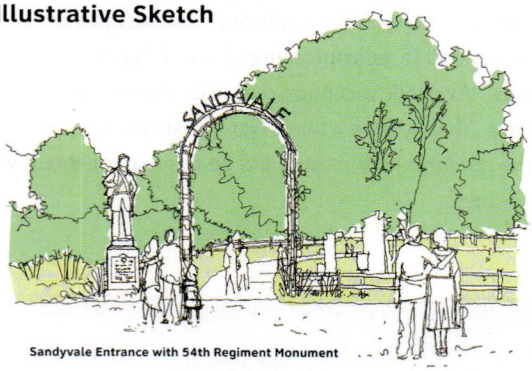
Work on the Johnstown project began with an open house at the town's visitors center on Main Street, which had been advertised in the local newspaper, on social media, and via the city's existing Main Street Committee, composed of local business and community leaders. PPD and SCAPE engaged the 100 residents who attended the open house in a pair of exercises: one asked what they love and don't love about Main Street and nearby Central Park, and the other asked what elements they want in the future of downtown. They conducted in-person and online surveys during and after the open house. From this input, the PPD/SCAPE team developed a set of design principles touching on issues such as inclusivity, accessibility, health, ecology, transparency, boldness, fun, pride, maintenance, resilience, and forward-looking initiatives.

Next steps included a design-options meeting held at Gazebo Place, a design options survey, the development of a concept design overview, and the unveiling of that overview at an outdoor meeting. The team collected public responses to the concept design on comment cards and via an interactive mural organized by a public art consultant. They also heard

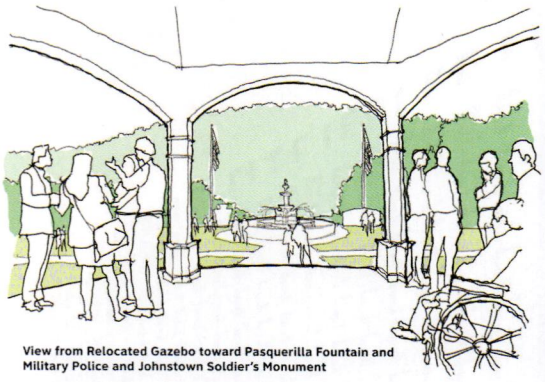
Courtesy Partners in Public Design

> "We believe every resident is an expert in the city, because they live there. The question is: How do we tap into that knowledge so we can create cities that are more responsive to their needs?"
>
> **CLAUDIA HERASME**
> *Partner at* ***Partners in Public Design***

VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK IN SANDYVALE
Illustrative Sketch



Sandyvale Entrance with 54th Regiment Monument



View from Relocated Gazebo toward Pasquerilla Fountain and Military Police and Johnstown Soldier's Monument

Top: Partners in Public Design held a session with students to help develop a concept for a project in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. **Above**: Changes to the Sandyvale Veteran's Memorial Park In Johnstown required extensive conversations with local veterans.

from the public through a series of community conversations at local events, including a polka fest, community days in various neighborhoods, a Juneteenth celebration, and a Pride event.

PPD and SCAPE made sure to engage different groups of residents, such as kids, young adults, bike advocates, artists and makers, entrepreneurs, and veterans. Because their concept design looked at moving some monuments and statues from Central Park to another park a mile away, they held talks with local veterans who initially were not happy about the change. In the end, the designers and planners recommended keeping some monuments in Central Park, while relocating a few to the other park. They also reached out to residents of public housing, who often feel they are not heard or included in public decisions, says Herasme. "We believe every resident is an expert on the city, because they live there," she explains. "The question is: How do we tap into that knowledge so we can create cities that are more responsive to their needs?"

Fostering Meaningful Design Conversations

In the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn, Think! Architecture + Design has designed a 230-unit housing project that responds to the needs of the community by including a 20,000-square-foot space for local entrepreneurs and businesses. Currently halfway through construction, the project—Glenmore Manor—acknowledges that housing is just one of the critical issues facing people in the area, says Jack Esterson, a founding principal of the firm. It was developed by a consortium of non-profit community developer African American Planning Commission, affordable housing developer and builder Lemle & Wolff Companies, and construction management and development company Brisa Builders. The project combines apartments for several different groups—families earning less than 80% of the area's median income, formerly homeless families, and low-income seniors—with the facility for emerging businesses. Called the B'Ville Hub, this two-story element provides space for the Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corp., the Brooklyn Coop Credit Union, an Asian restaurant, a public radio station, and a salon and beauty-training rooms.

Glenmore Manor is part of an effort by the City of New York to spur development in Brownsville by modifying zoning and density allowances and creating 2,500 units of affordable housing. The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), along with the Department of Transportation and the Housing Development Corporation, launched the project by conducting outreach to area residents and listening to their concerns. The departments "learned that housing is not the only crisis in New York," says Esterson. "There are serious problems with education, job training, and economic opportunity." As a result, HPD has been "piggybacking other components into housing projects," he explains. "For Glenmore Manor, that meant job training and economic development in addition to housing."

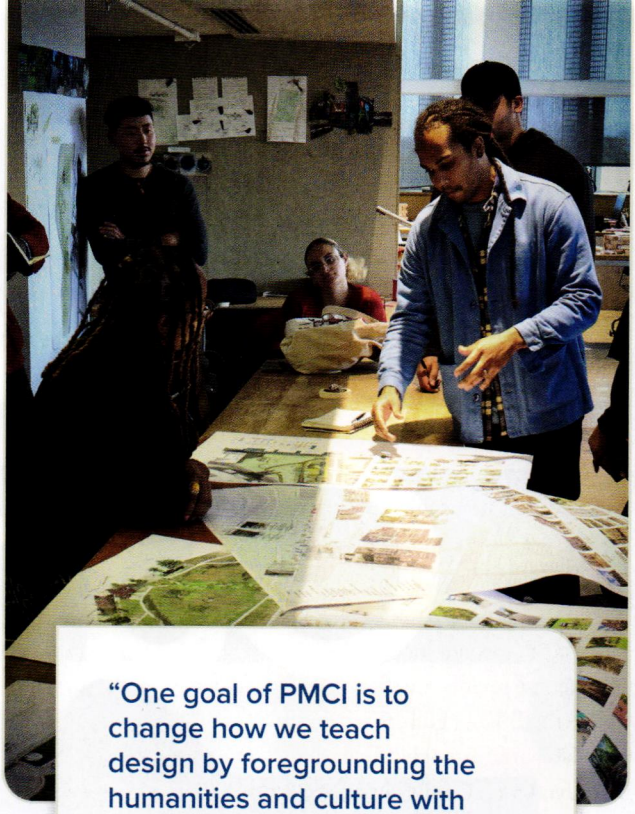
In preparing its request for proposals (RFP) for the project, HPD held meetings with Brownsville residents, conducted surveys, and reached out to residents in many ways. In doing so, the city learned that people in the area wanted a credit union, a sit-down restaurant, and a radio station, so these elements were included in the RFP as part of the commercial component. Think! also relied heavily on the expertise of Ericka Keller, the CEO of Brisa Builders, who grew up in Brownsville, goes to church there, and is on a first-name basis with many of the people living there. "Ericka can't walk down the street without people stopping her and saying hi," states Esterson. "She set up a series of visioning sessions at night at local schools, and invited the public to tell us what they wanted."

After listening to local residents, Think! gave the B'Ville Hub a prominent location at one corner of the building and wrapped it in glass to make it visible from the street. "We wanted it to be a landmark, a beacon," says Esterson. "You can't just listen; you need to respond in some meaningful way. It has to be more than just gloss." At public meetings, especially early in the process, he continues, "there's often a lot of fear and skepticism. You need to treat the residents with respect and be transparent about what you're doing."

HPD held meetings with Brownsville residents, conducted surveys, and reached out to residents in many ways. They learned that people in the area wanted a credit union, a sit-down restaurant, and a radio station, so these elements were included in the RFP as part of the commercial component.

Think! Architecture and Design's Glenmore Manor in Brownsville, Brooklyn, will create 233 apartments serving extremely low-income families, formerly homeless individuals, and low-income seniors. The apartments sit atop a two-story glazed podium dedicated to a center for innovation and local entrepreneurship.

Courtesy Think! Architecture and Design



Multidisciplinary designer, artist and educator Curry J. Hackett taught a Fall 2024 advanced studio through the Incubator: "Yards & Yards & Yards: Toward a New Ecology on Saint Nicholas Avenue."

Courtesy the Place, Memory, and Culture Incubator, Spitzer School of Architecture

Drawing Creative Energy from the Community

While design practices are engaging more extensively with local communities, academic institutions are realizing they need to teach future architects and planners how to contribute to such efforts when they graduate. The Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York, for example, established an ambitious program in 2022 that uses Harlem, its home, as a focus for pedagogy. Called the Place, Memory, and Culture Incubator (PMCI) and funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the initiative leverages connections with Harlem's diverse communities to shape the way students understand the role of preservation in the face of ongoing urban transformations, and how they might engage with the rich histories in the neighborhood.

