

# The Architect's Newspaper



Washington,  
D.C., issue



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## Architects welcome Biden, call for rapid reboot

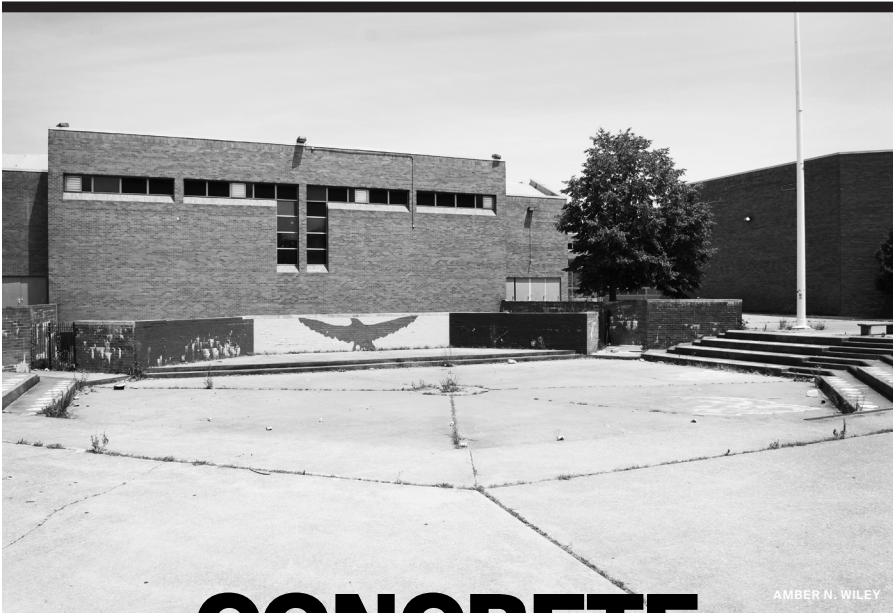
The national consensus finds that we are at an inflection point. Will the president-elect make the most of it?



SETH RYAN / EYEEM, GETTY IMAGES

At the end of a four-year experiment in governance by dismantlers of a responsible public sector, architectural leaders speak of the incoming administration in tones of relief, hope, and urgency. President-elect Joseph Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, observers find, face a cluster of crises requiring New Deal-scale activism informed by expertise in fields spanning earth science to complexity theory. The global climate emergency has grown harsher and harder to deny; national infrastructure has crumbled further while Infrastructure Week has become a Beltway punchline; COVID-19 has shortened lives, shuttered businesses, and driven urban gregariousness into hibernation; long-fester social divisions have menaced people as well as democratic processes. Turning crisis into opportunity has rarely been so imperative.

Views on what the AEC industries can expect under Biden-Harris leadership range from granular policy recommendations to comprehensive rethinking of systems and values. Concrete priorities include equitable pandemic relief, affordable and sustainable housing construction, nationwide extension of broadband, electrified transportation, and a decarbonized economy. Some frame these measures within aspirational visions of societal renewal and **continued on page 8**



AMBER N. WILEY

## CONCRETE CAPITAL

Brutalism and Black community activism come together in one of the most compelling chapters in D.C.'s architectural history. **Read on page 19.**



PUBLIC RECORD

## CAMPUS REVIVAL

Howard University eyes development plans while staying true to its roots. **Read on page 21.**

## Pushing past Mies

A renovation of a Mies-designed public library works through the nuances of the architect's signature style while improving function and user experience.



DC PUBLIC LIBRARY; MAXINE SCHNITZER PHOTOGRAPHER

Unlike nearly every public building its size in the nation's capital, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library has an unambiguously local remit. With the recent renovation of its 1972 Mies van der Rohe-designed building, the institution has reaffirmed its dedication to the people who call D.C. home. The project, initially laid out in a 2014 competition entry by Delft, Netherlands-based Mecanoo and further developed in successive iterations, aims to center on the needs of library users. Only those patrons can judge whether the design team succeeded, when the library opens to the public in a postpandemic world. Until then, it is still fair to say that its program, design, and art add up to a strong investment in the potential of residents of the proposed 51st state.

The central branch was one of the last projects undertaken by the unelected government that oversaw the District of Columbia from 1873 to 1973. The library, first envisioned in the early 1960s by white business leaders as a downtown revitalization project, opened in 1972 to a city reshaped by activism and unrest. The effects of this change extended to the library itself. The District of Columbia Public Library board voted to dedicate its anchor branch to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. and decided that a Black director would supervise its operations. Not long after, Congress devolved municipal and state-level functions to the residents of D.C. It was an exciting moment. **continued on page 12**



## Residential Construction

Case studies and products for home designers. **See page 24.**

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Corrections

The December 2020 issue of *The Architect's Newspaper* announced that two Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects projects, Westgate1515 and MLK1101 Supportive Housing, received honorable mentions in the 2020 Best of Design Awards in the Residential—Mixed-Use and Social Impact categories. However, the announcements incorrectly switched photographs of the projects, showing an image of MLK1101 Supportive Housing for Westgate1515 and vice versa. The images shown in the online announcements are correct.

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# Style Reboot

In late December, even as he signaled to his supporters that he would continue to contest the results of the 2020 U.S. elections, President Trump pulled the trigger on a notorious executive order leaked earlier in the year. That much-circulated draft, which bore the sloganeering title *Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again*, sounded an anxious note among the chattering classes, which were quick to highlight the document's curious architectural remit. Not since the heyday of print media had architecture garnered so many inches of newspaper columns.

Mix aesthetic zealotry and politics, and you have a combustible situation on your hands, or so went the general consensus. Trump, though lacking the panache of a Mussolini and the artistic irritability of a Hitler, was nonetheless lending neoclassical architecture his leaderly imprimatur—standard fascist procedure. But if this counts as fascism, it's of the comic-book variety, a fact underlined by the draft's ghostwriters at the nonprofit National Civic Art Society. These self-styled "aesthetic guardians of Washington" would so like to play the role of the Justice League, and share with that juvenile brigade the qualities of being unelected, unaccountable, and righteously smug. (Comic books and fascism share another commonality: the necessity of a reboot—the nonchalant zapping of history—to the viability of IP or a people, respectively.)

We were all expecting a few surprises from a lame-duck President Trump, but the finalizing of this executive order was always a foregone conclusion. Parsing its contents reveals that it rehashes many of the same bromides against modernist architecture and its successors found in the February 2020 draft. The overheated central claims remain relatively untouched. The through line is still one of regression. One slight

emendation: The signed order subs out the MAGA-inflected heading for the equally bumptious—but far less pithy—*Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture*.

For the drafters, Greco-Roman models of representational government and neoclassical enlightenment converge on the historical vanishing point of San Francisco's U.S. Federal Building by Morphosis, completed 2007 CE. It's a laughable premise, but also a little charming: One imagines a bemused Trump unable to make heads or tails of terminology like *Brutalism* and *deconstructivism*. The order attempts to poison the well against these modern design currents, counterposing them to the rather capaciously rendered "classical architecture," that is, "Neoclassical, Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, Beaux-Arts, and Art Deco." Presumably what binds this multifarious lot, apart from stemming from an obvious unfamiliarity with architectural history, is a deference to antiquity-as-ultimate-authority.

On the issue of authority, the order makes out that the General Services Administration (GSA)—the body entrusted with commissioning and overseeing the construction of new federal buildings—has gone rogue. Rather than looking to the "citizenry" for judgments on aesthetic criteria, the GSA has deferred to the wisdom of its vendors, i.e., contemporary architects. (There is a thinly veiled reference to Thom Mayne.) According to the order, these architects are uglifying American cities and thus fostering a form of national nihilism. They are to be chastened for their high-handedness, as is the professional architectural apparatus for flattering them. Rogue agents, demiurges, and a pandering press? We're right back to comic-book formulae.

As for actionables, the order would compel the GSA to overhaul its Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, and con-

comitantly, its Design Excellence Program, presumably with the aim of elevating antiquated models of design over 21st-century ones. It would establish a "Council for Improving Federal Civic Architecture," comprising the Commission of Fine Arts (of which nonprofit National Civic Art Society president Justin Shubow is a Trump-appointed member), the Architect of the Capitol, and various GSA personnel, in addition to potentially scores of presidential appointees drawn from within and without the federal government. But it wouldn't mandate a federal style, let alone outlaw whatever it is we're calling the architecture of 2020. (We've yet to come up with an appropriate ism.)

In a sense, it's a defanged order from a defanged presidency. That isn't to downplay the harm the soon-to-be-axed regime has succeeded in perpetrating (and still might). There is a lot to undo, say leading architects, who discuss their hopes for a Biden administration in our extensive survey (page 8). Were they to have their druthers, Biden would pursue restorative policies on several fronts, from the climate to housing to transportation. He would sign on to the goals of the Green New Deal, even if he never mouthed the words himself. He might be moved to call into question the basis of late capitalism itself. But what none of these architects and experts in architecture-adjacent fields have bothered to mention is an outright rejection of Trumpian "oligarchic thicc" (see page 14). There are bigger fish to fry.

Of course, professional organizations including the AIA and the ASLA were right to immediately criticize the order on the grounds that it had the potential—indeed, seemed to signal an intent—to silence certain communities and diverse voices. Moreover, anyone claiming the innocence of the classicizing impulse is deliberately neglect-

ful of history, perhaps even of psychology. It's never been about the implements of classical architecture—sturdy entablatures or sumptuously ornate Corinthian capitals—but rather the particular kind of authority they have traditionally enshrined.

Samuel Medina

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# 6 In Case You Missed It...

We corralled the top architecture and design stories buzzing about the internet this month.

## Zaha Hadid Architects and Foster + Partners leave Architects Declare

One and a half years after 17 U.K. firms released an open letter declaring a “climate emergency,” two of the highest-profile initial participants, Zaha Hadid Architects and Foster + Partners, have left Architects Declare. The impasse came after the two studios refused to stop designing airports. Both criticized the organization for being too strict in its goals.

## Seattle Parks and Recreation unveils \$100 million Green Lake Community Center

In conjunction with the third and final installment of a series of public feedback-seeking online open houses, Seattle Parks and Recreation released renderings from architecture firm Miller Hull Partnership and landscape architecture practice Berger Partnership that show a new community center at the city’s cherished (and heavily used) Green Lake Park.

## Widespread cracks threaten Oscar Niemeyer’s National Library in Brasília

Cracks have been observed throughout the Oscar Niemeyer–designed Leonel de Moura Brizola National Library in the Brazilian capital city of Brasília. Opened in 2008, just four years before Niemeyer’s death at the age of 104, the building is already experiencing severe cracking along its walls, roof, and elevator machine room.

## Adjaye Associates reveals the new Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library in Johannesburg

Adjaye Associates has unveiled its design for the Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library, a rammed-earth structure set to include a museum, a research center, and more for the second postapartheid president of South Africa. Born in 1942, Thabo Mbeki served as president from 1999 until his resignation in September 2008.

## MoMA launches a new institute to explore the intersection between built and natural environments

The Museum of Modern Art has established a research institute that will explore the relationship between architecture and ecology. Located within the museum’s Department of Architecture and Design, the Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment will focus on conversations about sustainability.

## St. Louis CITY SC shares updated plans for a downtown stadium district

Major League Soccer expansion franchise St. Louis CITY SC has unveiled further details about—and updated design renderings of—the 22,500-seat open-air stadium and surrounding downtown “stadium district” planned for Missouri’s second-largest city. The stadium is being designed by HOK and Minneapolis’s Snow Kreilich Architects.

## As COVID-19 cases surge to new highs, museums across America close again

Prepare for a long, dark winter if you’re an American patron of the arts: With COVID-19 cases increasing across all 50 states and no relief in sight, cities are shutting down to prevent the spread of disease. That includes all indoor museums in Philadelphia; Chicago; Baltimore; Washington, D.C.; and Los Angeles.

## Melted scaffolding removed from Notre Dame Cathedral a year after massive fire

With rebuilding plans (mostly) finalized and a firm 2024 deadline set, it looks like the reconstruction of Paris’s Notre Dame Cathedral is chugging ahead. On November 24, the French government cleared 200 tons of mangled steel scaffolding left ruined by the fire, both a symbolic and a structural victory.



COURTESY ST. LOUIS CITY SC

## Tadao Ando’s much-reviled “Berlin Wall” comes down in Manchester

Manchester, England, started taking down a 20-foot-long section of a concrete pavilion designed by Pritzker Prize–winner Tadao Ando at Piccadilly Gardens in November as part of the city’s effort to revamp the historic public square. Many residents viewed the structure as a Mancunian Berlin Wall.

## Los Angeles launches design challenge seeking new models of affordable low-rise housing

Christopher Hawthorne, chief design officer for the city, and the office of Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti have launched a \$100,000 design challenge that invites architects and landscape architects to imagine progressive, appealing models of low-rise multifamily housing.



COURTESY ADJAYE ASSOCIATES

Kuldip Singh, legendary Indian architect, dies at age 86

Kuldip Singh, a prominent architect who designed two of the most iconic government buildings in Delhi (the National Cooperative Development Corporation building, completed in 1980, and Palika Kendra, completed in 1983), died on November 10 from COVID-19 at 86. Singh was known for his structurally complex modern designs.

Ford reveals a 30-acre “mobility innovation district” in Detroit’s Corktown

Ford Motor Co. unveiled plans for Michigan Central, a 30-acre redevelopment in Detroit that will create an “inclusive, vibrant, and walkable mobility innovation district” centered on the restored 1914 landmark Michigan Central Station. The project’s lead architect and planner, Practice for Architecture and Urbanism, revealed the site plan on November 17.

England approves running a \$2.2 billion highway under Stonehenge

Britain’s secretary of state for transportation, Grant Shnapps, has overruled local planning inspectors and approved construction of a road underneath Stonehenge. According to inspectors, the underground road, a 2-mile section of an 8-mile-long extension, could cause “substantial harm” to Stonehenge’s visual and cultural heritage.

Daniel Arsham will be the next creative director for the Cleveland Cavaliers

Contemporary artist, architect, Snarkitecture cofounder, fashion designer, basketball fan, and native Clevelander Daniel Arsham is heading home. The Cleveland Cavaliers announced that Arsham would be the NBA team’s newest creative director and take a minority stake in the franchise.

Reed Hilderbrand and Trahan Architects reveal an overhauled National Bonsai & Penjing Museum

Landscape architecture firm Reed Hilderbrand and Trahan Architects have announced that the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts has green-lighted their design for the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. It will feature a network of circulation-improving paths extending from a central courtyard.

BIG will replace Johns Hopkins University’s Mattin Center with a cascading complex

Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) has been selected as the lead architect for a \$200 million to \$250 million student center that’s expected to open on Johns Hopkins University’s Homewood campus in Baltimore by the fall of 2024. The new facility will replace the Mattin Center, a three-building arts complex designed by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects.

Justin Garrett Moore leaves New York City Public Design Commission for the Mellon Foundation

Justin Garrett Moore, executive director of the New York City Public Design Commission, is leaving to be the inaugural program manager for Humanities in Place, established by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which, per the foundation, “seeks to bring a variety of histories and voices into public, media, museum, and memorial spaces.”

Architects and designers call on MoMA to remove Philip Johnson’s name

Seven architects, artists, and designers featured in the forthcoming exhibition *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America* have signed a letter asking that the Museum of Modern Art remove Philip Johnson’s name from titles and public spaces because of what the letter describes as his white supremacist views and activities.

Fate of Toronto’s Rogers Centre uncertain after report of potential demolition

Rogers Centre, a Toronto landmark and the first major stadium with a fully retractable motorized roof, may be demolished. Its main tenant, Major League Baseball team the Toronto Blue Jays, could be relocated to a smaller stadium. This comes as part of a redevelopment scheme headed by Rogers Communications and Brookfield.

Noguchi’s *Floor Frame* unveiled for the White House Rose Garden

*Floor Frame*, a 1962 bronze sculpture by the late Japanese American artist, landscape architect, and political activist Isamu Noguchi was unveiled at the White House. Installed at the east terrace of the Rose Garden, the sculpture was selected by Melania Trump and acquired by the White House Historical Association for \$125,000.

Eavesdrops

Infighting at ZHL Comes to an End

It’s been a tough few years for Zaha Hadid Limited (ZHL). After the loss of the firm’s namesake leader, the company has suffered years of infighting over the late designer’s estate and control of the firm. Last month the battle came to an end as a judge ruled that principal Patrik Schumacher would not be given veto power over ZHL’s board of trustees. The legal battle began after three executors of Hadid’s will—her niece Rana Hadid, developer Peter Palumbo, and artists Brian Clarke—accused Schumacher of trying to oust them as coexecutors. According to Oliver Wainwright in *The Guardian*, Judge Matthew Marsh called the case a “tragedy,” saying that Zaha Hadid would not have wanted the group embroiled in such a “toxic dispute.” Beyond the contentious lawsuit, tensions

at the company rose after Schumacher’s controversial 2016 comments advocating privatization of public housing, which the other three executors immediately distanced themselves from. According to *The Guardian*, a corporate report from 2019 also exposed alleged shortcomings in Schumacher’s leadership. The article added that a later report, from 2020, further alleged that Schumacher pursued sexual relationships with junior staffers, for whom he would then try to secure pay raises. In the court hearing it was also announced that Schumacher and the other executors of Hadid’s will had agreed to transfer the majority of her estate—worth about £100 million—to the Zaha Hadid Foundation.

Archigram Anxieties

Archigram has gone through plenty of changes since its early days in the 1960s. At a virtual summit in late 2020, the group explored a variety of new projects, followed by a discussion among several founding members: Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, and Michael Webb. Covering a range of topics, the founders offered some criticism of the state of the firm’s projects today compared with ones they’ve worked on in the past. “I thought Archigram was about mixing things up,” Greene said. “This is something I think is anti-Archigram, if you’ll forgive me for being so

bold. One of the annoying things now, or just annoying for me, is statements like the following: ‘In the absence of a critic of Archigram, with what privileged act of gentrification is this interesting?’” Cook also remarked how speaking over video calls hampers the creative process. “One of the things I’m noticing on Zoom, doing so many things here, there isn’t much repartee,” he said. “It’s very start and stop. Because you focus and then somebody else focuses. You can’t see somebody picking their nose in the hall. You have to make all sorts of funny assumptions.”

A Dish Best Served Broken

Weeks before the main telescope at the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico suffered a devastating blow that destroyed it, scientists were reeling from the news that it would be closing forever. The large device in the town of the same name was deemed irreparable after two supportive cables holding the telescope broke in August and November. Less than two weeks after news of the closure, the other cables gave way and a receiver platform dropped to the ground, crashing into the dish

and destroying the telescope before a controlled demolition could take place. Beyond the loss of the National Science Foundation’s research that would have relied upon the telescope, the destruction of the 1,000-foot-diameter dish and telescope also leaves the world more vulnerable to planetary attacks. Aside from the possibility of “intelligent” attacks of the Hollywood variety, planetary attacks could come in the form of asteroids or objects falling out of orbit.



COURTESY ARECIBO OBSERVATORY AND UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

# Architects welcome Biden, call for rapid reboot

The national consensus finds that we are at an inflection point. Will the president-elect make the most of it?



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A Biden administration can either seize the opportunity to implement generational change or shrink back from it.

**Biden continued from front page** technological transformation (with or without the name Green New Deal). All commentators emphasize the need for dramatic action, with most calling for intervention on the environmental, equity, housing, and transit fronts that has historically occurred at the federal level.

