No Rose without a Thorn
David Adjaye’s pink-hued Winter Park Library & Events Center finally debuts in Florida.

After numerous delays and more than a whiff of controversy, the Adjaye Associates–designed Winter Park Library & Events Center opened last month in the Orlando-adjacent Florida city. A self-described “intergenerational community hub,” the $41.7 million project spans three rose-pigmented concrete pavilions on a lakefront site in Winter Park’s 23-acre Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

David Adjaye, the Ghanaian British principal of Adjaye Associates, called the project “a new typology of the 21st-century knowledge campus.” It replaces Winter Park’s existing public library on East New England Avenue, completed in the late 1970s and expanded in the 1990s to replace another, older facility.

“I designed the Winter Park Library & Events Center as a collection of unique spaces and the additive ways in which their differences could overlap, coming closer to each other,” Adjaye continued on page 6.
Paranoid in Pittsburgh

The Fabricated Landscape, an exhibition that just closed at the Carnegie Museum of Art’s (CMA) Heinz Architectural Center in Pittsburgh, featured the work of ten contemporary architects from around the globe born in Europe and Latin America, with one representative each from the U.S. and Japan. This loose framing rendered the show’s contents a bit of a grab bag, but in addition to their youth, curator Raymond Ryan selected architects who, in their own ways, take fresh and novel approaches to practice. As he said in a statement, “They embrace a new sense of urgency regarding nature and the planned environment from how and where we live to how we engage with the world around us.”

Another revelation might be the provocative domestic and social innovation in the offerings on view from Catalan office MAIO. Their Public Space System (pictured), completed in 2014 as an improvement of a small plaza in Barcelona, is a simple 10-foot grid of posts, topped with lights and shading devices and underlaid with benches. As the drawing above clearly shows, the possibilities of the project are open and endless, providing a flexible, informing framework within which people can choose to arrange themselves however they see fit. Open-endedness is also at the heart of MAIO’s speculative Discontinuous Villa, a series of small rooms entombed within sky-high pink extrusions that are dispersed in open space—a blurring of urban and residential, work and home, inside and outside, that is becoming quite familiar in our pandemic-stricken world.

There are, of course, many more eye-openers in the exhibition, and though its run is over at CMA, The Fabricated Landscape lives on in a three-part publication out on Inventory Press. It includes all the projects from the exhibition along with bonus texts, including a series of fables by Emilio Ambasz and an unfinished short story by Franz Kafka—“Der Bau” (“The Burrow” in English)—that was given to Belgian practicing office KGDVS by clients as inspiration for their youth, curator Raymond Ryan selected architects who, in their own ways, take fresh and novel approaches to practice. As he said in a statement, “They embrace a new sense of urgency regarding nature and the planned environment from how and where we live to how we engage with the world around us.”

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In early January, the oldest chapter of the American Institute of Architects, AIA New York (AIANY), announced the winners of the 2022 slate of awards. The 25 winning projects were awarded to AIA members and architects practicing in New York City, resulting in some potential confusion; more than a third of the honored buildings are located outside the five boroughs. In her first State of the State address, New York governor Kathy Hochul threw her support behind a legislative proposal that would mandate zero emissions for all new buildings by 2027. Hochul also announced plans for one million electrified homes and an additional one million electrification-ready homes by 2030. If approved by the state legislature, the measure would mark the first statewide ban on gas hookups for new buildings in the nation. As if that weren’t enough, the governor also endorsed the idea for a new rapid transit route extending from Jackson Heights, Queens, to Bay Ridge, Brooklyn—a land area with some 900,000 residents. If built, the proposed rail line will connect with 17 separate subway lines and the Long Island Rail Road.

Just ahead of the new year, Virginia governor Ralph Northam and Richmond mayor Levar Stoney revealed that a tentative agreement had been struck to transfer ownership of five Confederate monuments, including an equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee that was removed from its massive marble plinth in September 2021, to the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia in the state capital. (Prior to their removal, the statues were strewed on Richmond’s historic Monument Avenue.) Before any further actions can be taken, the agreement must be approved by the city council. In Atlanta, an economic development organization representing the Beltline elevated park launched a new tool that enables users to track “investments” across five impact areas: housing, parks and trails, transit and streetscapes, and economic concerns. By harnessing the mapping tool—or as a local outlet called it, the “gentrification-o-meter”—residents and stakeholders in neighborhoods located within the Beltline’s 22-mile loop can more easily understand the changes underway in their own respective backyards.