"One goal of PMCI is to change how we teach design by foregrounding the humanities and culture with an interdisciplinary approach," explains Jerome Haferd, who is the program's co-director, along with the school's dean, Marta Gutman. "To do that, we aim to deepen and strengthen existing relationships with community partners in Harlem, and forge new ones," says Gutman. "The idea is to walk down the hill to meet our partners, rather than asking them to come up to meet us." These partners include the Harlem Arts Alliance, the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, Uptown Grand Central, and Save Harlem Now! "We want to integrate new ideas of preservation and the teaching of history, architectural history, and preservation practice in our studios," she says.

One studio supported by PMCI focuses on the 125th Street Corridor and asks students to study and document the culture, community, and living history of Harlem's iconic thoroughfare, and then design a culturally resilient future for the area. The studio examines not only the physical fabric of the neighborhood, but ephemeral aspects—such as street art, bodegas, bars, and flea markets—that change over time. Students work with the program's partner organizations to tap into local knowledge and cultural production and establish a "sustained dialogue with the artists and stewards of Harlem's living heritage," states the PMCI website. One element of this effort is to create a "Living Digital Archive" that will grow over time and be accessible to the public. This ensures that the work done each semester builds on what came before and won't be lost or confined to the school.

This past spring, students in the 125th Street Corridor Studio met with a 93-year-old local artist, Franco Gaskin, who for many years has painted murals on the roll-down gates protecting storefronts in the neighborhood. First installed in the 1960s and '70s in response to concerns about vandalism, the mostly opaque gates are woven into the social history of the city and reveal changing attitudes about crime, art, commerce, and representation. As the area gentrifies and businesses renovate their shop fronts, these vibrant artifacts and the stories they tell are threatened with being erased.

> **"One goal of PMCI is to change how we teach design by foregrounding the humanities and culture with an interdisciplinary approach. To do that, we aim to deepen and strengthen existing relationships with community partners in Harlem, and forge new ones."**
>
> **JEROME HAFERD**
> *Co-director, **Place, Memory, and Culture Incubator (PMCI)***

Thanks to the Mellon Foundation grant, PMCI also distributes micro-grants of a few thousand dollars to community groups, enabling partner organizations to continue work on particular projects begun during the semester. "We hope our students learn to listen—and understand that they have a responsibility to the public that's independent of their responsibility to the client," says Haferd. "They need to be stewards of the community's interest."

Whether working in the public or the private sector, on large or small projects, designers are growing increasingly aware that responding to the needs of users and the public doesn't interfere with creativity, but makes it richer. The model of the Howard Roark-like genius, dreaming up architectural visions independent of the people who will use them, may never disappear entirely, but it is being questioned and discredited today as never before. ■

Building Culture

Far from the output-driven, top-down institutions of the past, today's progressive firms take internal discussions of identity and values as a core mission that informs the work they do.

BY **ZACH MORTICE**

Architecture firm culture exists in the overlap between design philosophy and working conditions, inseparable from the way work is done and the final product. Under pressure to evolve from technology that became omnipresent during the COVID-19 pandemic, and due to social and political currents that seek to monitor how leaders treat their employees, office culture is disseminated formally and informally, as a set of rules in a handbook and as a series of quietly collected observations.

There is purported widespread interest from firm leaders and employees in building a collaborative and non-hierarchical culture, but even in the most progressive settings, there is no escape from elements of culture that flow from top to bottom, sometimes for paradoxical reasons.

Facing: KPF's New York Office. A careful sense of material craft is part of the firm's design DNA. **Above:** OneFlushing, designed by Bernheimer Architecture, is a 230-unit intergenerational and all-affordable housing development in Queens, NY. The project includes a 6,000-square-foot community center, providing both adult day care and social-service needs for the neighborhood, and 29,000 square feet of mixed retail space.

That's the case for **Bernheimer Architecture**, which specializes in affordable housing in New York City. With a current staff of 18, the firm made history last summer as the first unionized shop in architecture, after months of negotiations and voluntary recognition by management. "Over the last two-and-a-half years, we've been preoccupied with firm culture," says Founding Principal Andy Bernheimer, and in many ways this effort has coincided with his staff's work towards unionization. "The unionization effort was the catalyst for a lot of conversations about what kind of office this place is. A great deal of that discussion during the negotiations was subtextually about office culture, even as it was primarily about contract language."

As this way of working has evolved, intuitively, the union contract makes work and firm culture more collaborative in some ways, but also more hierarchical—and transparent—in others. As a relatively co-equal partner with management, and with legal protections defining working conditions, union members "felt more accountable and responsible for the future of the practice," says Ayman Rouhani, who has been an architect at Bernheimer since 2020. Autonomy—and power—within the firm enabled members to exercise agency and foresight in ways that traditional hierarchical relationships and the final, unmitigated say of management would discourage. Traditionally, most important decisions at architecture firms are made "behind closed doors, and you have no say," Rouhani says.

This collective voice means there is more room for democratic debate and consensus, itself a radical change in culture. Many things that determine firm culture that were traditionally the province of elite decision makers are now up for debate. Early on, when the unionization effort looked to be successful, staff conducted internal surveys to determine the top issues for a contract to address, all of which were intensely connected to firm culture. These included maintaining a hybrid work model, parental leave policies, clear delineations of job responsibilities, mentorship, and professional development.

But management and labor's contractually defined roles create a unique (for architecture) hierarchy that is likely to be more ambiguous elsewhere. Supervisory responsibilities and access to information such as financials, for example, make certain people part of management, with a distinct and legally defined set of roles and responsibilities. "That legal hierarchy has instilled a greater need for transparency," says Bernheimer.

This includes measures that require notice periods for reductions in hours and layoffs, and an end to at-will employment. Managers must give staff a more detailed picture of the firm's financial situation, where new work is coming from, who it's for, and what new work leaders are pursuing.

As a specialist firm (75% of Bernheimer's work is on affordable housing projects), aligning staff values with project types is a key driver of firm culture. This tight focus on a specific project type focuses firm culture around a progressive social mandate to improve the lives of city residents who need it most. "Just knowing our clients are working in those people's interests makes for a positive workplace culture," says Bernheimer.

This tight focus on a specific project type focuses firm culture around a progressive social mandate to improve the lives of city residents who need it most. "Just knowing our clients are working in those people's interests makes for a positive workplace culture."

ANDY BERNHEIMER
Bernheimer *Founding Partner*

In terms of design output, the culture of a firm is often the mediating point between broad vision and design execution, macro-scale planning and micro-level details. At Brooklyn-based design studio **Civilian**, culture is derived from the firm's small size and interdisciplinary straddling. Founded in 2018 by Nicko Elliott and Ksenia Kagner, the boutique firm currently has three to four full-time staff members, with a strong focus on interiors as well as traditional architecture.

"We warn people they're going to have to talk with a structural engineer about piles, and then give an opinion on what vase looks cool on a table."

NICKO ELLIOTT
Civilian *Co-Founder*

NewLab at Michigan Central (top right), an ambitious reuse project in Detroit, and Sandbox Films studio and screening room (above) in Manhattan, were designed by Brooklyn-based studio Civilian. The small firm is comfortable working from minute to grand scales, and communicates the need for this versatility to its incoming colleagues.

Designers there are responsible for overall design vision, but also for granular details of finishings and furnishings, and their attendant costs. "While we're talking about lofty design ideas, spatial relationships, and form, everyone is also on the phone with the furniture vendor," says Elliott. "We warn people they're going to have to talk with a structural engineer about piles, and then give an opinion on what vase looks cool on a table."

Similarly, the firm's design culture operates at two different scales of the representation process simultaneously. "We're all about rendering and drawing at the same time," Elliott says. "The rendering never exists without an actual drawing of a real thing. When we push these two things, interesting things happen because a rendering can leave lots of open questions, and a detailed sketch of a thing closes them off."

Brian W. Ferry (top); Chris Mottalini (bottom)

"Your relationship with the contractor is what allows you to solve some of these on-site problems." This relationship was "the real reason why that project sings."

BECKY GARNETT
Garnett.DePasquale *Co-Founder*

Top: Garnett.DePasquale designed a master plan for the East End Food Hub in Riverhead, New York. The campus and the organization behind it support the East End's vibrant food producers, connecting them with local resources and customers.
Bottom: The firm's Meadowlark House, in Sag Harbor, lent itself to some "pretty serious Modernism," says the New York firm's Co-Founder Becky Garnett.