## A change of climate

It's not as though there's a shortage of prompts. The past year's wildfires in California and Oregon resulted in "the worst

air quality we have had in years from the heat-triggered smog and fire smoke, threatening our lungs during a deadly pandemic," said Heidi Creighton, associate principal of Buro Happold's Los Angeles office. Pointing to geographic disparities in health outcomes, the International Labour Organization's projection that "a shift to a greener economy could create 24 million new jobs globally by 2030," and the outsize burden borne by disadvantaged communities, Creighton expects "the most diverse administration the U.S. has ever had...[to] work to ensure that investments of climate change dollars go first and foremost to these communities."

Jonathan Marvel, founder of Marvel Architects and Resilient Power Puerto Rico, draws on his experiences in postdisaster reconstruction and local-scale electrification (see *AN*, Oct. 9, 2018) for recommendations about both reversing federal neglect of the territory and accelerating the broader shift from fossil fuels to renewables. "We can all learn from Puerto Rico," he said of his place of birth. "I see this whole thing from an oceans perspective: You think about the oceans rather than the continents when you grew up in an island, and so we're all joined together by these oceans rather than divided by a continent."

Meanwhile, the global COVID moment

is "a pause button" revealing "our resiliency or lack thereof," said Christiana Moss, principal at Studio Ma in Phoenix. She looks to demographic change and fossil-fuel-to-solar conversion as catalysts for a long-overdue transition from 20th-century paradigms to the "regenerative design solutions" of the 21st. "Ripping a Band-Aid off sooner than later is probably the way to do it. Frankly, there's no time to wait. Solar is used in cloudy parts of the world. There's no reason why this can't happen in coal-fired places; it's just an industry problem, and it's a political problem. That's all it is. It's not a problem of technology."

## Keynes is back

Clarity about the steps required, said PAU principal Vishaan Chakrabarti, is essential: “What we’re all talking about is deficit spending. Let’s not be shy about saying this.” To emerge from pandemic-era economic contraction and create the broadly defined “infrastructure of opportunity” that generates good jobs, medical security, and a habitable environment, the administration must ignore political deficit hawks and recognize how progressive investments bring lasting gains. “No one’s broke when it comes to multitrillion-dollar wars,” he said. “No one’s broke when it comes to tax cuts for enormously wealthy people, right? Suddenly we’re broke when we need to invest in our own people.... The idea that we’re broke is a broken concept.” Progressives would be wise, Chakrabarti added, to prune counterproductive processes that kept many major infrastructure projects such as high-speed rail lines from being “shovel-ready” under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). “There’s got to be a way to streamline certain stimulative projects right now. If you’re building mass transit, which is by nature green, why do I need a two-year environmental impact report?”

Sociologist Daniel Aldana Cohen, director of UPenn’s Socio-Spatial Climate Collaborative and proponent of the Green New Deal, sees today’s policy makers learning from history. “There are two causes for optimism: One is that the Biden administration has put climate at the heart of their economic development agenda,” he said. “The second is that the climate movement is incomparably vaster and more sophisticated than it was in 2009. The green portion of ARRA was small and barely visible, and ultimately it was caricatured as basically just Solyndra. And I think we live in a different world now, where the scale of proposed green investments is immeasurably higher, and instead of green being a kind of marginal tack-on to the broad stimulus...it is the logic of the stimulus itself.”

Although Biden distanced himself from the Green New Deal label during an October 15 town hall, the Biden Plan reflects consultation with congressional progressives on many Green New Deal aims. Much depends on administrative variables, Aldana Cohen said: “Will the United States catch up to Europe on green-building retrofits and materials, not just operational efficiency but transforming building materials themselves, in line with carbon targets and desire for healthier, more modern materials? Well, that kind of thing could really hinge on two or three senior appointments at the Department of Energy.” Multiple departments will work on climate policy, and Cohen hopes joint task forces will combine technical and political expertise. “Anything interagency can just fall through the cracks, so if the domestic-policy czar has enough power, then they should be able to turn all this collaboration into a strength. If the domestic-policy climate czar isn’t sufficiently supported by Biden, then I think you’ll just see a lot of PowerPoint presentations.”

## Momentum building amid the headwinds

“A first and early test,” said Lance Jay Brown, a cofounder of the Consortium for Sustainable Urbanism and the AIANY’s Design for Risk and Reconstruction Committee, “might be the support for the \$30 billion Gateway Tunnel across the Hudson.” Biden’s “Build Back Better” slogan, Brown said, arose in 2015 with the United Nations’ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which “would use disaster crises as a trigger for more resilient development” in physical infrastructure. Brown noted numerous signs that in professional and governmental circles, the climate/energy realm is a resurgent priority. In architecture, the AIA just awarded its annual Gold Medal to Architecture 2030 founder Edward Mazria. Stirrings within government increase the likelihood that the U.S. will rejoin the Paris accords, as it does the “reconstitution of government components”—special task forces and commissions—that the Trump administration neglected or disbanded. During a federal leadership void, “we’ve all looked to mayors around the country as leaders,” Brown said, highlighting Biden’s appointment to cabinet-level positions of former mayors like Cleveland-area congresswoman Marcia Fudge (tapped to head Housing and Urban Development). Most recently, the president-elect named another ex-mayor, South Bend, Indiana’s Pete Buttigieg, to head Transportation.

Edward Mazria himself noted that “in order to meet the Paris Climate Agreement limit of a 1.5°C global temperature rise, the world must phase out all fossil-fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2040. The Biden administration’s goal of carbon-free electricity by 2035 moves the U.S. closer to meeting that target.” The AEC sector accounts for about half of U.S. emissions and thus “can expect near-term and local government adoption of zero-carbon building codes as well as policies and incentives for building-efficiency improvements, electrification and renewable-energy generation, and low-to-zero and carbon-positive construction materials as outlined in the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis report.”

Obstruction of public-sector activity has been only partial, noted Brian Swett, principal and director of cities at Arup. “Against significant headwinds out of Washington,” he said, “there has still been a lot of progress in the last four years at the state and local level in terms of embracing resilience and the climate crisis and the need to begin to decarbonize—and rapidly do so—our economy by midcentury.” He is encouraged that Biden’s early appointments emphasize policy experience and professional credibility. “This is not a time where we have the luxury of being stuck in political debates for another two or four years.” Full decarbonization by midcentury, he continued, is “not an aspirational goal; that’s a must-have if we are to preserve the large segments of quality of life throughout a lot of the country that folks appreciate. We don’t have a choice to be carbon-neutral; we have a necessity.” Swett sees green policies gaining adherents even in resistant regions if progressives can summon the political courage to endure the kind of heat FDR took over New Deal programs. They will also need to

be willing to communicate with nonexpert citizens, Swett added. “When I was at city hall, we called it ‘bringing the science to the sidewalk.’”

Trent Lethco, Arup’s leader of Americas transport consulting, stresses the necessity of federal policy in addressing issues that would otherwise overwhelm state legislatures. After the previous regime destroyed many climate-related offices and efforts, he said, “you need people who know how government works, who’ve run departments and agencies before, who can come in, quickly figure out who else to hire, and move both a rebuilding agenda around infrastructure and economy and a resiliency agenda around climate change and pandemic recovery.” The transition team impresses him with its grasp of “multivariate problems that require multivariate solutions” and a determination that “social justice won’t get lost in that rush” to reverse institutional damage.

## New paradigms for housing

Affordable and resilient residences, many commentators stress, are an immediate national priority. Carmi Bee, president of RKT Architects, finds relief in the hope that the Biden administration will take substantive steps toward addressing the housing crisis. “[It] is critically important at this time,” he said. “People need more than shelter—they need healthy, permanent homes in thriving communities.”

Ennead partner and AIANY past president Tomas Rossant looks to New Deal electrification and President Eisenhower’s Interstate Highway System as precedents for a transformative investment in public utilities, namely universal broadband. “Certainly, that immediately takes care of certain social-equity and social-justice issues,” Rossant said, by extending the advantages of work-from-home-or-from-anywhere logistics to more of the population—a pandemic adaptation that may prove enduring. Consequent changes in proportions of commercial and residential demand, in cities needing more affordable housing and facing an office-space glut, may drive rezoning to accommodate more flexible live/work spaces, replacing the 20th-century single-use zoning that inflicted daily commutes on much of the workforce and excessive vehicle emissions on the planet.

Such changes will call for imagination on the part of architects, planners, and owners. “What an apartment building is probably has to be rethought,” Rossant said. One measure sometimes bruited as a response to shifting demands, office-to-home conversion, is difficult when commercial leases within a building expire on different terms. Instead, he argues, “the change in legislation should be hybridized” to incentivize adaptations so that “simultaneously they update their building systems and the thermal resistance of the building envelopes to become sustainable.” This transition should address rents as well, he added. “New York City two years ago made a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing act, so every time a developer now makes a building, they really have to have affordable apartments in it. I think it’s time the Biden administration federalizes that.... Like the federal ADA [Americans

With Disabilities Act], I have to include 30 percent affordable housing; in exchange for this revenue, [such a law would] help me convert office towers to apartments as well as make them green.”

Jonathan F.P. Rose, developer of green communities and author of *The Well-Tempered City* (2016), sees integrated systems thinking, particularly on the relations of housing and health and the electrification of buildings and vehicles, as a potent resource, which the Obama administration began to explore and Biden’s can extend. “We live in an ecology of ideas and mental frameworks and really have four years to shift those. And the key shift in the field of communities is, instead of seeing things in isolated pieces, a chance to see them all together,” he said. The smart-grid project outlined in engineer Saul Griffith’s *Rewiring America* (2020) strikes Rose as a way to align job growth, financial incentives, and green-energy expansion. He advises the Biden-Harris administration to embrace a “regenerative economy,” replacing “an economic system [that] rewards people for degrading the common good, either by polluting or exploiting labor,” with a more ethically grounded system where “you profit by how much you contribute to the common good.”

Jonathan Kirschenfeld, affordable-housing specialist and founder of the Institute for Public Architecture, also envisions fundamental changes emerging from today’s troubles. For starters, there will be an end to the destructive myth that “you need private actors to get something done,” he argues. “Why is that? The public sector does it in Europe: Go to France [if] you want to see what the public sector does, tax dollars at work, making beautiful urban plazas, forms, buildings, libraries, housing, all of the highest quality possible. Why can’t we do it here?” He also highlights a desperate need to find alternatives like community land-trusts to the default model of “speculative capitalist” urban development. “If Biden sees housing as a right, as opposed to a speculative vehicle for somebody to make a lot of money, we could have huge, huge change in this country, and we don’t have to have a full revolution. That would satisfy me as a Bernie-style revolution.”

The interests that would try to obstruct such endeavors are obvious. Few expect Congress to act as progressively as city agencies can, and Biden’s whole career reflects an instinct for bipartisanship. Moreover, Chakrabarti points out, governmental policies and institutions have long favored private interests over public, isolation over community, and this approach has led to multisystemic disaster, including “an urban/rural divide in this country that’s tearing us apart culturally.” COVID-19 has only exacerbated preexisting economic trends that have negatively affected Americans for decades. Even so, Chakrabarti senses we might be at an inflection point: “This is the moment to say we’re either going to invest in the country, and that’s going to be a way to pull the country together politically, or we’re going to keep going down the path we’re on, which is a path of ruination.”

Bill Millard

# Glass on the Grass

Renzo Piano's \$100 million addition to the Johns Hopkins campus gets the go-ahead.



COURTESY RENZO PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP

A rendering depicting the café at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Agora Institute

Italian architect Renzo Piano last month showed he's not too famous to take a little criticism, after revealing a significantly revised design for his latest American project, a \$100 million headquarters for the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Instead of two glass cubes set on the same grid and joined by a circulation zone, the Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW) showed the city's design review panel a new plan that still has two glass cubes, but with one now rotated 45 degrees off the other's grid.

In addition, one section of the center that previously had been lifted off the ground to leave open space underneath has been shortened and the open space enclosed, with a cafe on the first level. It reads more as a separate building with its own identity, resulting in a more dynamic composition overall.

The 83-year-old Piano, a Pritzker Prize laureate and founder of the eponymous Building Workshop in Genoa, has been working in Italy during the coronavirus pandemic and did not travel to the United States for the presentation, a key part of the process Hopkins needed to receive a building permit.

Representatives for Piano's team said the changes were a response to feedback they'd received from the panel about the schematic design shown in September of 2019. "We took your comments very seriously," said Stephen Wright, a principal of Ayers Saint Gross, the building's architect of record.

After seeing the design that showed two cubes side by side, members of the city's Urban Design and Architecture Advisory Panel (UDAAP) encouraged the architects to find a way to strengthen the physical con-

nections to the rest of the campus, resolve "opposing" geometries in the area, and create a composition that seemed less fragmented.

Wright said the "twist" was Piano's idea. He said it introduced a diagonal pathway that provides clear access to both cubes and helps make one volume stand out more distinctly as a beacon for the university and the surrounding neighborhood, while strengthening visual connections back to the main campus.

Sarah Leaskey of OLIN, the landscape architect for the project, said the institute will be set in a forestlike landscape composed of native trees and other plantings that add color year-round and connect the site to other wooded areas of the Homewood campus and neighboring Wyman Park.

The changes were well received by the review panel members.

"The experience of this sort of crystalline series of jewel boxes sitting in the natural landscape really enriches the community and serves this edge of the campus very well," said critic Osborne Anthony, who called the twist a "very bold move" that "introduces a sense of hierarchy" into the project and helps define the entry sequence.

"The beautiful piece more than anything else about this composition to me is how it takes and engages the landscape," he added.

"I welcome the big-picture changes to the design," agreed panel member Pavlina Ilieva, a principal of PLKL Studio in Baltimore.

Instead of being read as one fragmented structure, "it actually starts to feel now as two companion buildings placed within the landscape that...is sort of weaving through the volumes, so building and landscape are closer to becoming one," she said. "This just makes a better project."

The SNF Agora Institute was established in 2017 through a \$150 million gift from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation with the goal of creating a new kind of interdisciplinary academic and public forum committed to strengthening global democracy by civic engagement and dialogue.

The institute takes its name from the ancient Athenian agora, known as a central space for conversation and debate. (See RPBW's Forum building for Columbia University; this has become something of a running theme in the firm's academic buildings.) Before moving into its permanent home, the institute has begun building a staff and holding seminars and community meetings, virtual for much of the past year, about topics ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the implications of the Black Lives Matter movement and the push for racial equity.

From the beginning, Piano and Ayers Saint Gross conceived of the institute as having two major halves: a "factory" side with faculty offices, labs, classrooms, meeting and seminar rooms, and open workspaces; and a more public, community-oriented side, where the staffers come out of their offices and meet with people from inside and outside the institute to hash over the issues of the day. Both started out at five stories tall, but were cut to at least one floor lower. The community side includes the cafe, spaces for public gatherings and art exhibits, and more. Connecting the two is a circulation element called "the spider."

The site is just west of Hopkins's main, Homewood campus, in the 3100 block of Wyman Park Drive. Because the land is off the main campus (technically not part of the Homewood campus at all), the architects weren't under any requirement to

use red brick or work in a neo-Georgian idiom, the way Robert A. M. Stern and architects of some other relatively recent buildings on campus were. In fact, both the site and Piano were chosen by Hopkins president Ronald Daniels and others so that wouldn't happen.

With approval from UDAAP this past December, Hopkins officials are aiming to start construction next summer and open in the summer of 2023.

Last spring, the university announced that it was putting a hold on most capital projects over \$100,000 through the end of fiscal 2021, as part of a belt-tightening process prompted by the pandemic. The exceptions, officials said, were projects that could move ahead because private donors or sponsors had provided funds for them. The Agora Institute, with its 2017 funding commitment from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, fell into that category.

"We are proceeding with this project because donor/sponsor funding specifically allocated for the building is already in place," Karen Lancaster, Hopkins's assistant vice president for external relations wrote via email.

Other major Hopkins projects that are moving ahead with targeted donor funds are a \$200 million to \$250 million student center designed by the Bjarke Ingels Group and others to replace the three-building Mattin Center by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, and a conversion of the former Newseum building in Washington, D. C., into a new home for Hopkins graduate programs, with Ennead Architects, Smith-Group, and the Rockwell Group as key members of the design team. **Ed Gunts**

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**Pushing past Mies** continued from front page But it didn't last. The D.C. government struggled to control waves of disinvestment, gentrification, and crime that left it bankrupt by the 1990s. The \$18 million library building's inadequate mechanical systems and elevators began to fail well before then. Mies's clean lines did not wear neglect well, and as libraries evolved, the deficiencies of the design—from its envelope to its space planning—were obvious.

Mies's parti for the project was characteristically simple: Four buff brick service cores sit in a grid that could go on forever, separated from the outside only by thin sheets of black-painted steel and bronze glass. On the ground floor, Mies set clear glass in black iron frames far back from the outer edge of the building envelope. These minimal walls felt more like partitions between two kinds of public spaces, one indoor and the other outdoor. Even at the library's nadir in the early 2000s, the great hall and two reading rooms on the ground floor evinced a kind of public grandeur.

The transparency at street level, though, was lacking elsewhere. A consultant brought on early in the renovation process thought the tinted upper-story windows a "special nuisance" in a world of fluorescent light and air-conditioning. Visitors could also be forgiven for thinking the 407,000-square-foot building was much smaller. Before the facility closed for renovation in 2017, library users making their way from the austere entry hall to the stacks upstairs had to pass through dim, claustrophobic cores and undersized elevators,



**Top:** Mecanoo, with OTJ Architects, cleared the original book stacks to free up the glazed perimeter. **Bottom:** Two rounded staircases framing the library entrance break with the Miesian vocabulary.

then windowless brick-lined hallways. This feeling of compression extended to the reading areas, where tall bookshelves, arrayed along the perimeter of the floor plate, hindered daylight from penetrating the interior. Readers were to be grateful for these rows of black metal that screened them from distraction.

But the buff brick walls concealed a large area roughly 12 bays wide and completely column-free. Removing those walls forms the first of three interventions that tie together a delirious range of activities over 426,000 square feet and five public floors. On floors 2 through 4, Mecanoo and its local partner, OTJ Architects, set down rounded volumes in the open space, wrapping them in vertical strips of white oak. On the third floor, these programmatic bubbles form private coworking spaces as well as offices for organizations serving the unhoused and other marginalized groups that are welcomed into few other spaces in the city. The fourth floor is the most open, with an exhibition space at its center for displaying library special collections.

The wood motif is expanded in the 280-seat auditorium, which bridges the fourth and fifth floors. The latter, Mecanoo's second intervention, pushes up through Mies's original massing, though only a third of this penthouse level is enclosed. Most is left as a green roof the public can use in whatever way it chooses, a telling indication of the architects' priorities. While many spaces in the building, like the fabrication lab and the adult literacy room, fit a specific program, the design team worked with stakeholders to create a variety of environments for more undefined uses. For example, visitors now have the choice to reserve secluded rooms in the fourth-floor conference center or to enjoy the view from the seating bar located in the third-floor reading room.

Mecanoo bound these spaces by carefully weaving partitions, countertops, and furniture around extant elements of the Mies landmark, whose most character-defining features have been painstakingly restored or upgraded for better performance (or, in the case of the original single-pane glass facade, both). Cleaving to exhaustive federal and local historic preservation guidelines, the designers made sure to modulate the contrast between old and new construction. Bright colors—as in the second-floor children's library—and the aforementioned white oak do most of the work. Happily, in some cases the distinction is blurred: the seating stairway on the north side of the great hall could easily be mistaken as original.

Curved corners and departures from Mies's grid make statements elsewhere, as in the project's third key intervention: Two monumental stairs hollow out the blind brick cores, which are opened up almost into atriums. Visitors can descend under natural light from the top-floor event space to basement recording studios.

Mecanoo and its director, Francine Houben, deserve credit for working through the nuances of Mies's style while sticking to changes that improve the library's function and user experience. The project team was helped in this aim by a methodical set of preservation guidelines and by the carefully managed competition. Both set the project on the right course before any designer became involved.