Chicago preservationists rang in the new year riding high on a monumental win. In late December 2021, the State of Illinois announced the sale of the James Thompson Center, a postmodern icon designed by the late architect Helmut Jahn under constant threat of demolition, to developer Prime Group for $70 million. Under the terms of the sale, Prime Group will renovate the 17-story governmental office building according to plans drawn up by Jahn’s firm. In other renovation-related news, Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot unveiled the next phase of her signature $750 million initiative focused on revitalizing ten historically disadvantaged neighborhoods on the city’s South and West Sides through new, community-centered development. Dubbed INVEST South/West, this next phase will involve rehabilitating the historic Pioneer Bank & Trust building in Chicago’s Humboldt Park and converting it to housing. 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Houston finished 2021 with a strong showing of new project announcements and completions, or near completions: The United States’ first Ismaili Center unveiled designs by the London-based office Farshid Moussavi Architecture with local firm DLR. The building and its sumptuous gardens, to be designed by landscape firm Nelson Byrd Woltz, will rise on a site adjacent to Buffalo Bayou. The city’s Orange Show for Visionary Art trumpeted a major expansion designed by Rogers Partners, as well as the restoration of its namesake—an idiosyncratic monument to the virtues of the orange erected singlehandedly by retired postal worker Jefferson Davis McKissack. Rice University hit the news cycle as well, releasing renderings for Sarofim Hall, an art center designed by Diller, Scofidio + Renfro. The barnlike design is nominal-ly an homage to the university’s now-de-molished Art Barn, but also might be a sign that the usually formally adventurous firm toned down its pitch to the institution after losing out on a previous gig, to design the campus’s new opera house. Finally, the OMAs-designed PostHTX, which transforms a sprawling midcentury USPS mail-sorting warehouse near downtown into a “mu-table collection of programs,” opened the doors to its first phase, despite only having reached “substantial completion.”
Eavesdrop

On Firmer Ground

Fourteen years, countless slips and falls, multiple lawsuits, and one hefty fine for “negligence” after it first opened to the public in 2008, the Santiago Calatrava-designed, glass-topped Ponte delle Costituzione (Constitution Bridge) spanning Venice’s Grand Canal could get a major overhaul to render it less precarious.

For years, city officials have instituted several measures at the notoriously slippery footbridge to prevent embarrassing and sometimes litigation-sparking tumbles, such as installing resin pads and nonslip stickers and even laying down a strip of trachyte stone across the middle of the 300-foot-long glass-and-steel structure. Still, nothing has stuck and now Venice has plans to replace the entire glass section of Constitution Bridge—known locally as the Calatrava Bridge—with stone.

As recently reported by The New York Times, the city has dedicated roughly $565,000 to the replacement scheme, which Calatrava has come out in full support of per a statement provided by his office that AN publishes in full below.

Ponte della Costituzione has been highly praised by the city of Venice and its users since opening in 2008, becoming one of the most beautiful bridges in the world. The original glass paving installed on the bridge consisted of an anti-slippery upper surface that complied with all local regulations and was tested and considered suitable by all control departments of the administration. In the daily use of the bridge, the inadequate use of certain heavy elements or even acts of vandalism have led to the breaking of some glass panes of the original flooring, which unfortunately were later replaced with inadequate glass. In the current situation, our office supports the Municipality’s substitution of glass panes for trachyte stone paving slabs, consistent with the bridge design and the surrounding cityscape to maintain its beauty and functionality.

A firm time line has yet to be established for the project as structural tests must be carried out and the plan must also win approval from Venice’s architectural authority.