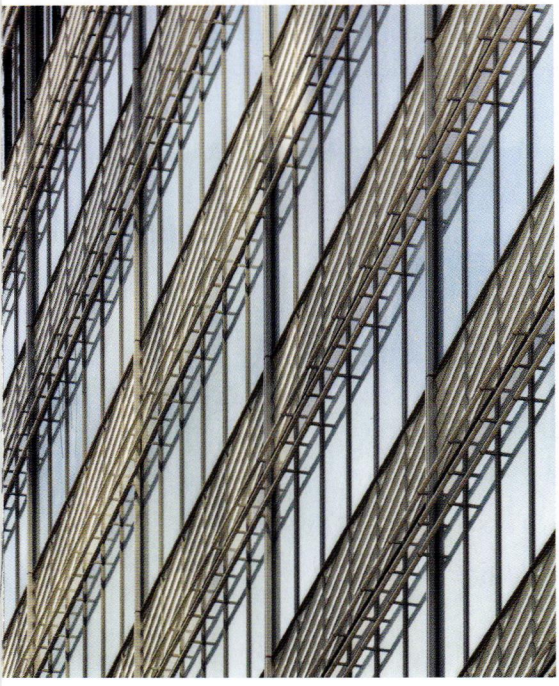
Another example of a small firm working nimbly across disciplines, **Garnett.DePasquale**'s firm culture prizes untangling the intimate and idiosyncratic ways that residential clients use their spaces, and translating this into tight coordination with builders and contractors in ways that makes details shine. This means bringing contractors "on board from the very beginning of the design process," says Founder Pete DePasquale. An iterative relationship with contractors, where their perspective can influence design decisions before they are finalized, means accurately assessing costs and troubleshooting logistical hiccups in advance.

The seven-person firm, founded in 2019 and based in New York City and on Long Island, saw this approach coalesce recently with its Meadowlark House in Sag Harbor. While it was located in a historic district, the new house would not be governed by preservation restrictions, which cleared the table for their clients to do some "pretty serious Modernism," says Co-Founder Becky Garnett. As such, the house needed to feature carefully crafted finishings that looked handmade, but were absolutely exacting in their execution. "There was a lot of math," she says. "Your relationship with the contractor is what allows you to solve some of these on-site problems." This relationship was "the real reason why that project sings."

Like many architects who set out to establish their own offices after working at larger firms, Garnett and co-founder and husband Peter DePasquale thought carefully about what they had learned from culture and working styles in previous offices. From her time at Thomas Phifer and Partners, Garnett learned to interrogate each underlying component of a building intensely—like the relevant building codes—so that she could innovate on top of them. "This made for designs that were so studied and meticulous they came off as whimsical and effortless. But they were also sensible and buildable," she says.

At the other end of the firm size scale, **KPF** boasts nine offices across North America, Europe, and Asia, with 600 people on staff. Given the complexity of managing the firm culture of a multi-continental design operation, leaders there are concerned with how management can best transmit a design ethos across time and space. Counterintuitively, this means de-emphasizing administrative regulation itself as an effective way to delineate culture. All firm partners, including President James von Klemperer, spend significant time designing. That's half his workload. "I'm a little unusual for a person who says I run a firm," he says. "I design buildings."

KPF de-emphasizes administrative regulation itself as an effective way to delineate culture. All firm partners, including President James von Klemperer, spend significant time designing. That's half his workload. "I'm a little unusual for a person who says I run a firm," he says. "I design buildings."



This helps ensure the attention to material detail and craft that von Klemperer says is at the center of the firm's design culture and philosophy. For the firm's Vanderbilt Tower in Midtown Manhattan, the architects popped champagne when the client agreed to include 1,400 feet of terra-cotta spandrels traveling up the entire length of the building. "Getting the client to accept and understand the value of that measure of the building was huge," von Klemperer says. "That's a bit of KPF culture: caring about the large and small at the same time."

Top: KPF has been involved in surgically restoring and renovating Covent Garden, a neighborhood in central London, for 20 years. **Left:** The façade of One Vanderbilt, an office tower in Manhattan designed by KPF.

A careful sense of material craft is part of the firm's design DNA; firm Founder Eugene Kohn was a student of Louis Kahn at the University of Pennsylvania. "Materials are the soul of architecture," says von Klemperer. "I'll spend all day or all week working on the design of something that's going to become a bronze casting."

This design culture approach is most exemplified by the Covent Garden neighborhood in central London, developed by Capital and Counties Limited, which KPF has been involved with for 20 years. In some ways, Covent Garden is an odd choice for a firm that usually designs large, new commercial buildings and towers. This historic neighborhood of low-rise, three- and four-story buildings was to be surgically restored and renovated in ways that kept its charming 19th-century urban fabric intact, and amplified its presence as a retail mixed-use destination. Therefore, the scale of KPF's inquiry focused on how material details could lend a sense of continuity to new construction and restorations. The firm decided to "spend a few months thinking about where the brick and dark metal come together," says von Klemperer.

"Office culture in our terms isn't about the workplace—physically—in my estimation. It's about *how* we work, rather than *where* we work."

ANDY BERNHEIMER
Bernheimer *Founding Partner*

The result is an interstitial landscape experience, where courtyards, streetscapes, and atria are woven together with pedestrian paths and bridges. Hidden corridors lead to interior courtyards, and historic structures are given to adaptive reuse. Subtly asymmetrical steel-framed windows (resembling the stacked crates that populated the area's historic fruit and vegetable market) adjust the proportions of traditional architecture toward a modern, contemporary expression.

KPF also uses a number of formal and informal social and administrative functions to transmit this design culture philosophy. The firm hosts evening events at which staff present about speculative design concepts: the ground place in urbanism, typological studies, and geographic studies. Principals also have lunch together every week. "Everybody has to get up and sing for their lunch, and say what they have been working on," says von Klemperer. "It's kind of like an old-fashioned atelier: show your work." He says collaboration beyond hierarchy is also important and, as such, principals' offices at KPF don't have doors and aren't secluded, including his own.

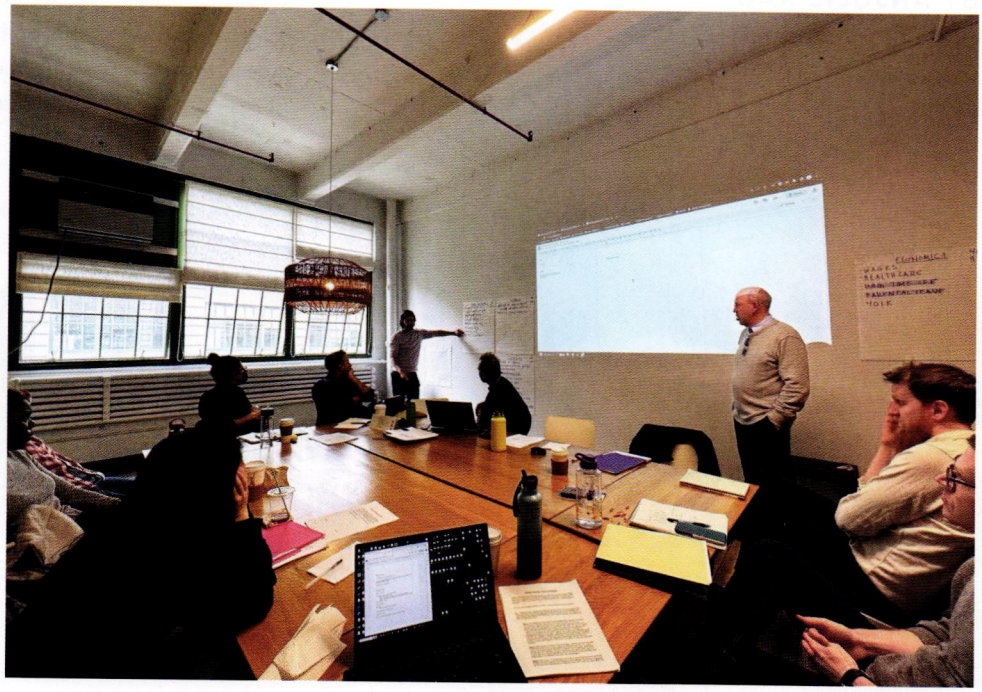
This de-emphasis on spatial hierarchy in the office is taken further at Bernheimer. Since the pandemic, the firm has stuck to a hybrid and remote work regimen, a simple measure that can do more to tip the work-life balance dynamic (a fashionable rhetorical concession among firm leaders, if not always practiced) in favor of employees. Staffers have a physical office, but it's rare for them to be there. "Office culture in our terms isn't about the workplace—physically—in my estimation," says Bernheimer. "It's about *how* we work, rather than *where* we work."

"There was an opportunity with COVID when everyone asked, 'What does an office look like? What should it look like? What does being a full-time employee look like?'" says Rouhani.

Because management never mandated a return to the office, "that was one of the big signals that we were different," he says—different enough that a unionization effort might work.