In that way the rehabilitation is a product of years of advocacy to save the library while also enhancing its architectural and public character. From the early 2000s, the library's arc bent from plans to sell the building to heavily altering it for a public-private partnership, even locating the District of Columbia's long-neglected ar-

chives there, before settling on a stand-alone renovation by 2015.

However, in a few places, the project's aesthetic compromises illustrate the incoherence of D.C.'s preservation process. The most visible demonstration occurs at the corners of the cores flanking the entrance vestibule at G Street, where the new curved staircases have been inserted. There, reproductions of Mies's first floor facade have replaced rectilinear chunks of buff brick. This pastiche undermines the original contrast between the clear enclosure and opaque cores. Likewise, it muddies the differentiation between old and new.

It did not have to be so. Early on, Mecanoo proposed removing much more brick but also using translucence and lighting effects to create a ghostly solidity. That would have been an opportunity to draw on the

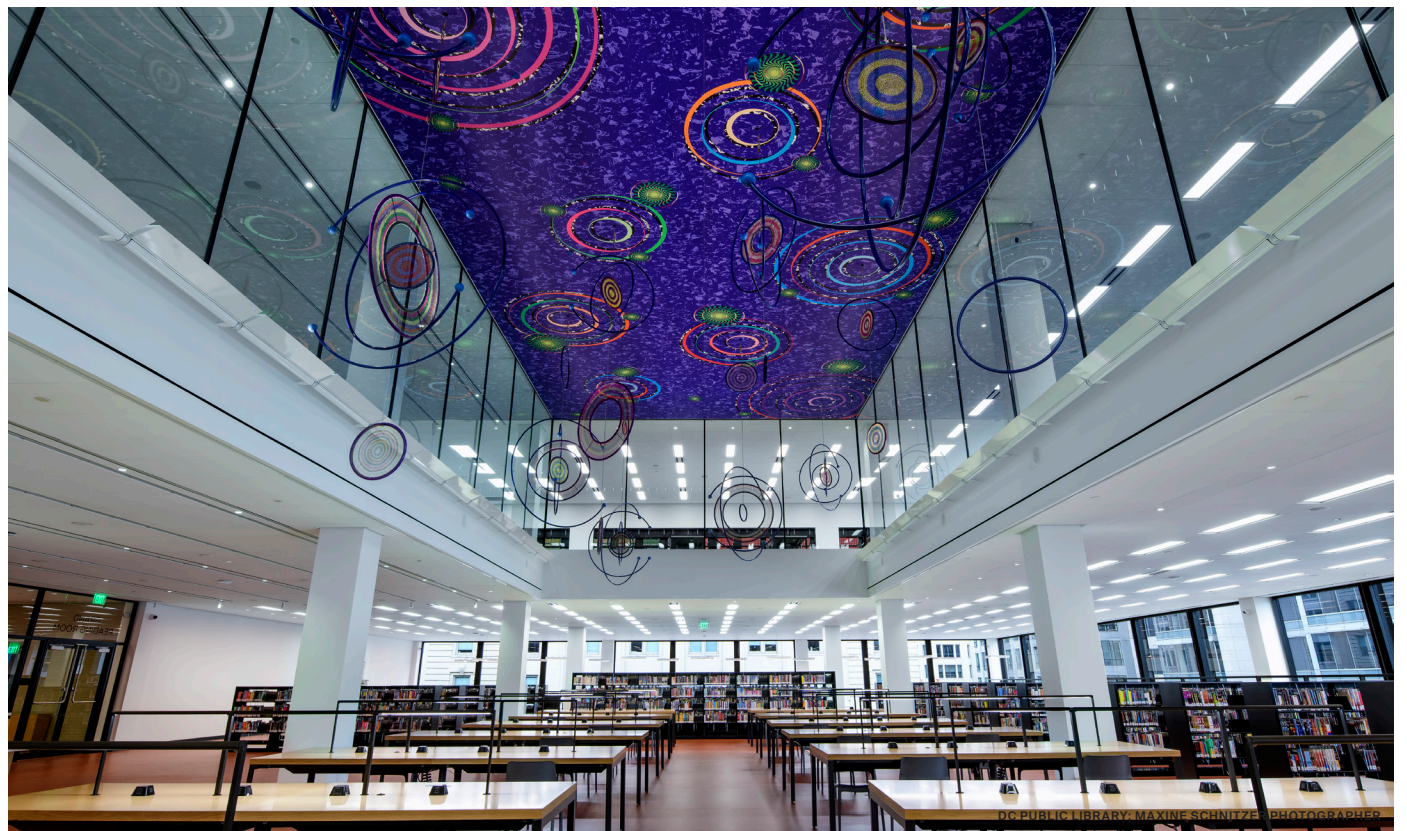
subtle attitudes about transparency and reflection that scholars such as Eve Blau and Detlef Mertins have shown Mies held when not subject to value engineering, as he was in D.C.

Pressure from preservation officials instead steered the design team to match Mies's barely there partitions in proportion, detail, and affect. The compromise solution to this corner problem is unsatisfactory, both as a preservation measure and as an alteration. It goes against federal standards and even the guidelines given to the design team. The approach comes across as rooted in an anxiety about adding to history that D.C.'s design review process seems structurally incapable of overcoming.

Fittingly, where the design falters, the occupants have made it succeed. The library has adhered halftone images to the glass

corners that restore something of the translucence of Mecanoo's initial design. The one on the west facade commemorates Dr. King, while its opposite on the corresponding east facade depicts a recent Black Lives Matter protest. Each dot in the supergraphics hides a protest sign created by high school students.

The building places its politics up front in a return to the state it was in during the 1970s. Just as it reflected the promise and precarity of home rule in the 1970s, the transformed building matches a District of Columbia that is more self-assured, pursuing yet more democracy in the form of statehood. The new Martin Luther King Jr. Library suits the mood in town by putting the people of D.C. at the center. **Neil Flanagan**



**Top:** A gallery overlooks the third-floor reading room. **Bottom:** A penthouse volume opens onto a landscaped roof.

# High-Tech Imperium

D.C. is more than neoclassical architecture, or Brutalism even. Ever since the “end of history” was announced three decades ago, the district has piloted a new “high-tech” style that bespeaks the nation’s imperial-democratic values.



TIM HURSELEY



MICHAEL DERSIN

Bright and expressive, the KPF-designed World Bank Headquarters broke through the prevailing Brutalist aesthetic of the D.C. office block. Its vaulted atrium is among the city’s most unique interiors.

Washington, D.C., is a city self-consciously styled, since its founding, to resemble ancient Rome. The neoclassicism of the White House and of the Capitol building, the now-tunnelized Tiber Creek on the Mall, and Jefferson’s naming of Capitol Hill after Rome’s Capitoline Hill all attest to this ideal. And just as Rome’s architecture evolved to reflect its imperial ambition, so too has D.C.’s followed America’s evolution from young republic to the world’s reigning superpower. We tend to associate more traditional architectural styles with manifestations of power projection, but for this very reason, it is not the Beaux-Arts of the Gilded Age, New Deal moderne, or Cold War Brutalism that best expresses the American imperial style. Rather, it is the post-1989 steel-and-glass “high-tech” buildings of the past 30 years that represent America’s global dominance—transparency standing in for democracy, restrained massing for pragmatism, and structural precision for the efficiency of technocratic administration.

Out of the gloomy beige of the Cold War dawned a truly globalized economic system. Responding to the “end of history,” D.C.’s architecture shed the traditional markers of that history, be it Roman marble or the Great Society’s concrete. Even the barely hinted remnants of the classical orders still present in Brutalism were stripped away in favor of a more tectonic language of mullions and members, steel ties and panel reveals. The high-tech style was pioneered in the late 1960s by architects Richard Rogers, Renzo Piano, and Norman Foster, in celebration of the emancipatory potential of cybernetic technologies. But their early experiments—which increased flexibility by allowing structure and ventilation systems to float free of walls—were already co-opted for banks, factories, and corporate offices by the early 1980s. At the time in D.C., construction of federal government office space

had slowed dramatically, with the balance of the region’s new development moving to suburban office parks in Northern Virginia and Maryland, the exception being a slew of headquarters for new lobbying firms along K, L, and M Streets.

Two landmark projects of the 1990s brought the new style to downtown D.C.: the World Bank Group headquarters building and the new National Airport terminals by Cesar Pelli, both completed in 1997. The World Bank, flush with new assets to manage and privatize from the national economies of the former Eastern Bloc, tapped Kohn Pedersen Fox (which had yet to abbreviate its name) for its new headquarters. For the design, architect Gene Kohn incorporated two existing buildings on the site, whose staid volumes and unimaginative concrete finishes had defined Washington office construction for decades. If much of the work of knitting the old with the new was worked out in section, Kohn also made expressive, if perfunctory, use of massing. More inspired was the building’s primary facade on H Street, unusually transparent for the time, and its grand midblock atrium. The former was tightly gridded, as if to represent the dominance of Excel as a new financial tool, whereas the latter provided an anomalous (for D.C.) vertical counterpoint. The atrium’s vaulted glass canopy was supported by columns frayed at the ends like unwound internet cables, while a 28-foot waterfall added an unexpected note of whimsy. Economists need to daydream too.

This technocratic exuberance was best captured by Foster’s 1992 competition-winning proposal for the reconstruction of the Reichstag dome, completed in Berlin in 1999. Retrograde anticapitalist forces had been soundly defeated by market forces, with Germany reunited in a nonthreatening and democratic form. But Foster’s glass dome atop the German parliament came to

symbolize the victory of freedom worldwide, its elegant ramps a metaphor for individual ascent through personal choice and the visible connections of its steel members making evident the superior efficiency of a synergized world. That literal transparency and frictionless technical precision could visually stand in for a new American-led neoliberal global order was not lost on D.C.’s architectural clientele.

While various other offices and commercial developments began to explore the high-tech style, it was Terminals B and C of National Airport (Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport to non-D.C. people) that accelerated architectural change in and around the city. Designed by Pelli around the same time as the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia—the world’s tallest buildings upon their opening in 1998—the new terminals featured a series of bright yellow domes supported by trees of steel members. In their articulation the domes shy away from curves in favor of a composition of tangents, aggregating and approximating rather than delivering smooth form—perhaps Reichstags in miniature. As the first major and well-loved public project in the area in quite some time, the airport expansion had an outsize influence on the course of design in D.C. in the decades ahead.

However, much of what followed, though aspiring perhaps to match the ambition of the airport, achieved rather mediocre results. The MCI Center (now Capital One Arena) and the Walter E. Washington Convention Center both brought the mullion-and-panel language deeper into downtown, an early sign of the slowing pace of suburbanization and twin kickoffs for revitalization and gentrification. Both also traded formal refinement for scale, taking up entire city blocks and fronting streets with blank tan panels. The banality of these strip

mall-like developments was alleviated only by glass towers at important corners or the type of glass-and-steel canopy formed by extruding the wavering line of a felt-tip pen—simple branding exercises.

The design of transparent buildings became more fraught after September 11, as the heavy and solid visual language of security barriers, bollards, and blast-proof components brought an altogether “chunky” proportional system to bear. In airports, formerly diaphanous concourses were filled with TSA checkpoints, and gestures of welcome and arrival were subsumed within makeshift plywood walls, the physical precipitate of the Patriot Act. The spatial organization of Baghdad’s Green Zone was soon mirrored in D.C. by the mid-2000s as the streets surrounding the White House were blocked off, street-level facades of public buildings were retrofitted, and tours of the spaces of government canceled.

And yet the imperative to represent democracy, freedom, and other ideological constructs with transparency and structural legibility continued to drive new architecture in the nation’s capital, now taking on an altogether more militaristic tinge. New midfield concourses at Dulles Airport mixed expressive elements—a central spine composed of suspended cable trusses—with the pragmatic, buttoned-down gray panels of a shed on an army base. Light-gray surfaces began to replace glass, and omnipresent American flags rendered quotidian structural elements into reminders of George W. Bush’s “mission accomplished” photo op—after all, aircraft carriers are also high-tech structures. The mullion-and-canopy style was soon adopted as an overt representation of the military, in buildings as disparate as the Marine Corps Museum (2006) and the Department of Homeland Security’s consolidated headquarters. This type of construction is relatively quick and cheap,



Opened in 1997, Terminals B and C of National Airport inaugurated the high-tech style in Washington. Cesar Pelli's design captured some of the optimism of the times.

after all, accommodating the twin features of 21st-century government: expansion of security-oriented governmental offices and simultaneous, yet paradoxical, anxiety about the deficit.

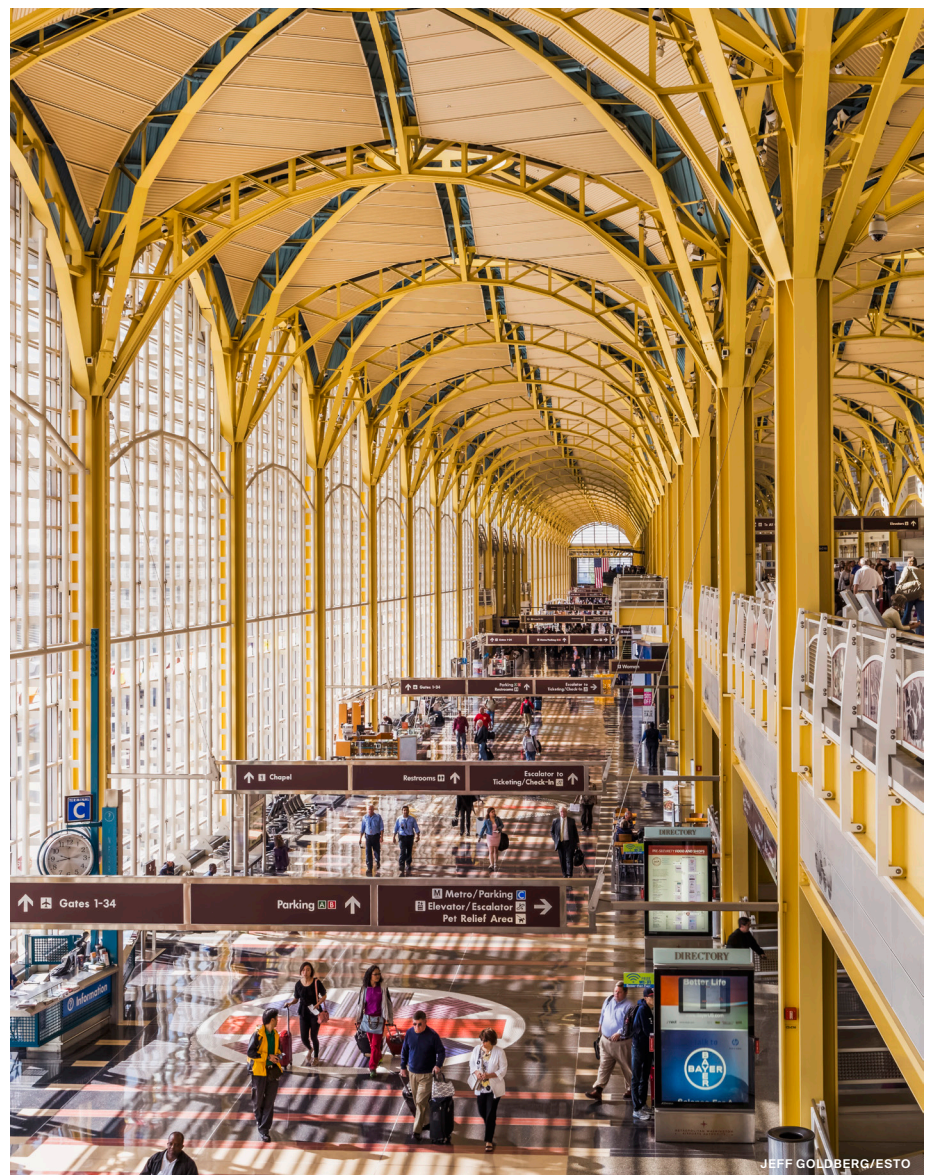
This bland version of high-tech architecture carried over into the public realm, with several recent expansions of the Metro system and the renewed development those have generated in neighborhoods like NoMa, Columbia Heights, and Tysons Corner, Virginia. The new underground stations take inspiration from Harry Weese's iconic and much-celebrated Brutalist coffered vaults but render them into thinner, almost ornamental appliqué. Aboveground canopies at the NoMa-Gallaudet or Tysons stations have fully adopted the militarized airport style—chunky members cobbled together into a loose metaphor for flight, as in liberty or victory—floating uneasily over unnecessarily massive concrete viaducts. Metro's new train cars themselves have also taken on the look of the new imperial style. Pixelated fritting patterns on the pure-silver exteriors and glass dividers within remove what was distinctive about the older cars—funky oranges and browns—and replace them with the frictionless gridded grays and gunmetals of military computing systems.

While recent public works in D.C. are of the same aesthetic register as a defense contractor's PowerPoint slide, the private sector has proliferated mullion-and-canopy structures throughout D.C., Maryland, and Virginia with slightly more verve. Large new mixed-use projects such as The Wharf and CityCenterDC were constructed during the so-called “Obama boom,” an acceleration of downtown development despite the 2008 financial crisis, accommodating professionals—largely employed by lobbying firms, defense contractors, and think tanks necessary to running a 21st-century empire—

moving back to densifying neighborhoods and theoretically more sustainable glass apartment buildings. But even hometown critics have not been wowed by this glut of development. In a 2016 Washington Post roundup of the “10 Buildings You Must See,” Annys Shin wrote, “The commercial architecture of the new Washington skews modern but stops short of avant-garde,” with the acerbic observation of one structure that “if glass buildings are the khaki pants of D.C. architecture, this building is a pair of flat fronts in a soft olive shade.”

Constrained by D.C.'s height limit, the new glass buildings bulk up to the full extent of allowable FAR, hewing to near-identical silhouettes distinguishable only by the varied canopies, trellises, and jauntily angled crowns. The new class of professionals, perhaps priced out of home ownership, press in their glass boxes against the remains of neighborhoods hit hard by the riots of '68 and ensuing waves of disinvestment. They also press into the republic-era city of white marble and surround it, speculation on war and peace fueling real estate speculation in turn. That said, the glass-and-steel, highly tectonic, mullion-and-canopy, technocratic-imperial style of post-'89 D.C. architecture is not so bad, especially when compared with the Trump-mandated oligarchic-thicc classical. But architects, as well as the general public, must remain vigilant about what our built environment communicates, and whether it has the capacity to energize our political imagination, or simply reflects an order that we are now powerless to change.

**A. J. Artemel was born and raised in Alexandria, Virginia, and has witnessed D.C.'s architectural development from 1989 to the present firsthand.**



The airport expansion's structure comprises branching steel members painted a custardy yellow.

# 16 Studio Visit

## Studio Twenty Seven Architecture

The firm talked to *The Architect's Newspaper* about housing and designing with communities in the nation's capital. By Deane Madsen

Studio Twenty Seven Architecture—named in a wink to the two cofounders' early 24-7 working habits, according to cofounder and principal-in-charge John Burke—relishes bringing community into the firm's design process. As the studio sees it, listening to a project's eventual neighbors allows communities to participate in creating the building they'll ultimately live beside. Recently, the Washing-

ton, D.C.-based firm has garnered accolades for a pair of residential projects, La Casa and The Aya, which reimagine affordable housing. "We were given a mandate to deinstitutionalize these projects," Burke explained. The D.C. Department of Human Services asked his team to "take away that stigma, to create environments that are more than dignified and that give some joy to being there and living there," Burke said.

At The Aya, residents expressed a preference for a taller building to retain more of its site for open space; expanding on that notion, Studio Twenty Seven incorporated green roofs within a stepped design that allowed for a mini lawn for each unit while preserving the neighborhood's views of the Capitol. The project and others the firm has underway are rewarding not only to their residents but also

to their designers: "You're doing stuff that affects so many people," Burke said. "It's not limited to one family—it's a housing project that really changes and improves people's lives. There's a great feeling for us when we're able to do that and see that."