Boasting postcard-perfect views along the western end of the Grand Canal, the bridge serves as a major gateway for Venice as it links Piazzale Roma, home to the city’s main bus hub, with the Santa Lucia railway station. Consequently, the structure is highly trafficked by distracted, luggage-lugging tourists, who likely contribute to the high number of falls.

Accessibility issues have also long been a concern. In 2013, a costly lift system featuring an egg-shaped cabin was installed at the bridge following complaints. It was dismantled in 2019 to the tune of roughly $44,000 for safety reasons, including frequent overheating in the summer months. Calatrava played no part in the design or construction of the failed lift system. His firm told AN in 2019 that a stairlift designed by Calatrava was part of the original bridge scheme, but the city council rejected it, deciding that wheelchair users and those with limited mobility could take a water taxi across the canal instead.

Matt Hickman

January/February 2022

West

The University of California, Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design appointed Lisa Iwamoto, a founding partner of San Francisco–based practice IwamotoScott, as its new architecture chair. Iwamoto replaces Renee Y. Chow, who was elevated to dean after Vishaan Chakrabarti stepped down from the post in late September. Nabr, a tech-driven real estate startup cofounded by Bjarke Ingels, announced its first apartment building project in San Jose, promising “quality, sustainability, and attainability.”

Further south, the Los Angeles City Council adopted the ambitious Plan to House LA, a blueprint for adding half a million new housing units to the city by 2029, 200,000 of which are slated to be affordable. The plan includes targeted rezoning along with “anti-displacement strategies” to safeguard against gentrification. To the east, Redlands, California, is making a move to shake off its auto-centric reputation with a new “car-light” development called University Village. Situated adjacent to Redlands University, and planned by Moore Ruble Yudell Architects & Planners, the development will bring a mix of housing, retail, and flexible workspaces centered around a Metro Link/Arrow Line rail station.

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continued from cover told AN. “I wanted the design to catalyze and imbricate the program, ensuring a greater amount of absorption, learning, and experience in each of the conditions.”

Joining design architect Adjaye Associates for the project was the Orlando-based architect of record HuntonBrady Architects. Civil engineer and landscape firm LandDesign, envelope consultant Thornton Tomasetti, acoustic designer Gary Siebein, and MEP engineer TLC Engineering rounded out the design team.

The library and events center, with their unifying portico and plentiful green space, form a coherent architectural vision. The 35,000-square-foot Winter Park Library, housed in the largest pavilion, is considerably more spacious than its predecessor and increases the youth collection by 30 percent while doubling the amount of available public meeting space. The open-plan library, which is serviced by automated materials robots, also features an indoor auditorium, dedicated makerspaces, a recording studio, private reading rooms, and an entrepreneurship hub complete with technology portals, a business center, and continuing education spaces.

The adjacent 18,200-square-foot events center boasts a penthouse and rooftop terrace that is as ideal for open-air fetes of up to 150 people. Below, a grand ballroom has space for up to 250 table-seated guests (or 320 if seated theater style). Outside, a lakeside amphitheater offers a spectacular venue for performances.

As the smallest of the three pavilions, the 2,500-square-foot porte cochere acts as a campus connector, completing the ensemble.

The entire project employs extensive sustainability strategies, including an advanced stormwater management system, on-site solar energy production (expected to generate 37,865 kWh annually), and the use of locally and regionally sourced materials. Among those are ones for precast facade materials, which came from within 25 miles of the site. The structures themselves, with their generous shade-providing overhangs and insulating precast concrete walls, integrate a number of passive design strategies.

“The campus’s configuration is inspired by the flora and fauna of Winter Park’s tropical climate and this notion of tree top foliage,” Adjaye explained. “The proximity between the buildings protects the glass from glare, cultivates moments of shade, and reduces the temperature naturally by using the mass of each structure to shield solar gain.”

The project’s path to realization was less than sure. Funding-related squabbles have been particularly fierce within the small, park-laden Orange County city of roughly 30,500, located just northeast of Orlando. Residents unsuccessfully sued the city in an attempt to block the contentious project, which voters approved in 2016, and in May of last year city commissioners considered halting construction work over budget and environmental concerns.