One benefit of unionization was the ability to lock in a firm culture that the staff felt was, on the whole, quite good. "We wanted to put down on paper everything that was working for us so we could have a say in what the future might look like," says Rouhani. "Developing culture is something all of us, as part of the union, are invested in." ■

A unionization meeting at Bernheimer Architecture



Courtesy Bernheimer Architecture

ARCHITECTURE ON THE AIR

Whether seeking to fill a void left by traditional media or construct new venues for dialogue, podcasting about architecture is building a bold future for itself.

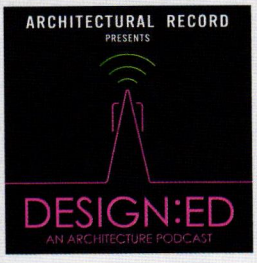
BY **ANJULIE RAO**

As many arts journalists and critics lament, the field of cultural journalism has diminished. Those who have been spared from newspaper and magazine budget cuts find themselves competing for column inches, while others have been forced to strike out on their own. For some, podcasts have become a sort of safe haven: those with an entrepreneurial spirit and access to a decent microphone can embark on telling the stories that traditional media have axed. For good reason, then, podcasting has grown: According to the Pew Research Center, the percentage of American listeners over age 12 who have listened to a podcast in the past month has grown from 9% in 2008 to 42% in 2023. The International Advertising Bureau

LISTEN UP

Oculus Editors' Top Podcast Picks

Buildings on Air
kdunn.info/buildings-on-air-audio



DESIGN:ED
architecturalrecord.com/designed-podcast

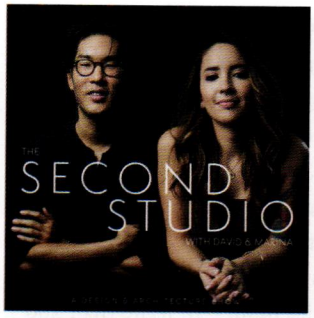
predicts that the podcast-creator economy will double over the next three years, based on advertiser surveys.

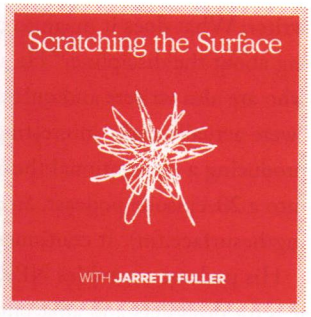
It's good news for creators and listeners alike, especially in an industry like architecture, where media coverage has been slimming down over the past decade. In this field, podcasting presents an opportunity to communicate with multiple audiences—the general public, other design professionals, and even clients—on issues such as theory, professional practice, education, and more. Two design-specific podcasts, *The Second Studio* and *Scratching the Surface,* are attempting to not just fill in the gaps left by traditional media's decline, but to elaborate on the nuances of design and practice. It's a revival of sorts, bringing back the depth of coverage and authorial voice that have been diminishing, a way to tease out and make transparent the lived realities and conceptual complexities of the designed environment.

Architects David Bruce Lee and Marina Bourderonnet started their podcast *The Second Studio* (secondstudiopod.com) almost seven years ago. Lee and Bourderonnet were both working in New York at the time; Lee was in graduate school under the tutelage of the late great Michael Sorkin, while Bourderonnet was working at an architecture firm. The couple would come home after a long day and debrief on what took place—the conversations, difficulties, and culture embodied in practice. Lee believed there was something in their conversations that was relatable to both anyone working at a firm and to those who'd grown weary of the tired media landscape.

"A lot of the content was being produced by people who once had a background in architecture, but ages ago. They didn't quite understand what it meant to be practicing currently because their time was spent teaching architecture or whatever else. There was what I perceived to be a gap," he says. "And, at that time, similar conversations were happening among our peers, and I felt we could put this in a bottle, so to speak, and launch it out there."

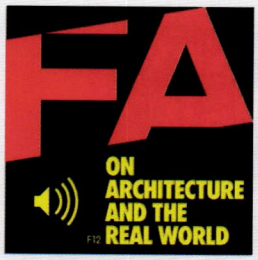
Bourderonnet hadn't had much experience listening to podcasts, but Lee was an avid listener of conversational podcasts, like comedian Ricky Gervais's self-titled show. "It's basically three English guys just shooting the breeze for a couple of hours. I thought it was so interesting to have very loosely formatted content that is humorous and sometimes very insightful because three people are talking as if no one's around," Lee explains. The two saw parallels in their after-hours chats, which were sometimes light and other times critical. "All our friends are architects, so we had a lot of things to share," adds Bourderonnet. "We figured, maybe we could record our conversations, put it out there, and see if it resonates with anyone, which eventually it did." They started anonymously under the name *The Midnight Charrette,* recording their first episodes at midnight. They had to learn how to use audio equipment and editing software to produce each episode but, most importantly, they had to learn how to speak.





Second Studio, hosted by David Bruce Lee and Marina Bourderonnet, and *Scratching the Surface*, hosted by Jarrett Fuller, are two podcasts that delve in-depth into practice, ethics, and design, often addressing issues that traditional media can't—or wouldn't—broach.

Podcast covers courtesy respective podcasts



Failed Architecture
failedarchitecture.com/podcast

Generation Green New Deal
generationgreennewdeal.com/podcast

I Would Prefer Not To
archleague.org/project/i-would-prefer-not-to

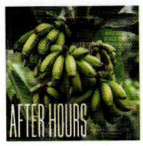
"Listening to myself in the early days, I realized that my architectural education did me a disservice because I was speaking in such a pseudo-academic manner," says Lee. "I'd listen back and realize it's very convoluted, so the podcast has been a great tool to learn more about how I speak."
As the podcast evolved (the team changed the name to *The Second Studio* in 2020), they created different types of episodes: They maintain their late-night chats, called After Hours; invite others for Guest Interviews; provide guidance for clients via Project Companion; and more. After Hours is more explicit—with lots of late-night, post-studio swearing—in comparison to their Fellow Designer episodes, which provide tips for younger practitioners.

The Second Studio has framed itself as an all-in-one podcast, where everyone from students to long-standing practitioners (and design-curious members of the public) can tune in. One of their recent After Hours episodes, "Apples, Bananas, Design Reviews, and the Broken Education System," candidly addressed the awful nature of architecture school's end-of-semester critiques. The episode is darkly funny, and also unexpectedly helpful to any student or juror. The hosts' friendly, informal approach, including interviews and advice, has helped build their reputation, but the conversations draw much-needed connections between practice culture, client relationships, and more, making transparent the closed-door environs of traditional architecture practice.

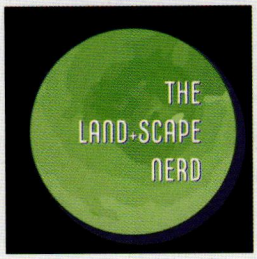
Jarrett Fuller, a graphic designer and podcaster, produces audio that similarly appeals to many audiences, but focuses solely on one specific storytelling typology: the interview. The podcast and its format came to him while developing his grad school thesis in 2016. Fuller explains, "I was interested in the overlaps in the process of designing and writing, and also in the positionality of the designer and the writer: What does it mean to be a designer who is also writing about the discipline?" He started interviewing designers who are also writers and quickly realized those interviews "were actually really interesting on their own." Rather than producing a conventional thesis, he turned those interviews into a 20-episode podcast, *Scratching the Surface* (scratchingthesurface.fm). It continues to this day.

His podcast resembles NPR's *Fresh Air* show in style, but it is for designers and adjacent disciplines. In more than 260 episodes, he's brought on established names in architecture, like Robert AM Stern, Jeanne Gang, and Reinier de Graaf, and has interviewed critics like Edwin Heathcoate, Kyle

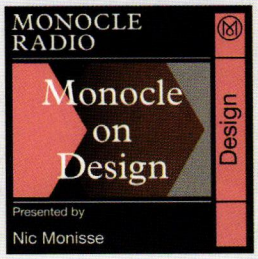
DAVID LEE: "Almost all the problems of students and their work are not because of their lack of competence, skills, or talent. It goes back to the education system. Everyone is trying to learn the ropes so they can win the game, and that's not how you should approach learning architecture. I'm concerned that we're allowing ourselves, as the people who are in charge, to cater to them."



From *The Second Studio* Episode #397: "After Hours: Apples, Bananas, Design Reviews, and the Broken Education System"



The Landscape Nerd
thelandscapenerd.com/podcast



Monocle On Design
monocle.com/radio/shows/monocle-on-design

New Angle: Voice
bwaf.org/resources/podcast

Chayka, and Michael Kimmelman. But his curiosity extends past capital-A architecture. "In a weird way, the podcast feels like a completely selfish endeavor. It is a way for me to ask people smarter than me about all the things I'm thinking about," he says. In September 2019, he interviewed author and artist Jenny Odell; while she has a background in graphic design, the interview connects seemingly disparate topics related to literature, design, and the attention economy. While it's not a straightforward "story about architecture," it exemplifies Fuller's real motivations.