## 1 La Casa

(Joint venture with Leo A Daly)

Incorporating the liveliness of an urban street in D.C.'s Columbia Heights neighborhood, the brightly illuminated lobby of La Casa—a new permanent supportive housing facility—serves as a beacon from the nearby Metro station. “The building needs to project a sense of warmth, comfort, and home,” Burke said, which is especially important in creating a feeling of ownership for the 40 men who live there.

## 2 Mundo Verde

A charter school called upon Studio Twenty Seven to update and add to its 1925 building to befit its sustainable curriculum. Inside the historic building, careful incisions opened up parts of the layout to accommodate better circulation and illumination. An annex in the form of a metal-clad structure punctuated with pockets of bright color is scaled to the original building's bay modules; in between old and new, a porous courtyard retains rainwater in an underground cistern.

## 3 Chapman Stables

The National Register of Historic Places-listed Chapman Stables evolved as its original owner, J. Edward Chapman, changed his business from selling coal to stabling horses to housing automobiles over a 25-year period beginning in 1906. In this residential refurbishment, Studio Twenty Seven maintained the site's historic character while enlivening both of the building's street frontages: “What we were bringing was life and vitality back to these alleys as well as more people into the neighborhood to be there, to watch what's going on,” Burke said.

## 4 The Aya

Completed in 2020, The Aya provides short-term affordable housing for women and children in D.C.'s Ward 6. Neighbors pushed for entries all around the building to avoid creating dead zones on its perimeter and also advocated retention of a basement clinic as a local amenity. Responding to the neighborhood's raised plinths—once done to reduce the risk of flooding—The Aya's lift similarly elevates the building to the same plane as its surroundings while providing clerestory daylighting for the lower level.



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# SCHOOLS' IN SESSION



SCURLOCK STUDIOS, PHOTOGRAPHER J. C. WRIGHT

Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., replaced its regal, red-brick 1916 building with a Brutalist facility several times larger.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.'S UNIQUE POLITICAL STATUS IS REFLECTED IN THE DESIGN OF ITS SCHOOLS.**

# CONCRETE CAPITAL



Opened in 1977, the Bryant & Bryant-designed Dunbar High School was demolished in 2013.

The design of today's public schools tends toward the underwhelming. Their formal and material solutions tell a story of frugality of means as well as of imagination. Even in those instances where the architecture does excel, where it manages to bond function with uplift, the effect is always hampered by a menacing apparatus of security devices and barriers.

It wasn't always so. In 1960s Washington, D.C., Black architects drew on the prevailing Brutalist idiom in monumental designs that aimed to match transformational notions of schooling with sculptural massings in raw concrete. In various essays, historian Amber N. Wiley has given close scholarly attention to the design of Shaw Junior High School and Dunbar High School and the social currents that gave rise to them. She plans to extend this research in a forthcoming book tentatively titled *Concrete Solutions: Architecture, Activism, and Black Power* in the Nation's Capital. *AN's* executive editor, Samuel Medina, caught up with Wiley to discuss this surprising, tragic chapter of D.C. architectural history.

**AN:** How did you become interested in the history of school design?

**Amber Wiley:** The short answer is by accident.

I went to George Washington University for a PhD in architectural history, after studying architecture at Yale. At GWU, I was in a seminar led by Suleiman Osman where we had to choose a research topic that utilized archives in D.C. I had heard a lot about Dunbar High School. Not only was it the first Black public school in the nation—it was formed in 1870—it was the first public school in D.C., *period*. (That part isn't well known.) It just had this illustrious history, and I thought, "Maybe I'll do my research on Dunbar." Now, I'm from Oklahoma City, but D.C. is my second home—my mom was born and raised in D.C.—and I had never been to Dunbar. I pulled it up on Google Maps and saw that it was around the corner from my grandpa's house. I drive over there, preparing myself to walk down the hallowed halls of this school, ready to soak up all this history. But when I get there, I thought I entered the wrong address. Standing in front of me was this high-rise windowless Brutalist building. It didn't jell with the Dunbar I had in my mind.

**AN:** What did you have in mind?

**AW:** A regal red-brick school building [*Laughs*]. I immediately jumped to several conclusions, thinking that there was no way that the community had anything to do with this monstrosity. I started to do my research, and come to find out, the school was part of a community-led effort. I was blown away by how wrong I was. I came across Dunbar and opened up a can of worms.

**AN:** Based on your research, what would you say made D.C. a place where Brutalist architecture and community activism came together?

**AW:** Howard University. I looked at the history of Howard's School of Architecture and found out it had been offering drafting classes in their manual arts department since 1910. You've got Black architects who are teaching at the university and also designing its campus. But they're not getting major commissions outside of Howard. Albert Cassell is the best-known example, but Hilyard Robinson, who comes later, is another.

There's a notion of professionalization within the architecture field that's important. It's how you get architects like Robinson who practice in the popular idiom of their day, and their work shows up in the Howard University School of Architecture brochures and catalogues that I found in the archives. It's a desire to be accepted by the mainstream. I talked to Melvin Mitchell, an amazing architect who came out of that era—the '50s and '60s—and he told me that "[Paul] Rudolph is what we were taught. We loved modernism." And I'm like, "Yeah, it shows." [*Laughs*.] It was their way of trying to prove their mettle, right? "We can play with the big boys too." They weren't about designing for communities in new paradigms. After '68 there was a major shift in the studio culture at Howard, but the folks who were getting the commissions were still the older generation that was really tied to heroic modernism and innocence.

**AN:** Where do the architects of Dunbar High School fit in this generational split?

**AW:** The school was designed by Bryant & Bryant, a Black-owned firm run by two brothers trained at Howard. The commission—for the newer, Brutalist school that replaced the 1916 Dunbar High School I was expecting to see—was a breakthrough for them. They were part of a generation of architects that got their gigs only *after* '68 and home rule [when Congress afforded D.C. limited self-rule through mayoral and city council elections]. Charles Cassell, of the esteemed Cassell architecture family [he was Albert's son], was on the first elected school board in the District of Columbia. And he ran for that position so that he could advocate for Black architects getting these big design commissions. Not just Dunbar but also Shaw Junior High School and a lot of elementary schools. That blew my mind: "Whoa, an architect was on D.C.'s first school board?" That means something to me.

**AN:** Educational reform began taking shape in the '50s after *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled against segregation, before picking up in the '60s and tapering off in the mid-'70s. D.C. was seen as a test site for many reform-based initiatives. What was the state of the city's schools at that time, prior to these architects' interventions?

**AW:** Black schools in D.C., especially from the '30s through the '50s, were allowed to be overcrowded and overused. An enormous strain was being put on these older buildings. There were fire hazards, electricity issues, bad egress, outdated electrical systems. Students were attending in different shifts—they couldn't even get a full school day in. *Brown v. Board* may have happened in 1954, but even after the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, little progress was made on desegregation. I looked into the *Coleman Report*, an independent nationwide study mandated by the Civil Rights Act and published in '66. The report asked if there was an equality of educational opportunities in elementary and middle schools across the U.S.—that was the official title, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*—and the answer was "No, there is not." According to the findings, many school systems

were basically resegregated if they were ever desegregated in the first place. Obviously, the worst schools were in the South, but Washington schools weren't much better. That fact was embarrassing for policy makers in the time of the Great Society. D.C. was supposed to be the symbol of good progress.

Then the next year the *Passow Report* came out, which looked specifically at the state of the school system in the District of Columbia. It said that the schools were ancient relics. Julius Hobson [an activist city councilman] had sued the school system for discriminating against Black students by putting them on academic tracks. If you were put onto a track, you usually stayed on that track for the entirety of your education in D.C. public schools. For Black students, there was very little opportunity to move up to the honors track, and for white students, it was unlikely for them to [be dislodged] from an honors track. The *Passow Report* finds that this system was abused and was abusive. When it came to looking at educational facilities, it finds that they were dingy and dark. [The report's authors] audit classes in classrooms where there are rats and plaster is falling off the wall. It was highly embarrassing to the superintendent, Carl F. Hansen, who eventually loses his job. Julius Hobson wins his suit against the track system. But this is 12 years after *Brown v. Board*. Twelve years that D.C. schools were pigeonholing students, sending them to the crappiest schools. The *Passow Report* basically said, "This can't stand any longer." It was all ammunition for the kinds of projects that happened in the late '60s and early '70s.

**AN:** We're nearing the pivotal year of 1968. You write poignantly how, in 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech at Cardozo High School near Howard University in favor of urban renewal. This would seem to complicate popular perceptions about both urban renewal and MLK, no?

**AW:** As I did my research, I kept getting shocked by the things I found. Shocked about who designed Dunbar, and shocked that Martin Luther King Jr.



Though Sulton-Campbell designed Shaw Junior High School in the late 1960s, it did not open until 1977. The Brutalist design was razed in 2019.

spoke at a D.C. public school on behalf of urban renewal in a predominantly Black neighborhood. But he spoke at the behest of Walter Fauntroy, who was a fellow reverend and member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He was also D.C. born and bred, a Dunbar grad whose church was in the Shaw neighborhood. I found evidence of Black pastors in Shaw who were afraid of losing their congregations if the major kind of demolition associated with urban renewal were to happen. They were saying, “It’s happened before. We lost congregations in Georgetown. We lost congregations in Southwest. They’re coming for us next.” It was a bubbling up of clergy activism. And because Fauntroy was pivotal in organizing the March on Washington in ’63, he was very close to Martin Luther King. The event started at Dunbar and concluded with King’s speech at Cardozo. This was a year before King was assassinated.

**AN:** And when he is at his most radical, a side of King we hear too little about.

**AW:** Exactly. There’s going to be some juicy quotes in the book where he says, “We can’t end the slums without taking the profit out of the slums.” So [after the success of civil rights in the South] he takes his fight to the North. He goes to Chicago to fight for fair housing and gets stoned. What he’s trying to do is battle for Black folks in urban areas that have been disinvested. Urban renewal is one way to change that. At Cardozo he’s saying, “You know what? You can actually make this work for you if you listen to my good friend Walter Fauntroy. He’s got some great ideas for ways that we can control [urban renewal] for our benefit.”

**AN:** What’s the connection between Fauntroy and urban renewal?

**AW:** He was getting his divinity degree at Yale when New Haven was supposedly leading this new kind of urban renewal, one with community participation. Later, when he is in Shaw, he thinks, “I can bring this to my neighborhood, and I can also keep it from displacing my congregation.” But he was having a hard time convincing Shaw residents that urban renewal was

for them. Shaw had a junior high school that was put on a list in the 1940s to be replaced by new facilities. But the 1950s came and went. No new Shaw. The first half of the 1960s came and went. Still no new Shaw. So Fauntroy said, “We can make a new school building a key part of *our* urban renewal plan,” which becomes the Shaw School Urban Renewal Area. Fauntroy creates his Model Inner City Community Organization, giving members of the Shaw community a role in the decision-making process. There’s now federal funding coming in and community groups directing it. Black architects and planners get very involved. Then the ’68 uprising happens, which leaves a lot of destruction in Shaw, and there is an imperative to build and to involve Black architects, who demand to be involved. That’s when the commission of Shaw Junior High School goes to a Black architecture firm, Sulton-Campbell Architects.

**AN:** You’ve described that the school-as-built is close to an “education park,” a planning idea that was popular at the time. Another was the idea of open space-planning within the school buildings themselves. How were these ideas implemented at Shaw and Dunbar, and were they successful?

**AW:** This open-plan model really seemed [to school reformers and community leaders] the way of the future. The rhetoric was all about knocking down walls between students and teachers, knocking down barriers and the rigidity of school curriculums. In the older school buildings in D.C., teachers stood at lecterns and students sat behind rows of desks nailed to the floor to keep them from moving around. But also, the track system was really hated for a different kind of rigidity. People considered Superintendent Hansen as being an authoritarian because the system ultimately re-created a sort of caste system. So on a conceptual level, demolishing the track system and creating an equal playing field was really appealing.

This rhetoric played out in the spatial sphere, of course. These schools weren’t going to have columns or corridors. Instead, the Shaw and Dunbar

school buildings were very big—Shaw was designed for 1,200 students and Dunbar 1,800—and divided into subschools with their own facilities. The funny thing is, open-plan schools had originated in Great Britain and were really meant for young kids and Montessori-style teaching, where you’re rotating [students] in and out. There is no collective learning. The idea was never really meant to be applied to middle and high schools [as it was in D.C.]. And a lot of teachers didn’t know what to make of these open layouts that promoted team-based teaching. Maybe they feared losing control of their classrooms. What ends up happening is they start using bookcases to form barriers between, for example, the English class and the math class. They want to set off their own space from the larger open plan.

The Black architects who designed Shaw, who designed Dunbar, are very much influenced by a lot of the educational rhetoric coming over from Great Britain, on a conceptual level but also more on an aesthetic level. I think of Dunbar, or Shaw, less as one school and more like four or five open-plan schools. Both were very tough on the exterior, but inside, the spaces were meant to be flowing and communal, with lots of [top] light. Communal on the inside and monumental on the outside.

**AN:** Initially, these school buildings were very well received by their communities. What changed?

**AW:** People loved these schools when they opened. They had all sorts of technology that was brand-new for the ’70s. The Brutalist Dunbar building was the most expensive school to be built in D.C. at that time! The architects were just really imaginative about the relationship of learning spaces to each other. One of my favorite features of the Dunbar school was the cafeteria. It was really high up with windows all around. Imagine you’re a student and eating your lunch up there. From your table you can see the Capitol Building to the south and, to the north, Howard University’s Founders Library.

As part of my research I started to have these conversations with people in

the community, mostly in their mid-20s. This was 2008/2009, when the 1977 Dunbar school was set to be replaced by a new one [designed by Moody Nolan]. The people I was speaking to just rejected the notion that there was any benefit to looking at that design and the ideas [it held]. They were vehemently opposed to that older building. But I think part of that really passionate opposition really comes from the fact that the school was in horrible condition. Budget cuts rendered aspects of these designs useless. And there were huge issues with maintenance. There was graffiti. Mess was everywhere. I’m not sure the carpet was replaced once in 30 years. It was just extremely unlovable.

**AN:** You mentioned teachers and administrators fearing losing control over their students and classrooms. As you’ve written, control over shaping behavior, and policing that behavior, has always been a core function of schooling. How was this applied at these architectural case studies?

**AW:** So the idea with the communal spaces at Dunbar was that [administrators] could monitor and see students. It was about what I call “passive” surveillance, where the students are being observed in a panopticon—think of Michel Foucault—but they don’t really feel it. But there’s also this tension between this exciting open environment and this surveillance and also the presence of police officers, which is already happening in D.C. public schools in the early ’70s. Charles Cassell talks about this on the D.C. school board, questioning why there were armed policemen in these schools and what their role was. At the new Dunbar school that opened in 2013 [replacing its Brutalist predecessor] there are metal detectors and CCTV video cameras recording the students at all times. They know they are being watched. I don’t want to suggest that passive surveillance is better than this active surveillance. But what I do want to point out is that after 50 years, we’re still having this debate.

# CAMPUS REVIVAL

## HOWARD UNIVERSITY EYES DEVELOPMENT PLANS WHILE STAYING TRUE TO ITS ROOTS.

About midway between the Yard, the quadrangle at the heart of Howard University's campus, and the historic nightlife strip of U Street NW stands a compact brick Georgian building. Stacks of quoins rise up from Bryant Street, stepping back to frame tall arched windows before reaching a pitched roof and a smokestack. It's unexpectedly graceful for a power plant, testifying to the ability of its architect, Albert Cassell.

On a cold December morning, construction workers were carefully removing the large windows as part of a long-overdue renovation. The rehab of the 1936 plant is one critical part of a campaign by the historically Black university to update its 86-acre main campus. The approach the administration has taken attempts to balance preservation of the heritage buildings at its core and construction of new specialized buildings at the periphery, funded by the sale and redevelopment of the school's other real estate.

The keystone of the effort is an update to the university's ten-year campus plan. Periodical zoning updates are required for institutions of higher learning in the District of Columbia, but Howard is using it as a benchmark for the future of the campus, building on a tradition of placemaking by preeminent Black architects, going back to Cassell.

"The Cassell plan is really the foundational plan on which the modern campus is built," said Derrek Niec-Williams, Howard's executive director of campus planning, architecture, and development. Completed in 1932, it was one of several consequential breaks from paternalistic white governance that followed the election of Howard's first Black president, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson. Prior to this time, the federal government gave campus projects to white architects, such as Bruce Price, Jules Henri de Sibour, and a young John Russell Pope, who designed the 1909 Freedmen's Hospital building, just opposite the Power Plant.

Cassell went on to design a dozen or so buildings around campus, including the iconic Founders Library, whose Georgian styling evoked the roots of American history. Later in the 1930s, the university turned to the partnership of D.C. native Hilyard Robinson and Los Angeles-based Paul Revere Williams. After World War II, Robinson and Williams made the modern movement their own, using their commissions to experiment with space planning, construction, and materials. The nine buildings they delivered have functionalist exteriors but put Williams's signature curves to work in interiors and populated key spaces with Black-centered artworks.

Cassell's elegant references and the innovation of Robinson and Williams's contributions spoke in a dual register. On the one hand the buildings reinforced the value



Howard's updated campus plan will add new facilities while clearing lots for redevelopment.

of the scholarship being done inside them. On the other, they presented evidence of the quality of the Black institution to a nation that expected little of its graduates and left their work out of textbooks.

The buildings influenced design students like Melvin Mitchell, who earned his BArch from Howard before pursuing a dual career in practice and teaching. "We were just steeped in the Black excellence. This was a magnifier," he said of a learning environment built by Black architects.

Mitchell, who went on to serve as chair of the architecture program at Morgan State, an HBCU in Baltimore, notes in his book *The Crisis of the African-American Architect* that the development of Howard's campus fostered the architecture program and Black professional networks over 40 years. These commissions begat other work for Cassell, Robinson, and Williams while keeping students and graduates employed in the profession until African American architects secured better opportunities for themselves in the 1960s.

Given this history, the latest plan emphatically preserves Cassell's work, particularly the Yard. While the plan calls for one building at the center of campus, a new student union, it otherwise clusters studio, medical, and STEM programs in dense multidisciplinary buildings at the periphery. For example, the plan envisions a new home for the architecture and communication programs on the back side of Robinson and Williams's arts complex, which bounds the Yard to the north.

These dense aggregations of curricular spaces signal a move away from the school's

current approach, in which academic departments are given dedicated buildings of their own. Derrek Niec-Williams said this shift has already begun, owing to an accident two winters ago, when pipes burst all across campus. The moisture subsequently froze, resulting in extensive damage to historic buildings. The first restorations, such as that of Cassell's Frederick Douglass Hall on the east side of the Yard, are only just reaching completion.

Still, unusual combinations of program follow a tradition begun with Robinson and Williams's work. Their 1956 biology building, for example, is topped with a greenhouse, making the most of limited land. Now, south of the historic campus, Howard envisions a multidisciplinary health science and STEM complex, created by adding seven-story laboratory buildings to the Freedmen's Hospital building. On the opposite side of Bryant Street, the successor to Freedmen's Hospital, Howard University Hospital, would move to a new building, matched by a medical office building for its faculty. The new buildings will likely be topped with solar panels; the plan calls for 1.3 megawatts of capacity to be installed across old and new roofs.

Relocating the hospital and medical programs opens up a massive area the university plans on redeveloping to bring in much-needed revenue. (In September the university received a \$225 million tax abatement from the District of Columbia for the new hospital construction.) This is the most controversial aspect of the initiative Niec-Williams oversees. At the height of disinvestment in D.C. in the 1980s, Howard assembled a large area of industrial land south and west of the school.