“After seven years of meticulous planning, budgeting, imagining, creating, designing and building, we are thrilled to celebrate the grand opening with our residents, partners and guests,” said Randy Knight, Winter Park city manager, in a statement. “We have been honored to work alongside a team of world-class professionals as we built this magnificent facility for the community to come together as they continue to learn, celebrate, gather and grow.”

Matt Hickman
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Cut It Out

Fort Lauderdale’s new tallest tower will let the sky in.

The mixed-use 300 West Broward Boulevard development is hollow at its center.

ODA has unveiled a tower design for Fort Lauderdale, Florida’s new tallest tower, and it’s quite a departure from the blocky buildings the New York–based firm has become known for.

The mixed-use development known as 300 West Broward Boulevard is being positioned as a new gateway to the city’s downtown and slew of surrounding museums and parks. ODA took its brief quite literally. The design consists of a pair of towers rising from a ten-story base. The larger of the two stalks is 558 feet—set to be the tallest in Fort Lauderdale—and appears to sprout an appendage, which rests on the smaller tower. A gaping void lies in the center. The hinged massing results in an L shape in plan. The expansive podium will be stuffed with amenities, including a library, a lounge, a fitness center, and slightly more than a thousand parking spaces. The abundant continues on the roof, where landscaping, cabanas, a yoga deck, and sunrise and sunset pools (at the east and west ends, respectively) add to the idyllic atmosphere.

ODA has made sure the tower won’t present an overbearing presence to pedestrians. The southwest corner of the podium will lift an overbearing presence to pedestrians. ODA has made sure the tower won’t present an overbearing presence to pedestrians. The southwest corner of the podium will lift

The southwest corner of the podium will lift


The Price of Protection

New York begins demolition of East River Park for new concrete storm barriers.

Flooding in East River Park after Hurricane Irene in 2011

The wrecking ball is coming for a portion of East River Park, a green space that has served Manhattan’s Lower East Side for eight decades. Constructed during Robert Moses’s tenure as New York City parks commission, the park sits on waterfront land that government officials deem critical for ongoing resilience projects in the area.

The Lower East Side suffered significant flooding when Hurricane Sandy slammed into the city nearly a decade ago. Storm surges returned Manhattan’s coastline to its original form, effectively negating decades of land reclamation and expansion. In the aftermath, federal and local government agencies launched the Rebuild by Design competition to task architects, planners, and engineers with developing systems that could protect New York’s low-lying coastal areas.

BIG and ONE Architecture’s Big U was the most publicized of the winning designs and proposed a comprehensive system of walls, berms, and landscaped knolls tracing the edge of Manhattan from the East Side to the West. Later, the Department of Design and Construction significantly reduced the plan’s scope and rebranded the particular portion affecting the Lower East Side as the East Side Coastal Resiliency project.

For years, the plan continued to be refined. Community outreach and town hall meetings contributed input on the scheme, which centered on a sloped, grassy berm on the western edge of East River Park abutting FDR Drive. Requiring an investment of around $760 million, the reinforced hill would protect the neighborhoods on the other side of the elevated highway from floodwaters. East River Park itself would be allowed to flood during major storm events—a strategy that reflects natural wetland landscapes and engineering techniques pioneered by the Netherlands.

But city agencies feared that the project’s construction would interfere with the flow of traffic on the FDR Drive and subterranean electrical wires operated by Con Edision. They therefore abandoned the grassy berm idea, and the administration of former mayor Bill de Blasio pursued a scheme that would have cost twice as much. Ultimately, the city resolved to demolish all of East River Park in order to make space for an additional 8 to 10 vertical feet of landfill along a 1.2-mile-long flood wall.

Rather than allow floodwaters to inundate parts of the park periodically, the city would essentially erect a levee to keep waters out permanently, or at least until 2050, when rising seas will have rendered its efficacy moot. A new park, similar in layout to East River Park, is slated for construction on top of the infill.