"What animates me are the ideas behind the work," says Fuller. "It's about the concepts and stories around the work, sometimes more so than the actual object itself—the narrative around it, how you talk about it, where it comes from, what lineage it fits in. All that stuff is very interesting to me." To make this podcast successful, he's had to learn how to conduct interviews to draw these ideas out. "It's not a puff piece," he says. "It is meant to be challenging and intellectually stimulating for the guest."

While *The Second Studio* is filling a gap in media, *Scratching the Surface* is attempting to meet a need in design discourse. Fuller is critical not of the media but of designers themselves.

"I think the design fields don't often do a good job of talking about their work, why things look the way they do, how they move through a set of problems or a design brief, or the ideas and inspirations that animate their work. There are better ways to talk about what we do—to talk about design, architecture, and how this stuff fits into the larger world," he says.

While podcasts aren't everyone's cup of tea, both *The Second Studio* and *Scratching the Surface* have built solid audiences of people searching for new voices, and for what has disappeared from traditional design media. While they can accomplish many tasks—like adding transparency to architecture firm employment, or enriching a project that has been PR-ified by sanitized sound bites—podcasts are able to draw out deeper meanings, motivations, and processes. It's not a podcast-as-media solution—rather, it's a podcast as an enduring provocation. ■

JENNY ODELL: "When I'm scrolling across Google Earth, looking for something I already had some idea of, and collecting a big pile of those things, the question is, how I can order these in a way that makes a new argument, or reanimates my original fascination with them?"

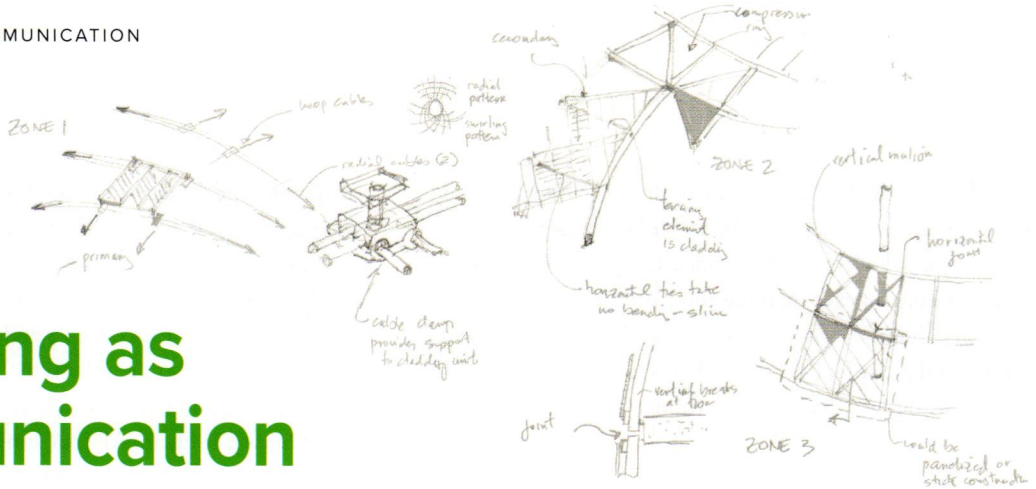
JARRETT FULLER: "I interviewed the designer Michael Rock, who is a principal at the studio 2x4. He had a great quote that he sees graphic design as an 'elaborate form of writing,' in that it's taking pre-existing things and collaging them together in new ways."

From *Scratching the Surface* Episode #132, "Jenny Odell"

BYoung Design
youtube.com/BYoungDesign

Stewart Hicks Takes On Buildings
youtube.com/stewarthicks

Unraveling Architecture
youtube.com/UnravelingArchitecture



Sketching as Communication

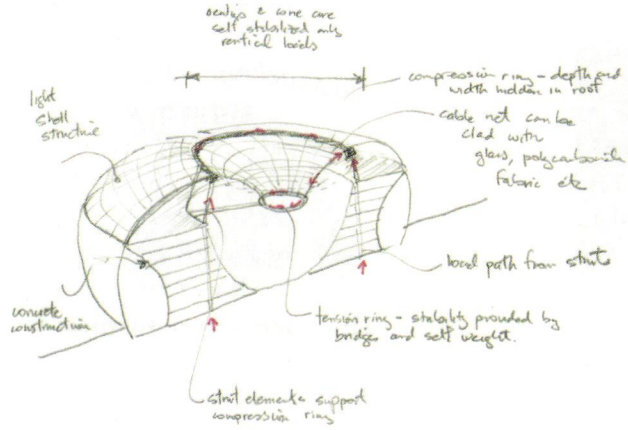
A COMMENTARY BY
CRISTOBAL CORREA, P.E., PRINCIPAL, BURO HAPPOLD NEW YORK CITY

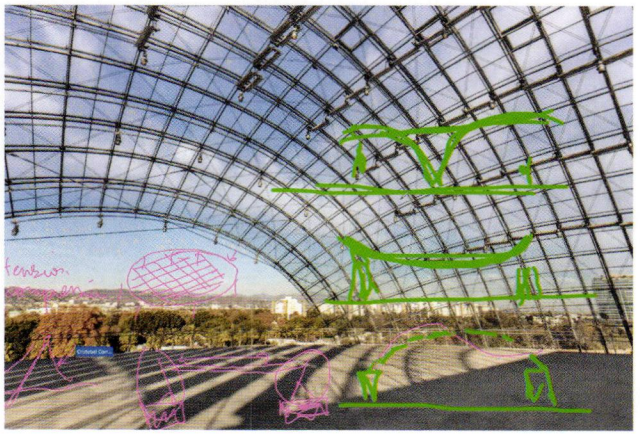
Freehand sketching is more than just a creative outlet; it is a critical tool that bridges the gap between engineering and architecture. It fosters innovation, enhances problem-solving, and facilitates effective communication. Some find sketching intimidating, perhaps because they think sketches need to be perfect, and there is no "delete" or "undo" function as on various digital platforms. In fact, whether as an exercise or as part of the design process, sketching can be liberating. A blank piece of paper represents endless possibilities. If you make a mistake, you can cross it out and start over, right there on the same page.

One can draw using software like Sketchbook to have a similar level of freedom, but once you are in a design suite like Rhino or SketchUp, your mind is already filtering, dealing with more data, and placing artificial restrictions on the creative process. And there is a lot of noise in the digital environment, which tends to bombard the user with images. When you draw, especially on paper, you can cut through the noise and identify the important ideas, allowing you to focus laser-like on what is the most important problem you are trying to solve. That level of clarity helps break down a given challenge into more manageable parts, encouraging lateral thinking and the exploration of multiple solutions simultaneously.

Another reason we at Buro Happold are proponents of freehand is that it's a practical tool for effective communication and collaboration, driving problem-solving and innovation among project partners. Working with Safdie Architects on Singapore's Jewel Changi Airport, we would often sketch on the same piece of paper, passing it back and forth and advancing ideas through multiple iterations. We were able to overlay our ideas in a way that made sense to everybody. Embracing the freedom and flexibility of freehand on paper, the engineers and architects together shaped a vision for an innovative, highly sustainable, and visually arresting one-of-a-kind structure.

Also, this type of sketching can and should continue even as more of us are meeting virtually. As we transition to an electronic stylus and virtual whiteboards on Zoom, Miro, or other software that allows us to keep on sketching, we can share our ideas in real time and more effectively communicate with other team members. ■



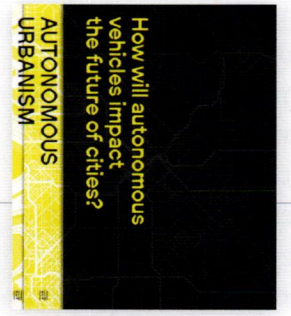


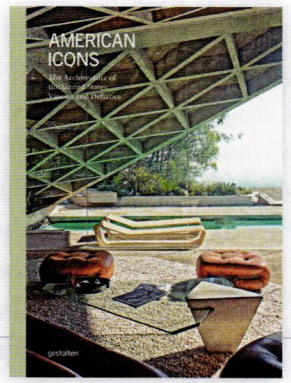
Hand sketches of the Jewel Changi in Singapore by engineer Cristobal Correa, and a collaborative markup of a Zoom whiteboard image of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles. (Jewel Changi was designed by Safdie Architects; the Museum was designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop with architect of record Gensler.)