Now that ground has become some of the most valuable land in D.C. In the past decade, the university has acted to capture the value through a series of ground leases, for-profit subsidiaries, and contracts with the private student housing company Provident Resources Group.

Along these lines, the university is requesting changes in D.C.'s Comprehensive Plan, which governs development citywide. The increased density will allow the administrators more flexibility to develop the western edge of campus and the old hospital site. Niec-Williams said that many of the private and university-owned projects will include space for university and affiliated programs.

Niec-Williams argues the real estate moves are in line with Howard's history, dating back to its founding in 1867. To pay for its first buildings, university leadership subdivided much of the rural land it acquired and sold the lots to early suburbanites. Moreover, the idea of leveraging its assets is of a younger vintage, going back to the 2000s. Racial wealth disparities have hampered the university's ability to fundraise from alumni. Most of Cassell's and Robinson and Williams's buildings were funded by Congress. While the federal government still funds about 30 percent of university and hospital operations, the appropriations do not cover the cost of overdue capital projects.

But inseparable from the increased land values has been the influx of wealthier, white residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. Thirty years ago students were more upwardly mobile than their neighbors but shared an understanding of the campus's cultural significance. That isn't the case with newer white residents, leading to ongoing conflict about appropriate use of the ungated campus by neighbors, especially dog walkers. Niec-Williams noted an even more direct effect of the increased prices. "We cannot rely on the adjacent market to house our students," he said. So the campus plan makes space for 70 percent of students on campus, even as the administration seeks to grow enrollment.

Administrators will be grappling with the balance between heritage, curricular goals, and the need for revenue for many years to come. At the same time, the university has gained recognition as the alma mater of the incoming vice president, Kamala Harris, and the discipline of architecture is beginning to reckon with the historical omission of practitioners such as Albert Cassell, Paul Revere Williams, and Hilyard Robinson. It is a major undertaking, Derrek Niec-Williams acknowledges. "There is still a lot of work to be done."

**Neil Flanagan is a practicing architectural designer in D.C., writing a book about the transformation of Washington in the 1920s.**

# DESIGN FOR SIGNING

**WITH A MASSIVE NEW DEVELOPMENT CURRENTLY UNDERWAY, GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY INCORPORATES ACCESSIBLE FEATURES BOTH ON AND OFF CAMPUS.**

One might not expect a historic 1866 college campus to break new ground in architectural theory, but that's exactly what's been happening at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Designed by Olmsted, Vaux & Co. as a green oasis amid the bustle of downtown, the campus is now reconnecting with the city it has long kept at arm's length, in part through a novel concept for space planning the school calls DeafSpace.

Located in Northeast D.C., Gallaudet is the oldest university for the deaf and hard of hearing in the United States. Until recently, its 99-acre campus was relatively closed off, even as neighboring communities in NoMa, Trinidad, Ivy City, and the H Street corridor grew around it. Union Market, a popular food hall on land Gallaudet owns, has prompted two simultaneous development projects on opposite sides of 6th Street NE, the campus's western boundary. Each incorporates DeafSpace principles incubated at Gallaudet over the past 15 years to promote friendlier, more accessible, and more open living and learning environments.

"DeafSpace has been around as long as there've been deaf people," said Hansel Bauman, who, as Gallaudet's campus architect for a decade, helped translate the concept into a set of design guidelines. "Modifying the built environment to meet the ways Deaf people occupy space can be as simple as gathering in circular seating formations."

But DeafSpace can also be more complex, and to that end, Bauman and a team at Gallaudet explored the various aspects of existing campus buildings that were working or needed improvement, aiming to distill five key principles: space and proximity, sensory reach, mobility and proximity, light and color, and acoustics.

In 2010 Gallaudet tapped New York-based firm LTL Architects (with local firm Quinn Evans Architects) to design a new dormitory building as a case study for the homegrown concept. Opened two years later, Living and Learning Residence Hall 6 (LLR6) featured tiered meeting spaces to host intimate conversations as well as larger gatherings thanks to generous sightlines, background wall color



A proposed design for a new mixed-use, pedestrian corridor incorporates DeafSpace principles.

that provides high contrast for signers, and ample natural light to reduce eye fatigue.

While DeafSpace can be treated as a tool kit, it can also be thought of as a framework for architectural design in which the experiences of people who are Deaf or hard of hearing are brought to the fore. "I think it has to do with acknowledging that Deaf people occupy space and have a different sensory relationship than their hearing counterparts do," Bauman said. "The built environment presents a number of barriers—it is the disabling element," he added, before clarifying, "It's not that being Deaf is a disability, but the ways our environment is constructed rarely take into account what's needed for visual communication."

LLR6 anchored Gallaudet's previous facilities master plan, which is required by the District of Columbia Zoning Commission to be updated every ten years. In anticipation of the 2022 deadline, the university undertook an expansion with the Maryland-based developer JBG Smith. The DeafSpace-compliant

development encompasses four parcels of land over six acres, with two parcels situated on campus and two immediately beside it. As UrbanTurf's Nena Perry-Brown reported in August, firms tapped to design buildings within a master plan by Morris Adjmi Architects include Olson Kundig Architects, Eric Colbert & Associates, and landscape architect Future Green Studio.

The contours of the entire development loosely follow those of an earlier concept plan by Hall McKnight, a U.K.-based firm that won a 2016 international competition sponsored by Gallaudet. Though Hall McKnight's proposal has since evolved, one major feature of its plan has been preserved: a pedestrian promenade running along the eastern edge of the campus parcels. The corridor is envisioned as an outdoor public forum, said Samuel Swiller, Gallaudet's director of strategic real estate planning. "It has the opportunity to be event space, meeting space, and collaboration space." Adjacent to the campus, several new

mixed-use buildings are set to rise on what is currently a surface parking lot for Union Market. These will bring close to 1,800 new residential units, more than 125,000 square feet of retail, and nearly half a million square feet of office space to the neighborhood. Building courts, arcades, and wide pedestrian walkways provide the elements of a promising streetscape, while differentiated ground treatments and horizontal datum demarcations—helpful for low-vision individuals in establishing spatial boundaries—will provide cues as to barrier-free zones versus high-traffic areas. The feel of unimpeded passage is important because it facilitates uninterrupted conversations between people whose attention may be particularly focused on one another rather than what's around them. For Swiller, these design moves will contribute to making "universally accessible space," where "Deaf individuals can have a much better time visually navigating the space as well as anywhere else."

While many of the principles of DeafSpace focus on increasing visibility in areas both on and off campus, Gallaudet also finds itself increasingly visible thanks to the current Netflix documentary series *Deaf U*. Though the series focuses mainly on relationships between students, the environments they inhabit serve as an active backdrop—what Bauman refers to as the idea of a building as a third person. "DeafSpace is really about socio-spatial conditions. You can't separate codes of conduct and communication from the built environment," he said. "That's what's so fascinating: Buildings become an active player in human communication and human contact. In those conversations, walking down sidewalks, there's this idea of the third person. One person is signing, so they're focused on that. The third person is the one responsible for caring for the group."

With these new developments, Gallaudet aims to create buildings that will be active caretakers of its students and universally accessible for the growing community around them.

**Deane Madsen is a writer and photographer based in Washington, D.C., and the founder of BrutalistDC.**

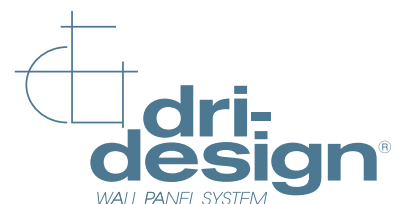
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# Home Building

Over the past year, people have relied on their domestic space to adapt to every facet of their lives. Homes have become makeshift workplaces, classrooms, and gyms. Even after the pandemic ends, these use patterns will likely continue in some form. The latest residential building products, including smart home solutions, hygienic surfaces, and more, ensure that these experiences are enjoyable and productive but also healthy and safe. **By Adrian Madlener**



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# Void House



Architect and landscape architect: Spiegel Aihara Workshop (SAW)  
Location: Atherton, California

Wood flooring and ceiling decking: Madera  
Paint: Benjamin Moore  
Exterior doors and windows: All Weather  
Skylights: Velux  
Batt insulation: Owens Corning  
Metal roofing: RMS Supply  
Kitchen pulls and primary bathroom decorative hardware: Rocky Mountain Hardware  
Appliances: Thermador, Viking, Miele, Samsung  
Plumbing fixtures: Waterworks, Kohler, Blanco, Newport Brass, Toto, Rejuvenation, Americh  
Tile: Ann Sacks, Daltile, The Builder Depot, Akdo, Ceramic Tile Design, Cement Tile Shop

Rather than tear down this Silicon Valley midcentury house to make way for an oversize mansion (standard practice in the area), San Francisco-based firm Spiegel Aihara Workshop (SAW) opted for a lighter approach to bring the building into the 21st century. “We decided that we would try to carve away from what was already there,” said Dan Spiegel, who founded and operates SAW with Megumi Aihara, about the Atherton, California, dwelling. The house’s roof and attic space featured prominently in the original design but were underutilized, and the architects saw potential there.

“We looked for opportunities, some based on locations of existing skylights, some based on unusual program adjacencies that we could find, and carved away at the attic,” Spiegel said. New Velux skylights and large operable windows and walls from All Weather flood the interiors with daylight and allow for passive ventilation in the mild local climate. The result is reminiscent of the gently luminous work of California ranch-style architect Cliff May—his celebrated *Sunset* magazine headquarters is not far away in Menlo Park, and Spiegel grew up nearby in a modified May house—but with a definite twist. Cutting through the clean rectilinear geometries typical of the ranch style, the architects inserted sculptural light wells that snake around the house’s existing structure and reach deep into the interior. In this otherwise horizontal home, these elegant vertical elements create unexpected spatial connections. “The challenge of trying to make these openings work within whatever the existing structure was led to some really interesting formal solutions that we wouldn’t have thought of otherwise,” Spiegel said. The formal solutions had programmatic effects as well: a window in the primary closet looks into a void that connects to a hallway by the front door, for instance. The new spatial connections and channels of light feel grounded in the past while presenting a brighter future. **Jack Balderrama Morley**



**Top left:** SAW carved into the house’s attic space and added Velux skylights to flood the interiors with daylight.  
**Top right:** Madera flooring wraps the walls, ceiling, and bench of a seating alcove.

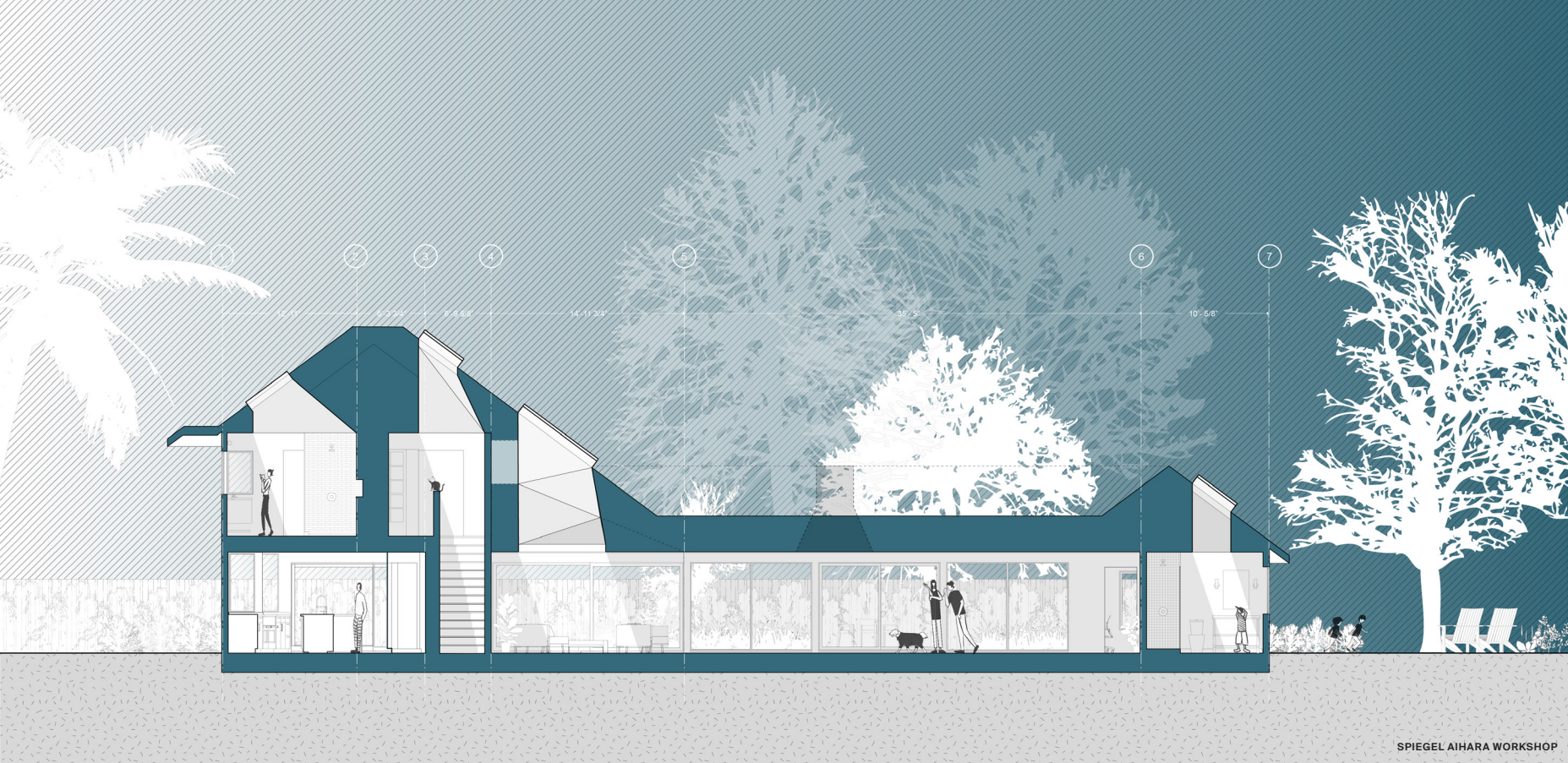
**Bottom right:** All Weather windows seem to make the house’s walls dissolve.



MIKIKO KIKUYAMA



**Top left:** Metal roofing from RMS Supply adds crisp linear patterns to the fifth facade.  
**Top right:** Angular cuts in the existing building's geometry enlivened the original structure.  
**Below:** Light wells bore through the section, creating unexpected connections.



# Barriers and Sealants

Ensuring the safety and efficiency of homes is getting more important. These barriers and sealants are vital to making spaces airtight. *By Adrian Madlener*



## Power Point 300 DAP

The Power Point 300 line by DAP is perfect for professional painting contractors. The high-performance acrylic urethane elastomeric sealant provides maximum flexibility and strong multimaterial adhesion for a durable seal that won't crack. The product is available in 14 colorways, conducive to today's top trim and siding trends.

dap.com



## COMFORTBOARD 80 ROCKWOOL

COMFORTBOARD 80 by ROCKWOOL is a vapor-open insulation that keeps the home dry from outside elements. It exceeds Home Energy Rating System Index building standards and is adaptable to many IECC climate zones throughout the United States.

rockwool.com



## CertaSeal INT CertainTeed

CertaSeal INT is a new water-based, liquid acrylic, spray-on air sealant produced by CertainTeed that fills any void or crack in a residential building envelope. When paired with standard air sealing practices like the use of taped house wrap caulk or spray sealants, the product helps achieve zero air infiltration.

certainteed.com



## Pure Safety Owens Corning

The high-performance Pure Safety insulation solution by Owens Corning is the world's first asthma- and allergy-resistant certified product of its class. The barrier allows up to 65 percent less dust and is mold resistant. It creates a safe and healthy indoor environment while delivering added fire resistance, noise reduction, and top-rated thermal performance.

owenscorning.com



## TUFF-N-DRI Classic Tremco Residential

TUFF-N-DRI Classic by Tremco Residential is a versatile waterproofing membrane spray used on foundation wall shrinkage cracks and to seal out water penetration. The sealant's exceptional ability to hang on the wall and build a targeted thickness allows it to span voids up to 3/8 inch wide.

tremcosealants.com



## ZIP System liquid flash Huber Engineered Woods

ZIP System liquid flash is a fluid-applied flashing membrane made with silyl-terminated-polyether technology. Produced by Huber Engineered Woods, this moisture-curing formula combines the durability of silicones with the toughness of urethanes. The sealant smoothly flows into corners to lock out water and air.

huberwood.com

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# Vertical Courtyard House

Architect: Montalba Architects  
Location: Santa Monica, California

Structural engineer: The Office of Gordon L. Polon  
MEP engineer: PBS Engineers  
Lighting designer: Sean O'Connor Lighting  
Landscape designer: Elysian Landscapes  
Waterproofing consultant: Roofing & Waterproofing Forensics  
Contractor: Sarlan Builders  
Surveyor: M&M & Co.  
Title 24 consultant: Newton Energy  
Soils engineer: Grover-Hollingsworth and Associates  
Civil engineer: Wynn Engineering  
Kitchen appliances: Gaggenau  
Toilets: Duravit  
Cabinetry, millwork, and doors: Wider SA  
Bathroom plumbing fixtures: VOLA  
Kitchen faucets: MGS

Sink basins, garbage disposal, and kitchen accessories: Franke  
Doors and windows: Vitrocsa  
Concrete panels and planter cladding: Swisspearl  
Roofing: Sika Sarnafil  
Stone: Hullebusch  
Wood floors: Dinesen  
Door hardware: FSB  
Lighting controls and shades: Lutron  
Lighting: No. 8  
Entry intercom systems: Siedle  
Modular storage and shelving: USM  
Kitchen furniture: Bulthaup  
Lighting fixtures: Santa & Cole

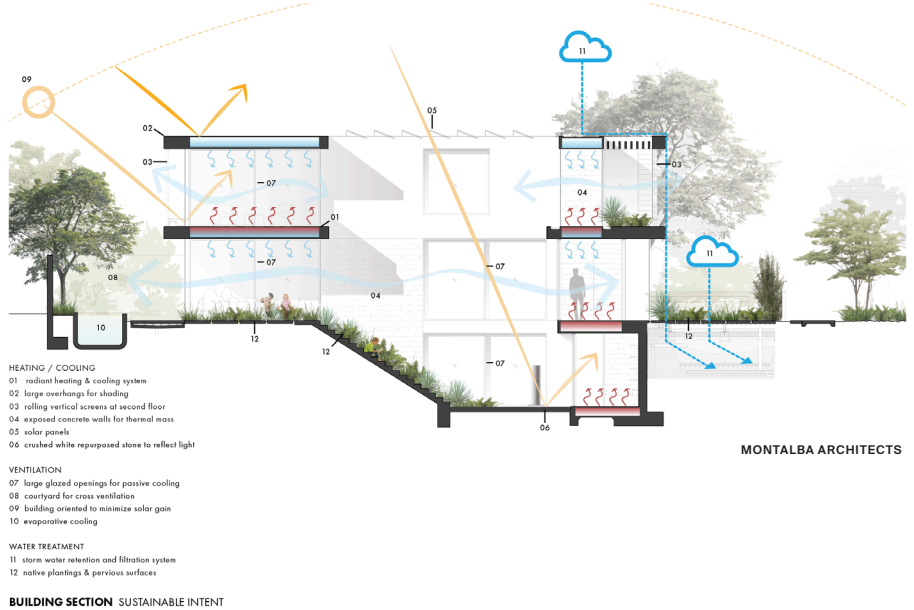
Vertical Courtyard House, a 5,450-square-foot single-family residence in Southern California's Santa Monica Canyon, dissolves boundaries between interior and exterior, taking advantage of the region's warm climate and

laid-back lifestyle. Designed by Montalba Architects as the home for its founding principal, David Montalba, the house features expansive glazing and a stepped courtyard that stitches together the residence's three levels. Sandblasted concrete footings and walls in the part-basement and ground-floor open-plan living areas support a hovering stucco volume that contains bedrooms and an office. Louvered timber screens on the second floor allow treetop views and enable air to flow through operable Vitrocsa windows while maintaining shade, privacy, and security. The project's massing facilitates sustainable strategies, including "cross ventilation over the footprint of the home and evaporative cooling from the strategically sited pool," Montalba said. Such measures are aided by native vegetation, like a retained old-growth avocado tree and two newly planted California oaks, that provides shading, and rain-