In April 2021, just as the city prepared to execute the plan, disgruntled residents and park users organized protests and took legal action against the municipal government. In November, the Appellate Division, First Department issued a restraining order to halt the demolition, but the city went ahead and began cutting down 180 of the park’s 991 mature trees. Officials argued that the order did not require a pause; workers continued to clear the canopy of trees under the protection of a small army of police officers. On December 16, another court overturned the restraining order, leaving activists with few options.

Specific concerns vary from resident to resident, but complaints tend to center on a construction process that will leave the neighborhood without a major green space for several years until the new park is built. Many residents have also spoken out against the destruction of habitats for local wildlife and the air pollution that will probably accompany the heavy machinery needed to build the levee. And while 1,800 trees are planned for the new park, none will be as large in the foreseeable future as the mature trees that had been there.

To disheartened locals, the East Side Coastal Resiliency project is just another top-down endeavor, one that reflects little care for the expressed opinions and needs of the people who use the park most. Only the coming years will reveal whether the park’s shiny replacement brings solace to those same community members.

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**Gainesville Gains**

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson and Walker Architects’ Malachowsky Hall deflects the Florida glare with an aluminum facade and electrochromic glazing.

**Design architect:** Bohlin Cywinski Jackson  
**Associate architect:** Walker Architects  
**Structural engineer:** Walter P. Moore  
**Glazing manufacturer:** Viracon (curtain wall) and SageGlass (electrochromatic window glazing)  
**Prefabricated panel manufacturer:** N-RG Cladding  
**Panel finish manufacturer:** PPG

In early August 2021, before the University of Florida in Gainesville commenced fall classes, a construction crew erected provisional elements of a forthcoming campus landmark. Ten full-size modules, lonely in the afternoon sun, served as poignant stand-ins for the Malachowsky Hall for Data Science and Information Technology, before being disassembled.

Designed by Bohlin Cywinski Jackson and Walker Architects, Malachowsky Hall will feature a textured facade that protrudes and folds to create swatches of light and shadow along its considerable length. The origami-like creases provide for some very idiosyncratic window shapes, which should quickly endear the building to the university community once it opens in the summer of 2023.

The purpose of the exercise was to ascertain how the prefabricated facade panels from N-RG Cladding would perform on-site, in sunny, humid north Florida. “We desired a seamless panel and N-RG suggested making the panel completely out of aluminum plate to ensure that we would achieve the desired finish and also meet the dimensional tolerances without additional joints, due to material size limitations with other cladding options,” noted the design team. Once the mock-up was approved, N-RG prepared a full set of shop drawings, which Bohlin Cywinski Jackson reviewed prior to fabrication of the panels.

The foundation of the seven-story, 263,000-square-foot facility was laid back in December 2020 and comprises over 400 auger-cast piles driven 50 feet deep into the sandy soil. Above grade, the design team, in collaboration with structural engineer Walter P. Moore, opted for a relatively straightforward cast-in-place flat slab concrete structural system, which suited Malachowsky Hall’s rectangular massing just fine. (The design’s boxy character is offset by cantilevers and an expansive roofline canopy to punctuate different aspects of the program, which spans 30 laboratories and a series of social spaces.)

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson began working with general contractor Ajax Building Company and N-RG well in advance of construction. After the design concept for the building envelope was set in place, the three parties, alongside the structural engineer, considered aspects of detailing, thermal performance, and waterproofing. They also mapped out how the numerous panels—1,500 in total—would come together and how the Sage Glass–produced electrochromatic glazing would sit within them. The team ultimately concluded that all these factors needed to be vetted on-site.

The panels, which will hang off the slab edge via a slotted embed-and-clip system, are actually double-sided. There is a structural backup layer measuring 30 feet tall and 12 feet wide, incorporating composed sheathing, a weather barrier, and insulation; and painted 1/8th-inch-thick aluminum cladding 6 feet wide and 7.5 feet tall.

“The system allows us to meet energy requirements—Malachowsky Hall is designed to meet LEED Gold—and design-build will facilitate a more rapid close-in of the building to meet schedule requirements,” the design team added.