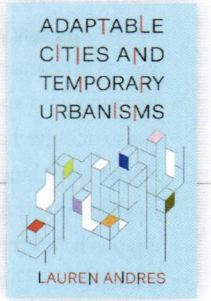
Courtesy Buro Happold

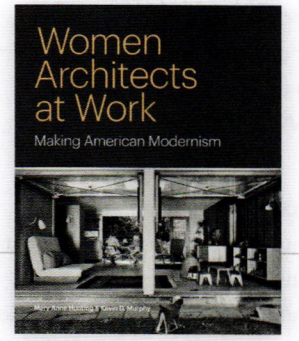
Lit Review

BY **THE EDITORS**









Autonomous Urbanism: Towards a New Transitopia

By Evan Shieh

Applied Research & Design, 2024, 480pp.

While the long-term spatial implications of autonomous vehicles (AVs) remain largely underestimated, *Autonomous Urbanism* argues that AVs offer a major opportunity to rethink our cities' built environments—with profound implications on urban life, as automobiles transformed the design of cities in the prior century. However, AVs also risk reinforcing many negative effects of auto-based urbanism, including urban sprawl, single-function infrastructure, congestion, and environmental degradation. Instead, Shieh proposes a driverless mobility paradigm shift that moves cities away from automobile dependency towards automated mass transit and mobility-as-a-service—using the city of Los Angeles as a test bed.

American Icons: The Architecture of the United States: Visions and Defiance

Edited by Sam Lubell and Gestalten

Gestalten, 2024, 288pp.

The development and expansion of U.S. cities over the last 150 years gave rise to one of the most ambitious and fastest growing building projects the world had ever seen. The landscape of cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and others transformed immeasurably as a consequence of decades of construction. Some of the most iconic architecture in the world—in the form of museums, skyscrapers, residential homes and airports—is located in U.S. cities. Through detailed, professional photography and the writing of Sam Lubell, *American Icons* recounts the stories that form the American skylines, stories told by some of the greatest architects of the 20th century.

Adaptable Cities and Temporary Urbanisms

By Lauren Andres

Columbia University Press, 2025, 328pp.

Adaptable Cities examines temporary urbanisms—the revitalization of underutilized public spaces—across varied global contexts. The book considers their significance for cities and everyday life, as well as for policy and practice. It brings together many distinct forms and facets of temporariness and adaptability—such as sites of consumption by privileged residents and the survival strategies of marginalized groups—drawing on examples spanning five continents. The author highlights how adaptability enhances livability, sustainability, and resilience, showing its importance for addressing crises such as climate change, socioeconomic inequalities, and pandemics.

Women Architects at Work: Making American Modernism

By Mary Anne Hunting and Kevin D. Murphy

Princeton University Press, 2025, 272pp.

In the decades preceding World War II, professional architecture schools enrolled increasing numbers of women, but career success did not come easily. *Women Architects at Work* tells the stories of the resilient and resourceful women who surmounted barriers of sexism, racism, and classism to take on crucial roles in the establishment and growth of Modernism across the United States.

Alongside illustrations, Hunting and Murphy explain how innovative practitioners—alumnae from the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture in Massachusetts, which evolved for the professional education of women between 1916 and 1942—capitalized on social, educational, and professional ties to achieve success, and used modernist architecture to address social concerns, engaging with the community and environment.

The Power of Language

BY **RUTH RO, AIA, NOMA, LEED AP BD+C**

Architecture is a collaborative endeavor, uniting diverse voices—clients, communities, engineers, contractors, and regulators—around a shared vision. At its core lies communication, a skill as critical as a pencil to a sketch or software to a rendering. Yet, in the rush to make decisions or lead meetings, we often forget that how we communicate can be just as significant as what we are trying to say. And using inclusive language, especially when engaging with communities and embracing diverse perspectives within our profession, is essential to achieving successful design.

In the depths of the pandemic, I began to reflect on the power of words and their role in shaping the world around us. The pandemic revealed fractures in society, but also highlighted opportunities for individuals to make an impact. Like many others, I felt compelled to do my part, not only in my workplace, but also in the town where I live and the communities I am part of as an Asian American and a queer woman.

As a result, I helped form my firm's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Task Force, establishing a foundation for more thoughtful practices, policies, and conversations. I joined the board of Build Out Alliance, an organization advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the building design and construction industries, where I launched the advocacy committee. Locally, I started volunteering to facilitate discussions on race with parents, school administrators, and community leaders, building spaces for dialogue during a time of rampant polarization. And, as anti-Asian sentiment rose, I joined forces with fellow residents to form AAPI New Jersey, now the state's largest Asian American advocacy non-profit.

These experiences, along with my work on multi-stakeholder projects, taught me that meaningful change begins with communication—listening, learning, and speaking with intention. I also acquired a deeper understanding of the ways language can either build bridges or reinforce walls. Language shapes how ideas are shared and understood. The words we choose can inspire creativity and build trust—or create barriers.

Technical jargon, while precise, can inadvertently exclude non-experts, reinforcing hierarchies instead of fostering collaboration. In large-scale projects, where community stakeholders often feel disconnected from decisions, clear and inclusive language is essential. Phrases like "fenestration rhythm" or "green infrastructure" might sound impressive, but they risk alienating those unfamiliar with design terminology. Adjusting communication to the audience ensures ideas are accessible, making architecture a shared process. Inclusive language prioritizes clarity over complexity, inviting participation and reaffirming that everyone has a stake in the built environment.

Inclusive language goes beyond clarity: it embodies kindness and respect. It recognizes the power of words to either harm or heal, especially in a profession where marginalized voices have historically been silenced. Through my work with Build Out Alliance and AAPI New Jersey, I've observed how unconscious bias often appears in subtle, seemingly innocuous ways, such as dismissive remarks or the repeated use of language that alienates or excludes. Inclusive language means using correct pronouns and avoiding unnecessary gendered expressions, ensuring that we address individuals as they identify, affirming their dignity and humanity. Moreover, as architects tasked with creating accessible spaces, we must make sure that our words, particularly when discussing disability, reflect the same thoughtfulness and care as our designs.

Tackling unconscious bias demands humility, self-awareness, and effort. When you're corrected, acknowledge it, adjust, and move on. Kindness in communication is not about avoiding difficult conversations, but about engaging in them with respect and a commitment to growth.

However, even when we have the best of intentions, missteps in language occur, and how we address them is just as important. Persisting in the use of harmful language after being made aware of its impact is a deliberate choice. Tackling unconscious bias demands humility, self-awareness, and effort. When you're corrected, acknowledge it, adjust, and move on. Kindness in communication is not about avoiding difficult conversations, but about engaging in them with respect and a commitment to growth. This fosters equity and builds the trust necessary for meaningful progress.

Inclusive communication is as much about listening as it is about speaking. In large-scale developments, stakeholders express priorities differently—some through emotion, others through practicality or technical concerns. An architect's role is to discern the intent behind these expressions. A community member might say, "I don't want this building to ruin the neighborhood." The instinct may be to counter with data or renderings, but this risks overlooking the deeper concerns, such as fears of displacement, loss of

identity, or a lack of agency. By listening without defensiveness, architects can address these underlying concerns and incorporate feedback into designs more meaningfully.

Architecture is a discipline of translation: of human needs into physical spaces, aspirations into design solutions, and abstract ideas into built realities. But before we can design, we need to bridge gaps in understanding, reconcile differing priorities, and find a shared language, one that prioritizes winning hearts over winning arguments. The most successful projects are those in which all stakeholders see themselves in the final design. This success requires more than technical expertise or creative vision—it demands the courage to listen, learn, and build connections through meaningful conversations. ■

Ruth Ro, AIA, NOMA, LEED AP BD+C, (she/they) is a partner at Dattner Architects, a women-owned firm, where she leads the design of large-scale, mixed-use placemaking projects. She has a passion for complex, multi-stakeholder endeavors, advocating for good design and communicating to design and client teams the importance of our responsibility to the greater community. As an openly queer person of color, she is a leader and vocal advocate for social justice, both within the profession and civically. She spearheaded the formation of Dattner's DEI Committee and serves on the board of Build Out Alliance, where she leads advocacy efforts for LGBTQIA+ professionals in the building industry. She facilitates discussions on race with local school administrators and community leaders, and she frequently speaks at rallies and testifies on behalf of marginalized voices. In 2021, Ruth was recognized as one of Crain's Notable LGBTQ Leaders and Executives.

Landscape Architecture's Changing Audience

BY **JACKSON ROLLINGS**

The truth is that most people don't know what landscape architecture is. Operating in a stealth zone between environmental design, the sciences, and the arts, landscape architects claim a miniscule fraction of architecture/engineering services' combined market value. Their ranks are small—about 16,000 licensed practitioners in the U.S., many of whom strive for the effect of an unseen hand shaping the land, and shying away from the spotlight. Misapprehensions abound. The media routinely describes them as architects; my family in rural Georgia thinks I write press releases for gardeners.