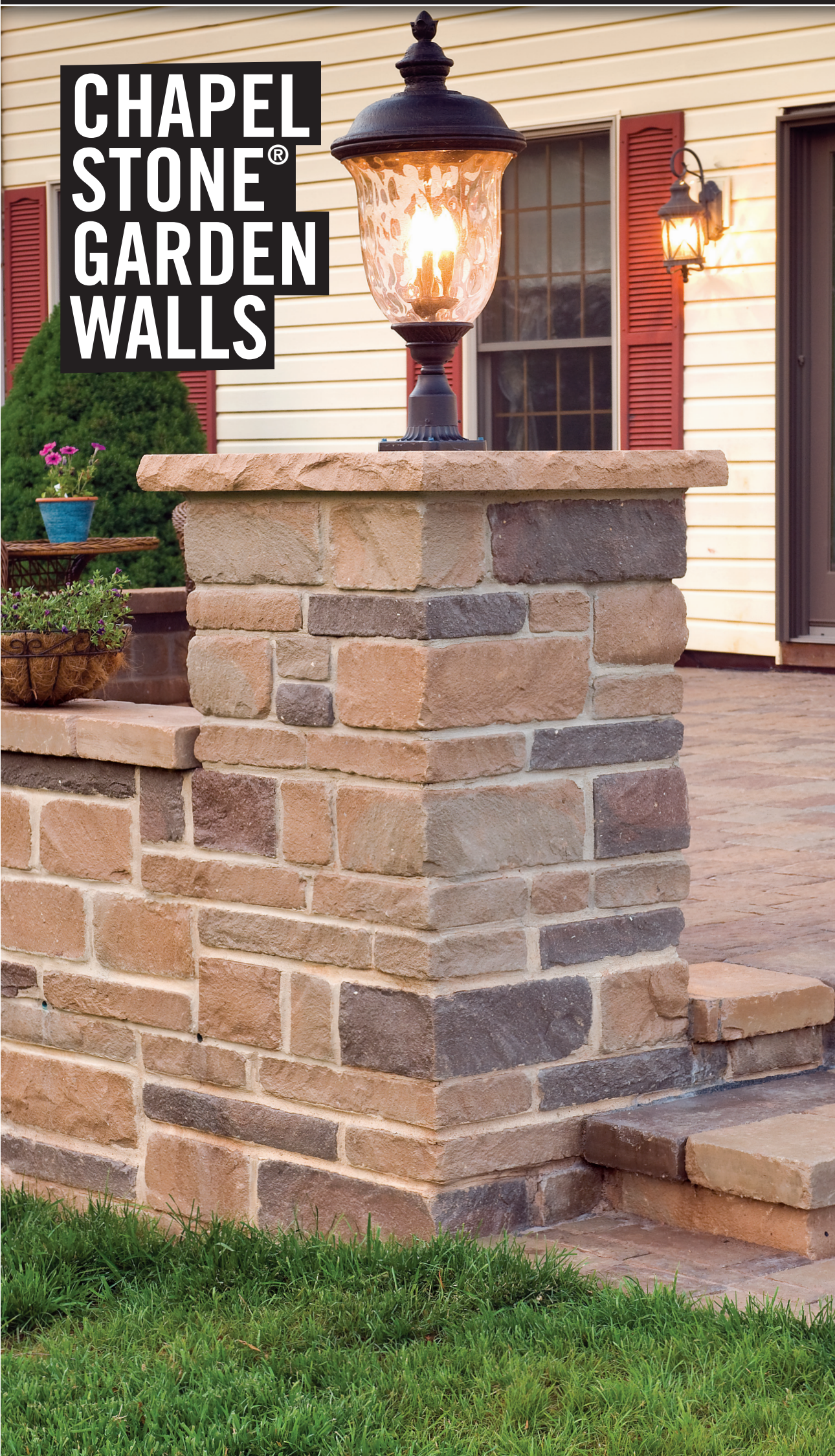
water collection systems to minimize water consumption. A radiant heating and cooling system also eliminates the need for a forced air system and reduces the risk of allergens and pollutants in the home. The interiors feature a warm palette of Hullebusch stone, concrete, wood, and soft white walls. White oak in varying textures, including flat matte and a raked corrugated finish, echoes the timber fins and cladding on the home's exterior. A timber stairway connects the living quarters to the private spaces on the first floor, and its open risers let light stream through to the levels below. The project's materials, Montalba said, "are natural, durable, yet contrast in their relation to one another to balance the crispness of the architectural concrete with the softer, warmer edges of the wood and a California lifestyle." **Amrita Raja**



**Top left:** Operable walls and timber fins help create a gentle connection to the outdoors.  
**Bottom left:** The house's namesake courtyard brings light deep into the building.  
**Top right:** VOLA plumbing fixtures help create a streamlined but humane environment.  
**Right:** Multiple sustainable strategies aim to lighten the building's effect on the environment.



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# Case Studies in Brief

## The Lake ‘Cottage’

Architects: SAOTA and matter architectural studio inc.  
Location: Lake Huron, Ontario

Facade: Neolith Strata Argentum and Neolith Nero Zimbabwe  
Ceilings, walls, and floors: Neolith Strata Argentum

Far from the average lakeside getaway, this sprawling 17,222-square-foot modern country home is used as a retreat by three generations of a large family from nearby London, Ontario.

“When you first arrive at the location, you can’t see the lake right away because the site sits on a bluff, occupying a transitional space between the water and acres of forestland,”

said Mark Bullivant, coprincipal of Cape Town, South Africa, firm SAOTA. “We therefore wanted to make sure that the first moment you see the lake, it has a real impact.”

SAOTA teamed up with a local practice, matter architectural studio inc., to meet a client brief centered on durability, versatility, low maintenance, and stunning views from the

inside out. The collaborators opted for various products from Spanish sintered-stone expert firm Neolith for both the exterior and the interior of the open-plan home. **AM**



## Frontline Townhomes

Architect: archimania  
Location: Memphis, Tennessee

Insulation: Owens Corning  
Sinks, tubs, and commodes: Kohler  
Drywall: CertainTeed  
Windows: Pella  
HVAC: State

Situated on 1.25 acres near the Mississippi River, this residential compound comprises a set of stacked volumes clad in zinc-gray box-rib metal and topped with bright-yellow fiber cement accents. The multifamily development includes 30 townhomes.

Each unit contains a semiprivate entry stoop, 9-foot-tall Pella windows, and an

enclosed garage. Many incorporate their own private exterior spaces, balconies, third-level multipurpose rooms, and roof decks. An exterior space between the two buildings connects to an elevated dog walk on an adjacent former railroad overpass.

Open-plan great rooms and spacious bedrooms make the most of angular floor plates.

Kohler products furnish compact bathrooms, while Owens Corning insulation keeps the units snug and energy efficient. **AM**



## Me-Kwa-Mooks Net-Zero

Architect: SHED Architecture + Design  
Location: Seattle

Solar power appliances: Artisan Electric  
Hardware: Baldwin  
Faucets: Hansgrohe  
Surfaces: Caesarstone  
Doors: Rixson

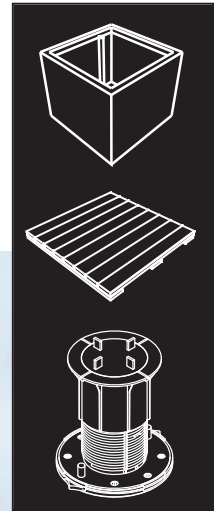
Framing vistas of Puget Sound, this 2,571-square-foot single-family house remodel makes the most of its perch on a triangular lot. Rectifying a series of disconnected additions made to the original structure over the years, SHED Architecture + Design created a coherent and efficient hillside home. The firm’s intervention improves access to the

main structure and interior flow.

SHED’s renovation scheme reoriented the home’s program around a central double-height hearth encompassing a dining room, living room, and music room. Adjacent to this three-ring mast are bedrooms and bathrooms complete with Caesarstone surfaces and Baldwin hardware. Putting the

home on track to achieve net-zero efficiency are Glo high-performance windows, Mitsubishi electric heat pumps, Rheem water heaters, and low-flow plumbing. **AM**





Carrino Firehouse Residence | Jersey City NJ  
photographer: Anthony Carrino | [www.TheBuild.tv](http://www.TheBuild.tv)

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# Dillon617

Architect: Lorcan O’Herlihy Architects  
Location: Los Angeles

Landscape design: Stephen Billings  
Landscape Architecture  
Civil and MEP engineering: SY Lee Associates  
Structural engineering: John Labib and Associates  
Shore engineering: Cefali & Associates  
Metal panel cladding: Metal Sales  
Weather barrier: DuPont Tyvek  
Windows and doors: Milgard  
Flooring: DTC Flooring  
Elevator: Kone  
Signage: Fusion Signs  
Window shades: Clutch-Operated FlexShade  
Smoke door: Smoke Guard Systems  
Planters: Old Town Fiberglass Planters  
Bike racks: Dero Ultra Space Saver

Dillon617 is a 49-unit residential development located on a narrow infill lot in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles. Designed by Lorcan O’Herlihy Architects (LOHA), the scheme reinterprets the midcentury “missing middle” bungalows typical of the area to develop a new, denser, multifamily missing-middle typology.

“The opportunity to reinvigorate commercial arteries with housing represents a new paradigm for Los Angeles,” said Lorcan O’Herlihy, LOHA’s founder and design principal. This in turn makes for a “more robust and inclusive city.”

The complex’s massing consists of two long, roughly parallel bars that split at the street frontages on both ends to create entry plazas. These spaces lead to open-air stairs and corridors clad in a bright white finish that contrasts with the striking dark Metal Sales wall panels covering the building’s outward-facing sides. Perforated screens punctuate the street-facing elevations, animating them and giving passersby a look inside.

The bifurcated massing brings light and air deep into the building. Cross ventilation, building orientation, and daylighting were key considerations in the project’s sustainability strategy. To take advantage of the site’s temperate climate, LOHA’s design integrates open communal spaces into the dense urban development. Stepped shared terraces are carved out from the building’s central pinch point, a strategy mirrored on the building’s north elevation. Punched balconies on the building’s long sides provide further outdoor amenities to individual units.

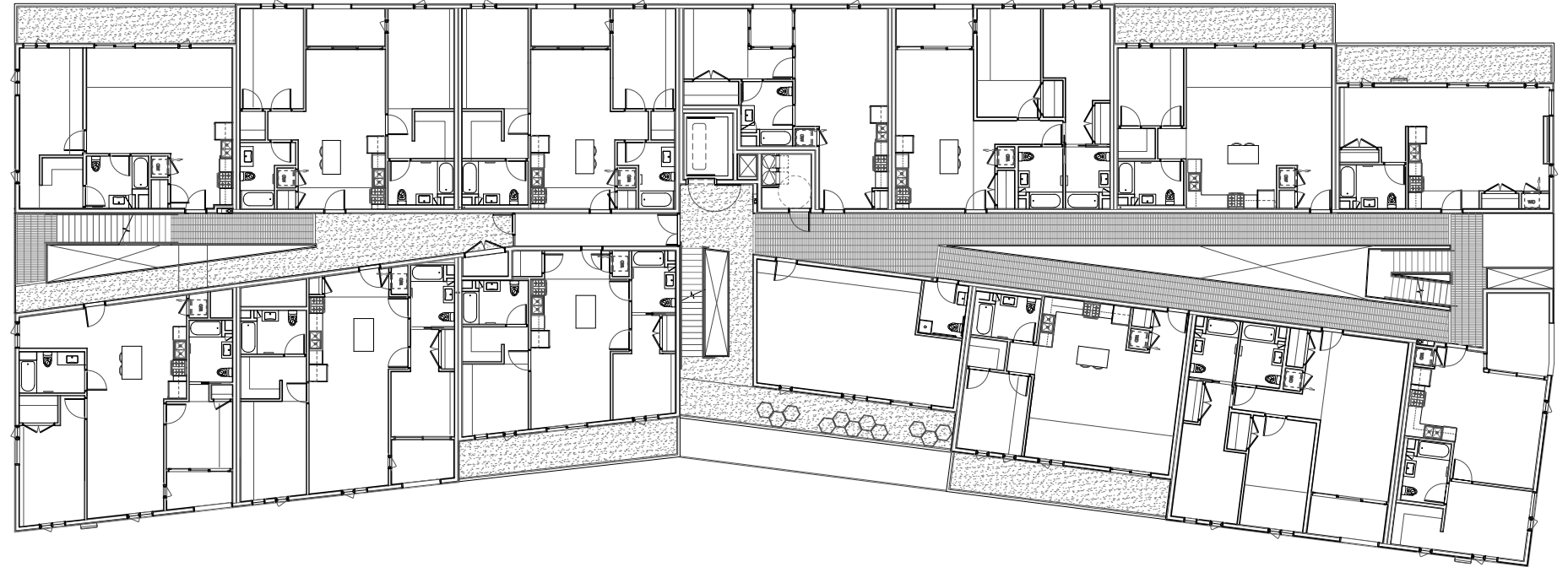
Los Angeles, O’Herlihy noted, is densifying, resulting in an “inevitable conflict between multiunit housing and houses.” By incorporating elements like intimate green spaces and terraced hillsides and plazas, all prevalent in the surrounding lower-density neighborhood, Dillon617 endeavors to show how multifamily housing can ameliorate L.A.’s housing challenges while remaining sensitive to context.

**Amrita Raja**



Left: Bright white finishes in interior courtyard spaces contrast with dark Metal Sales panels on the outward-facing sides.

Above: Perforated screens give passersby a look inside the complex.  
Below: Setbacks create private balconies and let in light.



# Windows and Doors

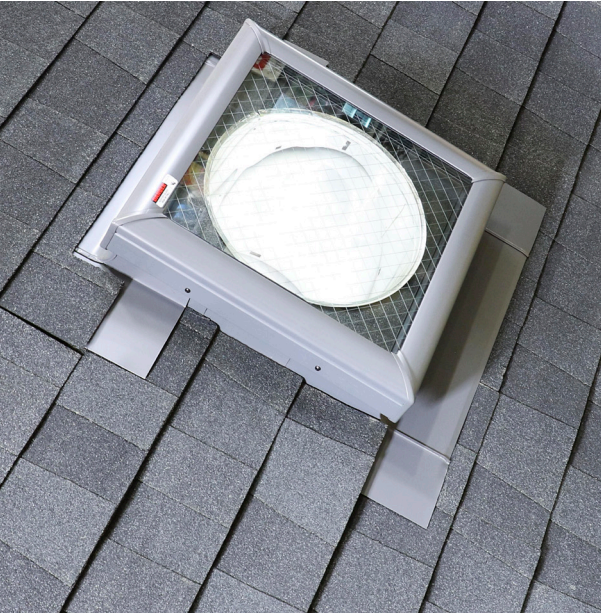
This new crop of openings ensures that a winter stuck inside won’t mean a season cut off from the sunlight crucial to a balanced life. *By Adrian Madlener*



## StyleView YKK AP America

Available in a new black finish, YKK AP America's signature StyleView line of windows and doors is intended to match residential construction trends like modern farmhouse and craftsman styles.

[ykkap.com](http://ykkap.com)



## TZR and TZRL Wildfire Glass Curb-Mount Sun Tunnel Skylight VELUX

Developed to meet wildland urban interface zoning requirements, the new TZR and TZRL Wildfire Glass Curb-Mount Sun Tunnel Skylight by VELUX features flame- and ignition-resistant tempered diamond wire glass panes. The opening's frame is engineered to withstand wildfires and prevent the glass insert from dropping to the floor in a disaster.

[veluxusa.com](http://veluxusa.com)



## Skycove Marvin

Meant to be a cozy place for small gatherings, the Marvin Skycove is an immersive glass alcove that extends from any dormer window or roof. Its steel structure and integrated bench can safely and comfortably seat one or more people. The glass enclosure extends functional living space by up to 20 square feet and offers homeowners a more intimate interaction with the outdoors.

[marvin.com](http://marvin.com)



## Palisades S90 Bi-Folding Door and Wall System C.R. Laurence

Claiming the slimmest profile on the market and concealed hinges, the new Palisades S90 Bi-Folding Door and Wall System by C.R. Laurence pursues an ambitious aesthetic standard. With a frame up to 12 feet tall, the CW40 Performance Grade-rated opening delivers superior thermal and structural performance while minimizing hardware to maximize views.

[crlaurence.com](http://crlaurence.com)



## Transira Window Solutions Winco Window Company

Encasing a high-performance vertical shade, the Transira Window Solutions product is an insulated opening that eliminates the possibility of allergens or airborne pathogens adhering to the fabric. The window's visibility, light, and solar heating can be controlled through any home management IoT system.

[wincowindow.com](http://wincowindow.com)



## 100 Series Andersen Windows & Doors

The easy-to-install 100 Series window and patio door range is manufactured by Andersen Windows & Doors using durable Fibrex reclaimed wood composite material. Offered in a variety of rich, dark colors, this new line is environmentally friendly and energy efficient. Three ¼-inch insert frame sizes allow for fast and easy replacement.

[andersenwindows.com](http://andersenwindows.com)

# Germ-Free Walls, Flooring, and Surfaces

The pandemic has set new standards for sanitation in homes. These wall, flooring, and surface offerings are engineered for easy cleaning. **By Adrian Madlener**



## Square-Edged Fame Hardwood

Avoiding the bevels and wire-brushed grains of standard wooden floor planks that trap bacteria, Square-Edged by Fame Hardwood is a smooth surface with minimal gaps and height differences between pieces. Matched with the manufacturer's signature Bona finish and Bona PowerPlus Antibacterial Hard-Surface Floor Cleaner, this flooring product is highly hygienic.

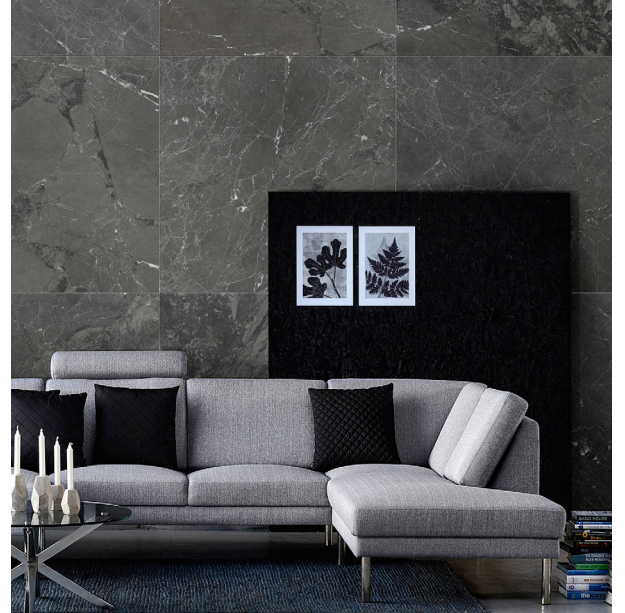
famehardwood.com



## Specular Pure+FreeForm

Specular is a range of high-performance interior metal surfaces produced by Pure+FreeForm that diffuse light in new and unusual ways. The collection of durable aluminum wall panels features a variety of textures and conforms to high antimicrobial standards.

purefreeform.com



## Six-S Neolith

Inspired by nature and the ongoing fight against COVID-19, the new Six-S collection by sintered-stone experts Neolith showcases the company's decoration technology and finishing techniques. A portion of the product's sales will go to a coronavirus-related charity.

neolith.com



## HD Laminate Wilsonart

Combining laminate-surface producer Wilsonart's designs and textures with antimicrobial protection and scratch- and scuff-resistant AEON technology, the new HD Laminate collection comes with built-in hygienic protection. Wilsonart advertises the product as being three times more wear-resistant than the industry standard.

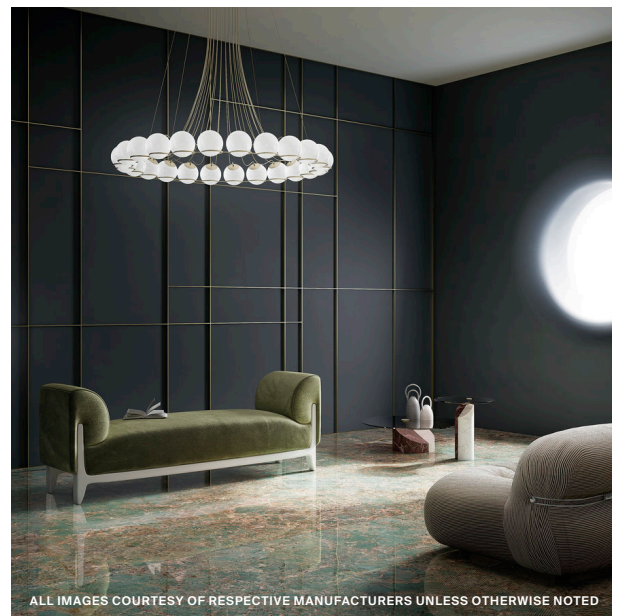
wilsonart.com



## Fresh Start FiberFloor Tarkett

Certified as asthma- and allergy-resistant, Fresh Start FiberFloor by Tarkett exceeds all indoor air quality standards. Available in various designs, this luxury sheet flooring solution is warm, quiet, comfortable, durable, moisture resistant, and easy to clean. It's suited to low-traffic areas like bathrooms and bedrooms.

tarkett.com



## Amazonite Fiandre

Inspired by the amazonite gemstone, this product is part of Fiandre's latest large-format-slab Marmi Maximum collection. Its teal shades are speckled with brown and peach tones with white and gray touches. Thanks to their 1/4-inch (6-millimeter) thickness and flexibility, products in the Marmi Maximum range offer the possibility of broader unbroken surfaces free of discontinuities.

granitifiandre.com

# HVAC

The push for hygienic internal air supply is likely to continue long after COVID-19 becomes a mere memory. These products will meet that demand in the healthiest ways possible. *By Adrian Madlener*



## LG Art Cool Premier Wall Mount Split System with LGRED LG

With one of the highest SEER ratings in the industry, the LG Art Cool Premier Wall Mount Split System with LGRED offers AEC professionals a design-forward solution that doesn't compromise on energy efficiency. This inverter variable split system connects with the LG ThinQ app, providing remote cooling and heating controls.

lg.com



## PKFY-NLMU Wall-Mounted Indoor Unit Mitsubishi Electric Trane HVAC US (METUS)

Perfect for tight spaces, the PKFY-NLMU Wall-Mounted Indoor Unit by Mitsubishi Electric Trane HVAC US is whisper-quiet, running at just 22 dB(A). Connected to the CITY MULTI R2-Series, Y-Series, WY-Series, WR2-Series, and S-Series VRF zoning systems, the unit uses the least amount of energy possible to maintain an area's desired set point.

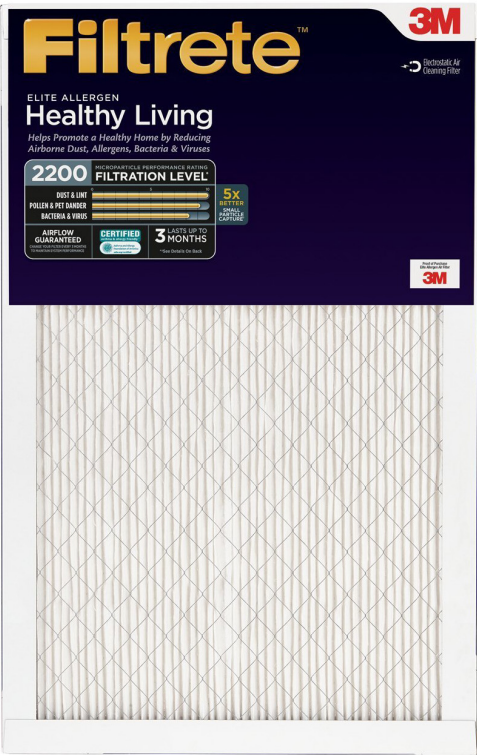
mitsubishicomfort.com



## CDi Series: SM Rev C Bosch

Bosch's leading geothermal solution, the CDi Series: SM Rev C residential water source heat pump, meets the highest ENERGY STAR standards. Available in two sizes, the system incorporates a two-stage scroll compressor as well as an ECM constant air monitor for superior comfort, and connects to Bosch's EasyStart diagnostics app.

bosch-home.com



## Filtrete Elite Allergen Reduction Healthy Living 2200 Filter 3M

The Filtrete Elite Allergen Reduction Healthy Living 2200 Filter by 3M keeps a variety of HVAC units hygienic and hypoallergenic. The insert captures particles like pet dander, smoke, bacteria, and viruses as well as odors and larger fragments like mold spores, dust, and pollen.

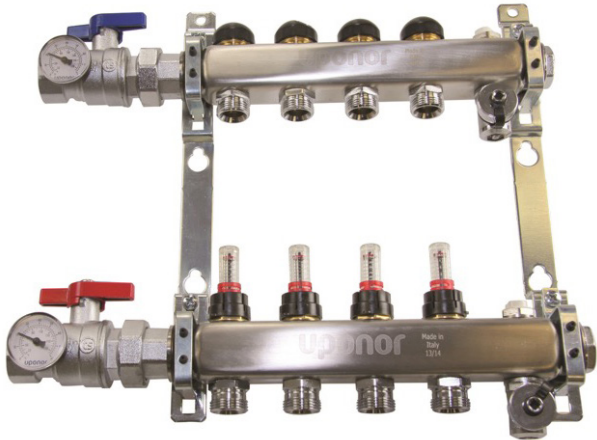
3m.com



## Infinity Carrier

Third-party testing has demonstrated that Carrier's Infinity air purifier can inactivate 99 percent of the murine coronavirus. Its MERV 15-rated filter treats the air flowing through most HVAC systems by creating a cloud of electrically charged ions that attach to, pull apart, and eliminate airborne dust, pollen, viruses, and germs.

carrier.com



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## Stainless-Steel Manifold Uponor North America

The new Stainless-Steel Manifold application by Uponor North America is a corrosion-resistant alternative for cooling and heating. Available in two sizes, the manifold comes preassembled for faster installation. Both variants include full-port ball valves with temperature gauges and integrated flow meters.

uponor-usa.com

# Smart Home Solutions

The latest integrated and stand-alone smart home technologies make it easier to keep abodes safe and healthy this winter. By Adrian Madlener



**Cosmos**  
Panasonic

A multifunction healthy home system, Cosmos by Panasonic monitors indoor air quality. The device connects to range hoods and HVAC fans, and color-coded LEDs alert users to airborne toxins, like volatile organic compounds and fine particulate matter, as well as carbon dioxide.

[panasonic.com](http://panasonic.com)



**animeo IB+ TouchBuco**  
Somfy

Animeo IB+ TouchBuco by Somfy is a wall-integrated touch screen that controls window-covering systems throughout small or medium-size homes. The automated solutions allow homeowners to carefully adjust shades in different zones, achieve optimal visual and thermal comfort, and meet the strictest energy-saving standards.

[somfysystems.com](http://somfysystems.com)



**Laser Egg+ CO2**  
Kaiterra

Monitoring fine dust particles, temperature, humidity, and carbon dioxide levels, the stand-alone Laser Egg+ CO2 by Kaiterra provides homeowners with clear, real-time readings. Paired with the Kaiterra Live Air app, Apple HomeKit, or IFTTT, the device can be programmed to give alerts and pinpoint historical trends.

[kaiterra.com](http://kaiterra.com)



**SmartThermostat with Voice Control**  
Ecobee

The new Smart Thermostat with Voice Control by Ecobee helps users reduce their energy consumption and stay on top of temperature levels, whether they're at home or away. This flagship product now includes voice activation, a quad-core processor, improved sound quality, natural language processing, and enhanced presence detection.

[ecobee.com](http://ecobee.com)



**SpectraSAFE**  
Hubbell Lighting

Easily integrated into flexible products like the MultiPurpose Linear MPS task light solution, the SpectraSAFE security camera helps protect poorly lit areas like garages and storage rooms. The cloud-enabled device incorporates a high-resolution HD camera, an IR emitter, a microphone, and a speaker for two-way audio communication.

[hubbell.com](http://hubbell.com)



**AirBird**  
VELUX Group, Leapcraft, and 3XN/GXN

The AirBird is a new indoor climate sensor developed by the VELUX Group in collaboration with Leapcraft and 3XN/GXN. Tangible and actionable, this device measures carbon dioxide, temperature, and humidity every few minutes. It uses real-time data to promote improved air quality and user well-being.

[getairbird.com](http://getairbird.com)

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### SmartEntry SL-SM9159E

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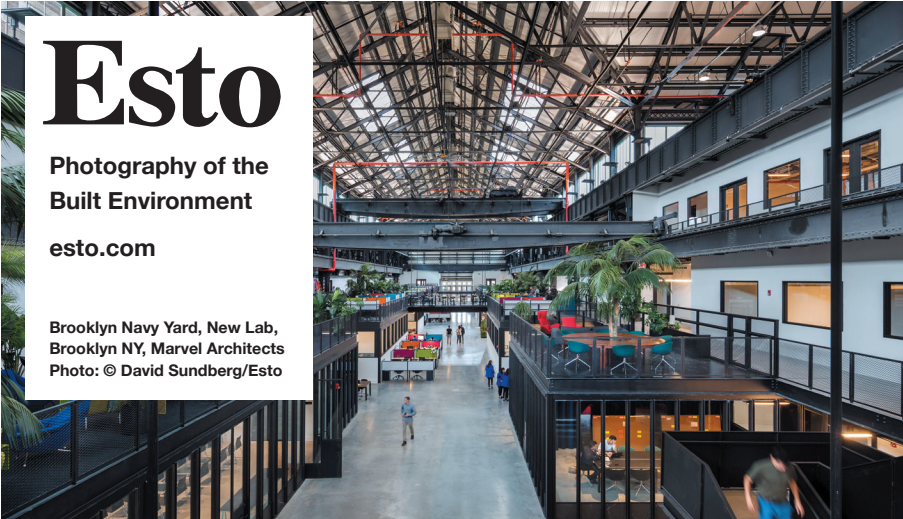


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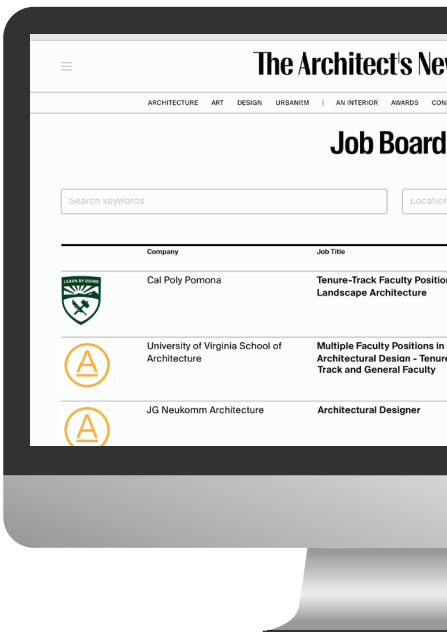
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# 44 Review

## Architecture and Labor

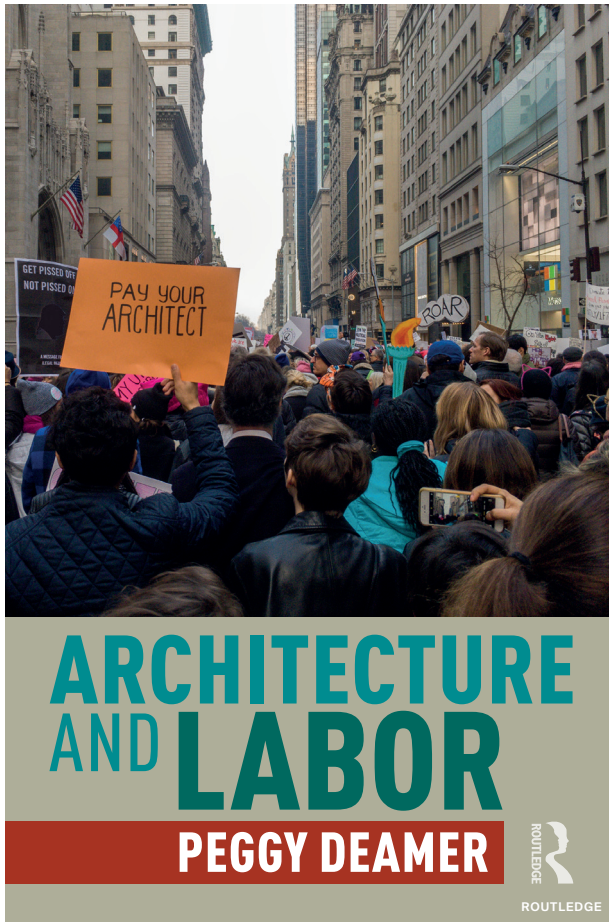
Peggy Deamer | Routledge | \$35

Most of practicing architecture is drudgery, and this is rather unfair. As students, architects are given thoughtful prompts about the built environment and its big questions, as well as sole creative rein to answer those questions. That is the only time in the architect's life when this is the case, and in many ways, this does not adequately prepare the architecture student for the world of architecture, which is a world of drudgery. In reality, the architects are not heroes. They are not great thinkers, tasked with resolving the contradictions inherent in putting something like a building into existence. It's very likely they are not tastemakers or aesthetes either. Most of the time, they're sitting at the computer wrangling something called Building Information Management or drawing sections of insulation at a desk with several other people doing the same thing. This is not the creative calling one was promised as a 19-year-old. This is work, plain and simple.

Or, to be more specific, it is *labor*, done in piecework, no different from that of the textile worker, except that the textile worker is not burdened by insurmountable student debt, nor made mentally undone by the false promise to radically change the face of fashion forever.

And yet architects do not see themselves as workers. They see themselves as temporarily disadvantaged creatives, somehow distinct from the construction laborers who turn their drawings into reality. When architects *do* begin to think of themselves as workers, they open themselves up to a wide range of political possibilities, ones with profound potential to change the practice and face of architecture, not individually as sole geniuses, but collectively, as organized political actors. But professionalism is a tough nut to crack, even when the profession has been in a downward spiral for decades. We as a field are thus fortunate that there are now works like Peggy Deamer's *Architecture and Labor* that help clarify, in no uncertain terms, our unflattering rules of engagement as participants in capitalist society. Deamer's book—a collection of essays written over ten years—addresses what seem like wicked problems and proposes possible solutions to them, ranging from contract law to unionization. However, to me, this slim volume is best understood as a resource, that is, as a series of thoughtful propositions to build on rather than blindly follow.

Much of Deamer's work could be characterized as disciplinary myth busting. Tellingly, she chooses to open her collection with an essay on architectural detailing, often the benchmark for distinguishing a good work of architecture from a bad one. She notes that we still adhere to an artisanal view of the detail and routinely ascribe it to some unusually sensitive creator, when in reality, most details are collective assemblies, just like the rest of a building; what's more, those assemblies are now mass-produced. Our concept of detailing has yet to take such things into account and, in failing to do so, fundamentally obscures further inquiry into the nature of architectural production in our contemporary world. She follows this with a disquisition on the nature of architectural labor as labor, aiming to tear down the fire wall between architects and the rest of the AEC world, or as Deamer succinctly puts it, "Architects design, contractors build; we do art, they do work."



In *Architecture and Labor*, Peggy Deamer questions architects' view of the profession.

In distinguishing themselves from the building trades, architects not only fail to grasp the notion of their own precarity as laborers but also let slip the financial and wellness opportunities available to those trades through unions and different structures of ownership. Furthermore, this disconnection also opens architects up to moral hazards regarding the construction of their buildings (one thinks of Zaha Hadid's pithy comments about the indentured laborers who built her work in Qatar) and shows a distinct lack of political will to change such things. In Deamer's words: "Architects rightly claim that they are not at the negotiating table but sadly refuse to reflect on how their disengagement impacts this tragedy."

Deamer, who is a leading force behind the Architecture Lobby, claims that the separation of the discourse of work from architecture is a recent one. Throughout the 19th century, architects, designers, and theorists like John Ruskin and William Morris interrogated questions of worker alienation in the face of mass production. But in the 20th century, the proponents of modernism, while invoking a sentiment of culture for all made possible by technology, shifted focus away from production toward consumption and materiality, resulting in the worker being obscured by the technology of industry. In postwar America, "corporatism" (per Deamer) advanced the idea of a humane capitalism that secured freedom through consumer choice, made all the more varied by a growing design industry. However, this golden age was short-lived. The subsequent period of neoliberalism stripped architecture of its social-minded bona fides (namely, its role in the provision of public housing), replacing them with formal discourses and, at the same time, the argot and rationality of finan-

cialization. Social projects immediately gave way to individual building projects, which, in turn, were reconceived as liquid assets. Architects, unfortunately, have neglected to reconsider their notions of themselves in regard to these latter shifts.

Perhaps the most interesting and enlightening parts of Deamer's book are her histories of events that have shaped architectural practice from the shadows. Of particular note is the role of antitrust lawsuits in the 1970s in gutting AIA protections such as "suggested fee schedules, the prohibition of members from discounting fees, the strict guidelines for advertising, and the prohibition of competition governing its members." These litigious endeavors essentially triggered architecture's race to the bottom, and considering the broader role antitrust laws have played in the reshaping of so-called "learned professions," they leave little recourse for collaboration, lest it be construed as anti-competitive. In terms of solutions, Deamer proposes cooperativization and integrated project delivery contracts in which risk and reward are shared among all parties through a promise not to sue. There are loopholes in the broader legal quandaries presented in the book; however, some (third-party surveys and nonprofit status) are less convincing and structurally consequential than others (exemptions from antitrust laws as they apply to states and unionization). Deamer's focus on circumventing architecture's legal and managerial woes is useful because it explicates the unique structures of architectural work within a rather difficult-to-navigate American capitalist framework, giving one a fuller idea of both the immensity of the problem and the inherent limitations of would-be solutions. (Also of interest is Deamer's comparison of architectural associations and

credential-issuing organizations in the United States with those of France, Sweden, and Germany.)

Two clear narratives emerge in the book. Architects refuse to acknowledge their role as laborers at their own peril, as professionalization structures buckle under pressures of automation and de-skilling. Meanwhile, the only available avenues for redress are ultimately rather narrow in scope. The fact is, much of the work of building communal entities has, in this country, been rendered illegal, and those, such as unions, that have retained legality have been eaten away by the voracious monster of neoliberalism. Reforming the AIA or building new organizations to take its place or working under new contracts or forming co-ops might help architects stem the tide of precarity, but these solutions are limited to architecture, and in a world where we all have to inhabit the built environment, that is simply not good enough.