Today, those of us who communicate the value of landscape architecture find public perception at an odd threshold. Nationally, leading designers are breaking through on major platforms as champions for climate action, environmental justice, and community-led design. In the past five years alone, three landscape architects have appeared on *Time* 100 lists. When we present landscape-based solutions clearly and strategically, people sit up and listen. We might forgive those who, through the years, have regarded designed landscapes as mere objects of privilege or frivolousness. Landscape can still be about beauty but, today, our work is also seen as a matter of public and planetary affairs.

Understanding these trends is useful for many reasons, the first being basic self-awareness. Many designers believe the media should find their work fascinating simply because *they* do, but this attitude extinguishes interest in half a second. When you study how publications tick and the market forces that shape them, you can identify how landscape attaches itself to relevant stories. Then you might begin to build strategy and answer the most crucial question in communications: Who's your audience, really?

The trade crunch

Today's digital upheaval has already transformed media as we know it, hardening the market into fewer and less diverse outlets. Since 2005, the U.S. has lost a third of its newspapers and two-thirds of its journalists. While a few institutions like *The New York Times* have adapted, smaller outfits have fallen victim.

The ripples have reached us, and trade publications are rapidly consolidating. In our corner of the industry, we've long relied on a single essential monthly, *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, operated by a membership organization and overdue for a digital refresh. Otherwise, in design, most trades focus on the broadly familiar disciplines of architecture and interiors (with the advantage of product tie-ins)—and, to sustain subscribers and ad revenue, many have leaned even further into aspirational, lifestyle, and celebrity content. For outlets that insist on niche beats like landscape and urban design, corporate acquisition has been one of the only lifelines, and coverage is often remixed to become more consumer-facing. The few remaining independent publications face tremendous pressure to find a buyer, and soon.

With its messiness and systems thinking, landscape usually doesn't check the boxes to secure coverage unless projects or firm leaders are themselves packaged as aspirational. Editors scrambling to align the two may wind up reinforcing clichés: the 1.5-acre park that will solve flooding and heal a fractured society; dignitaries posing with blocks of melting ice. These may be effective marketing tools, but they're dull, distract from original thought, and overpromise the impact of a discipline that has much more to offer. On the national stage, many of the same tropes have been adopted in service of bigger stories.

Scaling up

In recent years, a small group of landscape architects have risen to prominence in national publications, broadcast news, and beyond—some with the juggernaut of a once-in-a-lifetime public project, others with a cocktail of ideas and imperatives that align with the emergence of solutions journalism, climate desks, and COVID-driven interest in the public realm. The niche is having its moment in the sun. Suddenly, it seems, everyone with a social media account has detailed opinions about transportation policy, and knows the vibe (if not the meaning) of regenerative ecology. At the Venice Biennale, an elite and largely inaccessible forum where architects work out their narratives in public, many seem to have *just learned* about landscape architecture—countless installations about "designing nature" with a breathless tone of discovery. While this is funny, ahistorical, and often misguided, I lean optimistic and think the exposure is a net positive. Many disagree, but it's happening either way. For a discipline in a 125-year quest for recognition, why now, and why these few?

The starchitect has been around as long as architecture. Aside from Frederick Law Olmsted himself, the landscape starchitect is a new and multifaceted figure, propelled by the energy of the youth environmental movement and embodying the issues of the progressive left, with climate and equity as core drivers. Situated outside of "traditional" expertise, landscape architects are a foil to the character of the mainstream media wonk, offering a synthetic, interdisciplinary approach to environmental and social mores that resists categorization and is almost impossible to boil down into a headline.

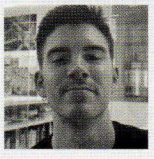
Five years ago, this complexity may have been a disadvantage. Today, amid the "earsplitting noise-to-signal ratio" of digital media, per Jonathan Rosen (see orchestraco.com), the niche point of view may be the only thing that stops our thumbs from endless scrolling.

Nurturing the niche

With both these trends in mind, I often implore designers to think like a media company, and spend a little more time paying attention than demanding it. Not seeing the coverage you want? No problem—invest in original content on your own socials and website. Identify compelling, outspoken people at different levels, not just leadership, and put them front and center. Figure out what sticks, and try again. There's no one solution.

On the editorial side, it's not all dismal. For landscape-oriented writers and editors, the path forward might involve embracing the niche not just as a content strategy, but as a financial model, leveraging an ever-expanding digital toolkit that now includes Substack and short-form video. I'm heartened by those already doing this work—Julia Gamolina for *Madame Architect*, and the wonderfully spicy *New York Review of Architecture*—but I wonder what it could look like for landscape architecture and urban design. I don't know when, or if, this will emerge. Perhaps it already exists. Executed with intention, it could even be profitable.

I do think that while the national coverage we're experiencing is ultimately good, it needs balance, nuance, and the kind of introspection that may be best suited for smaller platforms, written by people inside this industry of soils and stones, who are sincerely invested in its future. ■



Jackson Rollings is director of communications and associate principal at SWA, a global landscape architecture, urban design, and planning firm with eight studios across the U.S. and China. Based in New York, he previously led comms at SCAPE and other design firms, non-profits, and publications in New York and Louisiana, focused primarily on large-scale climate adaptation and resilience planning. He's originally from Savannah, Georgia, and is an avid birdwatcher.

Communicate with Impact

BY **TAMI HAUSMAN, PH.D.**

"I've always wanted to be somebody, but I see now I should have been more specific," said Lily Tomlin.

This statement is not just humorous, it's also true: Tomlin perfectly encapsulates the way architects need to approach communications. You must start with a strategy. Then you need to embrace that strategy and communicate it clearly.

It sounds incredibly simple, but it's not always easy. Unfortunately, if your firm doesn't have a strong or distinct message, you're about as effective as a car without a driver. You're not going in the direction you want to go. In fact, you're not even going to get out of the parking lot.

Further, if you don't communicate your intentions, you're missing opportunities to build durable relationships with clients and potential clients, consultants and other collaborators, and media and industry contacts. All these are your target audiences. It's part of your job to tell them what you do, how you do it better than anyone else, and what value you bring.

To maximize your firm's relationships with decision makers, bolster your reputation, and win more clients, focus on honing your content as much as your image. Every day, you communicate through emails, social media posts, and phone calls. Potential clients learn about your firm and its work through your proposals, on your website, and by the awards you win. Your messages should be clear, no matter the audience or medium.

If you want to stand out from the crowd, you need to have a point of view. It's important to build key messages that encapsulate your strengths, define your value proposition, and articulate the benefits your firm uniquely brings to its clients. You can do this through workshops or strategy sessions with the leadership, your

Headshots courtesy respective firms

marketing team, or an outside consultant who can help draw out the essence of your firm in ways that will resonate with people you want to reach.

Differentiation can be prickly for professional services firms. Perhaps you tell your clients and potential clients that your firm does great design, is technically proficient, or provides excellent service. Hopefully all three of those are true, but I bet many of your competitors can (and do) say the same thing.

Clients may or may not be able to articulate what they seek in terms of desired outcomes, which often represent the less tangible or qualitative features of a project—not the metrics, although those matter, too. That's where your message becomes so critical. Your messaging needs to reflect your mission, passion, and expertise while also responding to the needs of the decision makers who you most want to draw into your orbit. To communicate effectively, you need to define your clients' needs and what problems you are uniquely qualified to fix—and then find the alignment. That could be the support of socially minded causes, wellness design, historic preservation, 3D-printed buildings, technical innovation, risk-taking design, or a combination of the above.

Design and technical proficiency matter, but so do your ideas, problem-solving abilities, and creative edge. In fact, you are not selling buildings or even services: you are selling a promise that you can meet your clients' goals and overcome their challenges. Instead of describing the *what* of your work—size, typology, program, and relevant experience—talk about the benefits you provide, how you provide those benefits, and your methodology for helping your target clients tunnel through their proverbial mountains.

Next, you need to use the right pathways to proactively reach out to clients who share your goals and vision. Digital spaces such as websites and social media, print publications, in-person meetings, personal correspondence—there are many opportunities (*too* many) to disseminate information about your firm and its knowledge. I call these tools; some call them channels. Think strategically about your goal of building relationships, and then work your way backwards. Consider whom you are trying to reach, how they get information, and the types of content you are delivering to determine how to implement your communications program. You can't—and shouldn't—go after everything at once.

For example, some decision makers may read *The New York Times* every day, while others might be on Instagram. Others might attend a key conference every year. A written note to an editor might be more effective than sending out a press release. Or a key award might get your ideal client's attention. You can also double up your efforts by sharing the same content in different ways—as a social media post, a bylined article, and a newsletter story, for example. Use written content to enhance your visual language, and always try different channels to see what works best.