The prospect of unionization haunts the pages of Deamer's book, and though it may seem like an all-too-simple solution to our current maladies, it isn't. The power of a union lies in its ability to unite a segment of workers and build networks of solidarity outward, spanning fields and sectors. That's not to obscure certain unavoidable tensions arising from potentially conflicting demands and desires. For instance, if we want to change architecture into a more equitable field, we must build power from within architecture. But if we want to change the built environment for the better, we have to look beyond architectural practice and into political practices that intersect with battles being fought on the grounds of housing, environmentalism, gentrification, and the myriad other issues architecture touches. If a small cooperative uses its radical democratic consensus to refuse a project that will displace families, another, more cynical firm is happy to step into its place, and that cynical firm could *also* be perfectly democratized, working through IPD contracts, for instance. Democratic structures can always be used for undemocratic ends, but unions are inherently political—they carry political history and the solidarity inherent in the organizational struggle. If all architects were unionized, if they had solidarity with one another, then the refusal of their labor power would mean something collectively, something that would reverberate through the rest of the construction industry, something that in reality would throw a wrench into the production of buildings and the real estate capital inevitably tied to them.

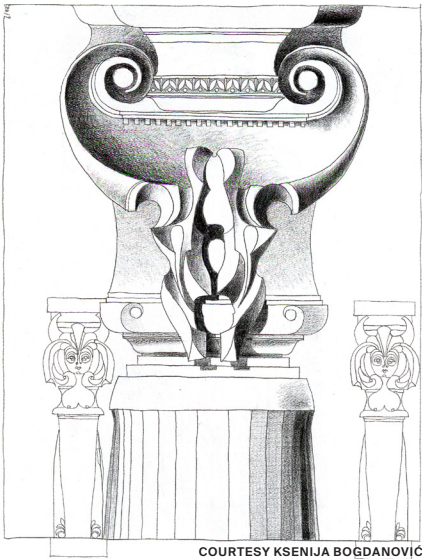
Peggy Deamer does a wonderful job of answering questions related to the eldritch legal and organizational setbacks tied to the specific field of architecture. She asks and answers questions of labor—what it means in terms of architectural practice, how architects' conceptions of themselves form over time, the history of architectural labor and its organizing bodies—but the time now has come to ask questions about *labor power*. Those are collective questions, and the only way to truly answer them is through action.

**Kate Wagner is an architecture critic and the creator of the blog McMansion Hell. Her column America by Design can be found in *The New Republic*.**

# 45 Review

## *Second World Postmodernisms: Architecture and Society under Late Socialism*

Vladimir Kulić (ed.), Bloomsbury, \$40



COURTESY KSENIJA BOGDANOVIĆ

An illustration by Bogdan Bogdanović

There is little straightforward about postmodernism, much less its architectural strain. Historians of architecture can't even agree on the timing of its emergence. While many trace its first stirrings to the late '60s, when Robert Venturi penned *Complexity and Contradiction*, Charles Jencks offered up the much more precise moment of July 15, 1972, at 3:32 p.m. But if Jencks's almost clinical chronology implies a particular place—the razed grounds of Pruitt-Igou in St. Louis—his peers generally agreed that the context was North American, or perhaps postwar Japanese. Fredric Jameson, a literary critic with an eye for architecture, famously described the new “hyperspace” that developed under late capitalism as an aesthetic expression of its cultural logic. Yet for the most part he circumscribed the operation of this logic to the First World, in step with other theorists.

*Second World Postmodernisms: Architecture and Society under Late Socialism*, a collection of essays by various authors, challenges such received wisdom. From the late 1960s until the end of the Cold War, architects in the Eastern Bloc made a conscious effort to reintroduce ornament, historical reference, and irony into their projects. If they often carried out this work in dialogue with postmodern architects on the other side of the Iron Curtain, they could also be daring. Their designs, whether echoing their Western counterparts or sui generis, stemmed from a common impulse, contend the contributors to *Second World Postmodernisms*. Editor Vladimir Kulić, who co-organized a landmark 2018 MoMA exhibit on Yugoslavian architecture, lays out the stakes of their argument in an insightful introduction. “Postmodernism appears to be—to paraphrase Jameson—the cultural logic of late socialism,” writes Kulić, “whether in its revived commercial motivations, nationalist aspirations, or the self-conscious retreat from everyday practice into paper architecture.” Late socialism, he rightly notes, had a far more definite end date than its capitalist correlate.

Grouped thematically into three sections, the essays brought together here deal with a wide range of nominally socialist nations: the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Cuba, and China. While the first four fall under the

heading “Discourses,” the next five cover “Practices,” with the remainder devoted to “Exchanges.” Each essay incorporates a wealth of material, however, so the lines between them can often seem to blur. Kulić's introduction renders the collection more cohesive than it might have otherwise been, but the contributions still feel fairly scattershot at times. Reviewers have pointed out that “postmodernism” is never rigorously defined, since some authors treat it as a style, while others consider it a discursive device. Because the term's polysemy is exploited throughout, one may guess the choice to leave it undefined is deliberate.

Several individual essays in *Second World Postmodernisms* are quite exceptional, but some are not, and the quality is uneven overall. Łukasz Stanek's account of Polish architects working in Kuwait and Max Hirsch's examination of two projects executed by a Japanese firm in East Germany are highlights. Andres Kurg's study of the Estonian postmodernist Vilen Künnapu—who was equally at home designing a kolkhoz (collective farm) as a flower shop—is fascinating, as is the profile Kulić provides of Bogdan Bogdanović, whose quasi-surrealist sculptures and monuments dot the landscape of Serbia and Croatia. For his part, Fredo Rivera interprets postmodern architecture in Cuba by means of Fernando Ortiz's concept of “transculturation” and has some interesting stuff on the propaganda supergraphics the Castro regime had painted onto the sides of older modernist buildings. Less successful is Ljiljana Blagojević survey of foreign texts and texts-in-translation that circulated among Yugoslavian architects, but this is of little more than bibliographic interest. Sadly, the text of her article is poorly rendered in English, marred by solecisms and awkward constructions that begin to impede its very readability.

Periodizing late socialism, a notion cribbed from Alexei Yurchak's 2008 book *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*, proves a tricky task for all involved. If by this term the Sovietologist Yurchak meant everything that came after the death of Stalin in the USSR, Richard Anderson and Alla Vronskaya seem to date it to the close of the Brezhnev era in their respective essays. By contrast, Lidia Klein and Alicja Gzowska regard Poland's late socialist period as starting circa 1970 in the typologies they outline of mass housing and church architecture. Maroš Krivý takes an even longer view of Czechoslovak postmodernism in his appraisal of theoretical debates about the “living environment,” with the Prague Spring as a turning point. Quite similarly, Ana Miljački focuses on post-1968 normalization in her chronicle of a Czech design team's participation in the 1980 IBA competition in West Berlin, just one of several instances of “postmodernism's jumping the wall.” Conditions varied from country to country, but certain constants emerge. Whether in the Soviet Union or elsewhere, the link that unites these experiences is decline.

Even more problematic is the figure of the Second World, a holdover from Cold War geopolitics. The First World meant the United States and its NATO allies, and the Second World consisted of the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies, while the Third

World referred to everywhere else. Depending on where one drew the dividing lines, Yugoslavia and Cuba might belong to the Third World; after all, the two countries cast their lot with the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s. Outside of the introduction, only Miljački's essay questions this artificial framework of division, writing about “The Cultural Turn, One World.” She is at once sympathetic to, and critical of, the Jamesonian interpretation of postmodernism. “Jameson's willingness to accept the three-world model,” Miljački writes, “short-circuits the interpretive power of his own theory of entanglements between cultural, political, and economic developments...we do not live (and have never lived) in three worlds, but in a connected one.” Left unanswered is the basis of their interconnection, however.

What bound these different “worlds” together, then? If analogs to postmodernism in architecture thrived in the so-called Second World, and if Jameson was right that these forms expressed the logic of late capitalism, it follows that nominally socialist countries also obeyed the imperatives of accumulation. Centralized state planning was never antithetical to the trademark capitalist law of value, but this fig leaf, too, had already begun to fade by the '60s. Kurg mentions the 1965 Kosygin reforms, which decentralized Soviet production and tried to motivate managers and workers by offering them profit/sales incentives. Yugoslavia's economy was always somewhat contradictory, as autogestion or worker self-management entailed a mixture of market forces and state plans. Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other Eastern Bloc countries never possessed as large a government sector as the USSR's and required private actors to fill in some of the gaps. Perestroika under Gorbachev accelerated the process of privatization in Russia, while Deng's market-friendly measures in China were in part facilitated by a postmodern architectural interregnum, as Cole Roskam documents in his contribution to the volume.

One of the most astute observations made in *Second World Postmodernisms* concerns the similarities between Stalinism and postmodernism in architecture, though this is hardly an exclusive insight. “One of the specificities of Second World postmodernism was that some of its manifestations developed in the looming shadow of (or even in direct reference to) the grandiose historicist architecture of Stalin's era,” Kulić explains early on. “[D]efined at the time as socialist realism, that architecture was in a way the first ‘post/modernism,’ reacting as it did against the aesthetic revolution of the Soviet avant-garde during the 1920s.... Socialist realism foregrounded easy communicability and the embrace of historical conventions, which puts it in close proximity to some of postmodernism's own tenets.” Richard Anderson goes over this in his chapter on “The Retro Problem,” a sort of *Rezeptionsästhetik* dedicated to the manner in which postmodern architecture was disseminated in the Soviet Union by Aleksandr Riabushin and Vladimir Khait. Anderson contends that such theorists “suspected the alleged permissiveness and dependence on historical forms characteristic of West-

ern postmodernism might correspond to a desire among an older generation of Soviet architects to return to the ‘excesses’ of Stalinism.”

I myself noticed their congruity several years ago in a reflection on a pair of books by Boris Groys and Vladimir Paperny, where Stalinism in art and architecture was polemically identified as “the first postmodern style.” Following, as it did, the defeat of the vibrant avant-garde movement that existed in the first 15 or so years of the USSR, Stalinist architectural doctrine largely adopted the advanced building methods and materials of its vanquished foe while championing citation, ornamentation, and a complex formal mélange. Unlike the postmodern style that prevailed in the West four decades later, however, the architecture of the Stalin era possessed a strong utopian impulse. Likewise, the postmodern wave that arrived in Second World countries from foreign shores during the '70s and '80s retained something of this impulse, although it was soon to be exhausted. Kulić notes this in his article on Bogdanović, writing that “in contrast to the West, where utopian impulses survived only as ‘ghosts,’ Bogdanović's oeuvre was devised in adamant support of an actual ‘utopian’ project: Yugoslavia's self-managing and multiethnic socialism.” The basis of that project had all but eroded by 1990.

Reinhold Martin's postscript to *Second World Postmodernisms* serves as a fitting coda to the volume, given all his past work on the topic. Martin is responsible for by far the most theoretically sophisticated reinterpretation of postmodernism to date, *Utopia's Ghost* (2010), in which he argues that the specter of modernist projects to transform society haunted what came after. Here he repeats some of his assertions from this earlier book: “[P]ostmodernism is not a stylistic or strictly chronological category; it is an untimely discursive one.” Despite this untimeliness, Martin proposes a periodization of postmodern architecture that has it roughly coincide with the Cold War—beginning rather with the ratification of the United Nations Charter in October 1945. Allowing that the Second World examples dealt with in the collection may belong to “a postmodernist international,” he perspicaciously remarks that analogous architectures in the Third World were often referred to as regionalism. Numerous postmodern motifs, from the death of the author to the collapse of teleological metanarratives, are thus called into question by the extension of postmodernism's architectural field.

Kulić's stated intention of complicating the standard story of postmodernism can therefore be said to have succeeded. Though by no means as resounding a success as his MoMA show, *Second World Postmodernisms* makes its case well. In detailing postmodernism's adventures on the other side of the Berlin Wall, the essays in this collection help complete the picture of a period too often forgotten in histories of design.

**Ross Wolfe is a critic, historian, and educator living in New York City.**

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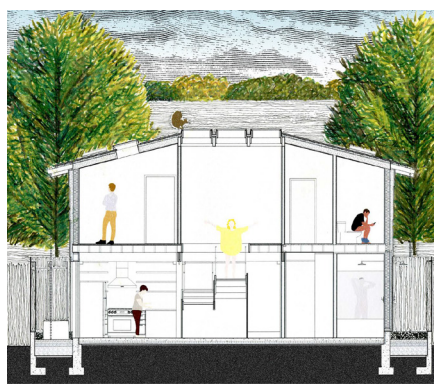
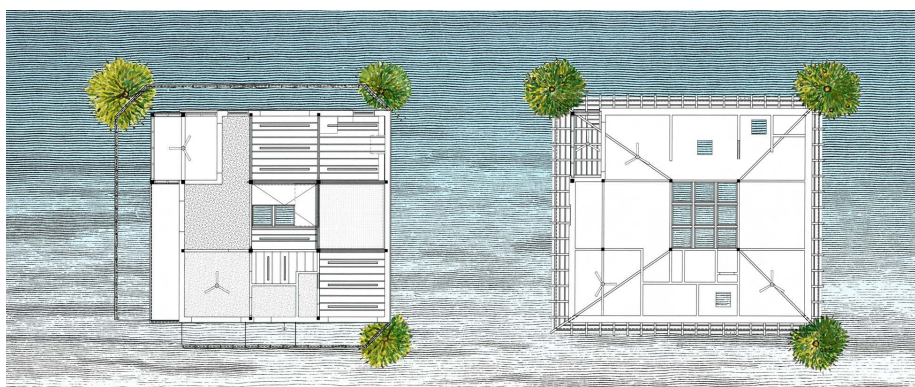
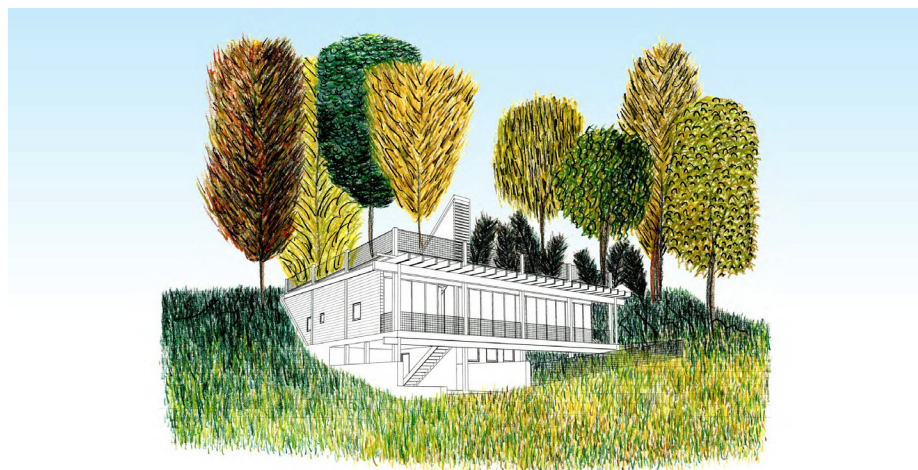
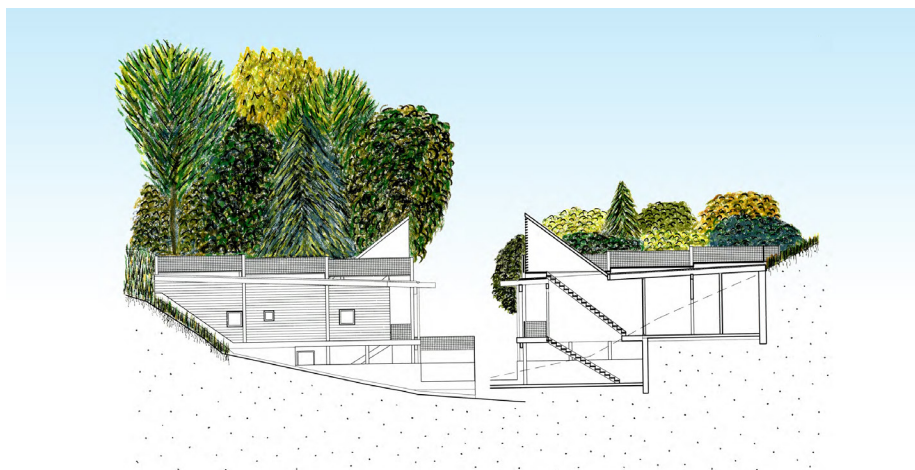
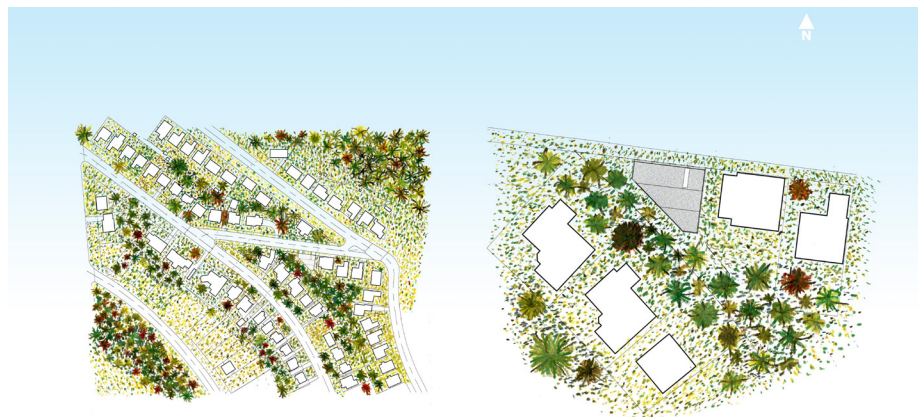
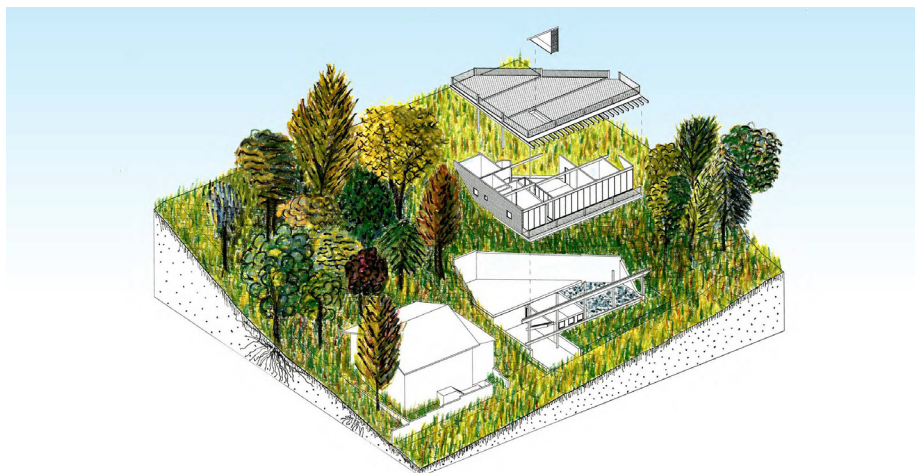
The drawings are an attempt to describe some of those landscape layers through handcrafted (using pen and pencil) textures.

The houses will be built with the healthiest and highest-performing (mostly compostable) building materials; one features a solar array and will be net-positive, while the other boasts a roof terrace and will exceed passive house standards.

Because we base each of our projects on typologies that have been implemented, tested, and adapted for centuries—in this case the courtyard house and the hillside house—we have a wealth of built precedents to reference.

Using materials and typologies that have proved their ability to endure through time, we give our buildings a better chance of surviving the climate crisis.

And we give the inhabitants of our buildings a better chance to live healthy, happy lives.



The illustrations on this page, all by bld.us, depict two projects.

Top two rows: Drawings of Hill House

Bottom two rows: Drawings of Poplar Grove

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