Finally, remember to communicate internally with your team as much as you communicate externally. Develop a cadence that makes sense for you, and stick with it. It's essential that your messaging is as consistent as it is continuous. Using these methods, you'll be able to communicate effectively, frequently, and persuasively for a big impact. ■

Tami Hausman, Ph.D., founder of Hausman LLC, is a strategic advisor on communications, branding, and external outreach to architects, allied professional services firms, and non-profit organizations. She is chair of AIA New York's *Oculus* Committee.

INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

Publisher is not responsible for errors and omissions in advertiser index.

OCULUS ADVERTISING SALES

Architects as Storytellers and Listeners

BY **JESSE LAZAR**, ASSOC. AIA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AIANY/CENTER FOR ARCHITECTURE

"People don't understand what we do." This sentiment comes up again and again when we engage in discussions at the AIA New York Chapter about architects as communicators and the challenges of public outreach. The frustration is real. To many people, architecture as a profession may be abstract: focused on distant design ideals or inaccessible technicalities. Yet we know that at its core, architecture shapes the fundamental experience of urban life through the places where people live, work, and gather. Bridging this gap between architects and the public is not just about explaining the profession better, it's about transforming the way architects communicate, collaborate, and listen.

Storytelling is key to this shift. Good storytelling doesn't just inform, it connects. For architects, this means stepping beyond the echo chambers of professional dialogue and directly engaging with communities. It's about meeting people where they are—literally and figuratively—whether at a neighborhood association meeting, at a public forum, or through digital platforms that make complex ideas accessible. Most importantly, storytelling isn't one-sided. It prioritizes listening as much as speaking, allowing architects to understand the aspirations, concerns, and challenges of the people who ultimately experience designed environments.

Storytelling prioritizes listening as much as speaking, allowing architects to understand the aspirations, concerns, and challenges of the people who ultimately experience designed environments.

Reimagining how, why, and with whom we communicate is vital for the future business success, relevance, and influence of the profession. Through deeper mutual engagement and storytelling with the public, architects gain insights that make their work more responsive and meaningful. Ideally, listening to the people and learning about their communities can reveal priorities that may not align with the preconceptions of designers or clients. These interactions enrich architects' understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental contexts in which they work, deepening their ability to craft spaces that foster belonging and resilience, and ultimately create more successful and lasting projects.

The benefits of this two-way communication extend beyond individual projects. As architects become more effective communicators and listeners, they contribute to breaking down barriers that have historically separated the profession from the communities it impacts. These barriers—whether rooted in jargon, privilege, or process—have too often excluded marginalized voices. By challenging and subverting these obstacles, architects ensure that the work they are creating is responsive to what people really need.

The Center for Architecture plays a pivotal role in advancing this mission. As a hub for dialogue, education, and exploration, the Center positions itself as a listening and learning organization, dedicated to building reciprocal relationships with communities across New York City. Through exhibitions, public programs, and partnerships, the Center creates opportunities for architects and the public to come together to share stories, exchange ideas, and envision the future. Our efforts emphasize that true collaboration begins with humility and a willingness to learn from those outside the profession.

By embracing both storytelling as a tool for connection and listening as a foundational practice, architects can reframe their relationship with a public that truly wants to better understand their work. In doing so, architects not only demystify the profession, but also strengthen their ability to design spaces that reflect the diversity, dreams, and challenges of the people they serve.

Samuel Lahoz

Architectural Record's

DESIGN:ED

AN ARCHITECTURE PODCAST

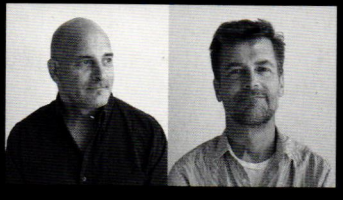
The DESIGN:ED Podcast by *Architectural Record* takes you inside the profession through informal conversations with the field's leading architects and designers. Tune in to hear inspiring stories from design leaders, posted twice a month.

Hosted by Austin, Texas–based architect Aaron Prinz, *Architectural Record*'s DESIGN:ED podcast features renowned architects such as Jeanne Gang, Bjarke Ingels, Thom Mayne, Deborah Berke and Billie Tsien, as well as rising professionals like Frida Escobedo, Joshua Ramus and Omar Gandhi.

PODCAST GUESTS

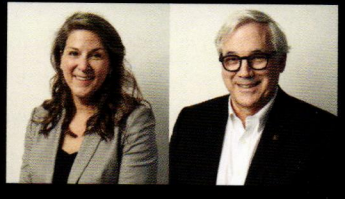
Emily Abruzzo & Gerald Bodziak
Abruzzo Bodziak Architects

Wendy Evans Joseph
Studio Joseph

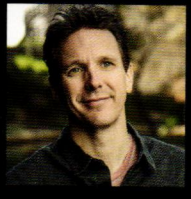


Joshua Aidlin & David Darling
Aidlin Darling Design

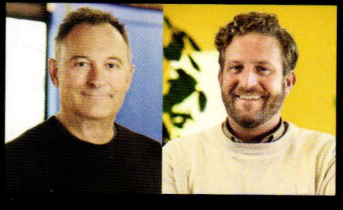
Tristán López-Chicheri
L35 Architecture



Anne Marie Duvall Decker & Roy Decker
Duvall Decker



Brian Korte
Clayton Korte



Mark Rios & Andy Lantz
Rios

Gabriella Carrillo
Colectivo C733

Charlie Dolman
Burning Man

AIA Continuing Education Provider

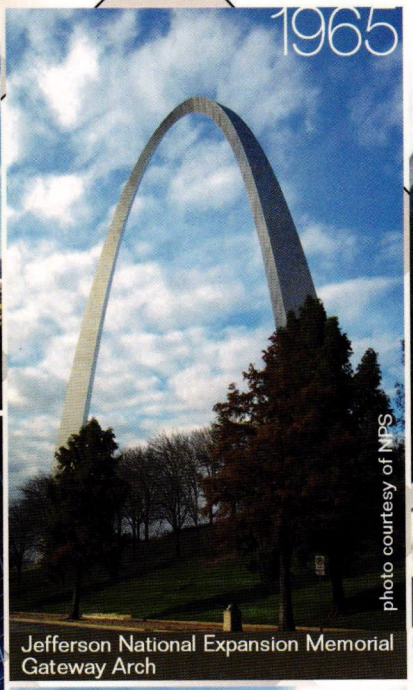
Now all DESIGN:ED podcasts qualify for AIA LUs. Listen to conversations with design legends and emerging stars while earning CEUs. After listening to the podcast, visit ce.architecturalrecord.com/podcasts and take a quick quiz to earn one learning unit towards your license requirements.

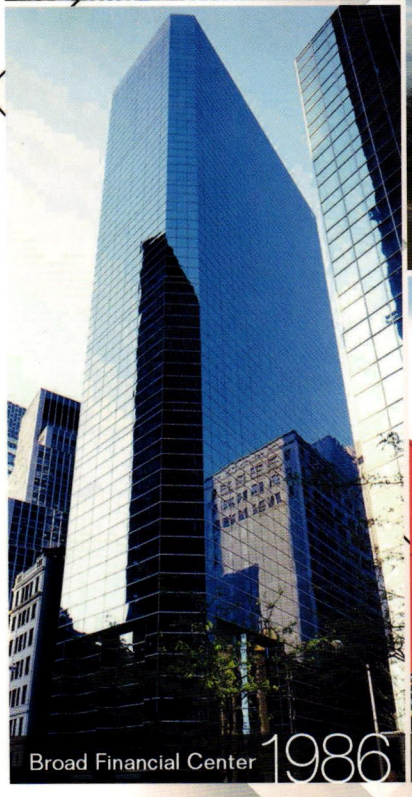
PLATINUM SPONSORSHIP: Vitro Architectural Glass

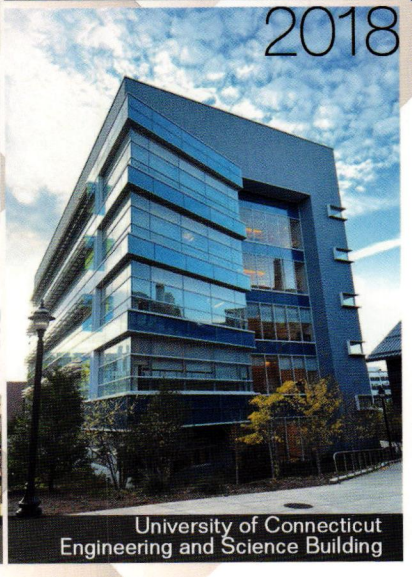
www.architecturalrecord.com/designed-podcast

SUBSCRIBE: Apple Podcasts | Spotify | iHeartRadio **FOLLOW:** Instagram

Severud Associates







Severud Associates
CONSULTING ENGINEERS P.C.
469 Seventh Avenue, Suite 900
New York, NY 10018
(212) 986-3700
severud.com

Celebrating
95
Years of
Structural
Engineering
Excellence