While the project called for well-tuned solar mitigation in the form of a large opaque facade for the laboratories, the larger communal areas are framed by stretches of Viracon-fabricated, ceramic-fritted curtain wall. Matthew Marani

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Above: A mock-up of the design’s faceted aluminum facade  
Left: The rectilinear massing is punctuated by cantilevered glass volumes, indicating social or collaborative spaces.  
Following page, top: Malachowsky Hall will act as a hub at the University of Florida’s Gainesville campus.  
Following page, bottom: The building is currently slated for completion in summer 2023.
In Construction
In this month’s anthology, critics review a museum, the renovation of a legendary theater, and a foundation for art exhibitions and residencies: Alfonso Architects’ Museum of the American Arts and Crafts Movement in St. Petersburg, Florida; Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre, as reinterpreted by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill; and SO-IL’s Amant Art Campus in East Brooklyn.
On the Florida peninsula’s central west coast, just across the bay from Tampa, is the city of St. Petersburg, a recurring New York Times pick for best places to visit in the world. Indeed, “St. Pete,” as it’s called by locals, has a lot going for it. As the state’s greenest urban center, St. Pete is on track to reach 100 percent renewable energy by 2035. It also boasts a well-established arts community, which has spurred the city’s cultural patrons to invest heavily in pilgrimage-worthy works of architecture. The latest, the Museum of the American Arts and Crafts Movement (MAACM), is arguably the crown jewel of the bunch.

Situated on a 3.2-acre site where downtown meets the Waterfront Arts District, MAACM is the third privately funded cultural institution in St. Pete and houses a renowned collection of American Arts and Crafts objects owned by the Two Red Roses Foundation. Designed by local, Ybor City–based office Alfonso Architects, and brought to life by construction management firm Gilbane, the 130,000-square-foot, $90 million project offers an architecture both sensuous and rational, playful in its suspended white metal shingle-clad geometries and elegant in its proportions and layered, handcrafted materials. The precisely executed detailing never deviates from the overarching design logic; simply put, its consistency and quality are world-class.

The hundreds of small and large works on display feel right at home in this gracious and considered context, which is positively Spartan compared with the flowery interiors that exemplified the Arts and Crafts movement. Here, each ornate museum piece—be it pottery, block prints, or painted glass—is afforded the opportunity to shine and be marveled at. The greatest challenge for fellow museum nerds, and particularly for museum nerds who happen to be architects, is pacing oneself as one moves through the 40,000 square feet of galleries. A visit is both exhilarating and mentally exhausting, impossible to complete in a single day.

Mottled black venetian plaster marks out critical thresholds throughout the interior, offering a counterpoint to the gleaming white shell—also plaster, but looking for all the world like Calacatta marble—of a sculptural stairway that connects the galleries starting on the second floor. A long stretch of the opening gallery is glazed, allowing visitors to orient themselves prior to immersion in the collection. Elsewhere, small openings punctuate the otherwise-opaque exterior envelope. South-facing windows offer views of an ever-increasing number of residential towers, while those on the opposite end of the building frame a bustling low rise commercial corridor and the Crescent Lake water tower, a local landmark since 1934. On the top floor, afternoon sun falling through a clerestory casts a mesmerizing bar of light across the exhibition space.

But one’s itinerary could just as easily begin and end in the soaring full-height atrium, which contains the museum store and a cafe, in addition to administrative offices. From...
here, it’s possible to admire the spectacular stairway from all angles, including below; its tightly coiled form is a subtle homage to Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s Glasgow Rose motif (titular inspiration for the Two Red Roses Foundation?). The east face of the atrium is clad in walnut acoustic panels, which have clearly been laid with great care. Along the base of the wall is anchored one of the museum’s many gems: an intricate 600-piece mosaic that portrays a calm maritime scene dating to 1914.

Like these architectonic elements, the coffered skylight underscores the architects’ commitment to evoking the ethos, if not the style, of the Arts and Crafts movement. To create the installation, they stacked and offset metal louvers in a manner recalling patterns found in Frank Lloyd Wright’s stained-glass works, examples of which are in MAACM’s collection. (The skylight transept brilliantly conceals a maintenance catwalk.) An expanding and contracting overlay of light and shadow enlivens the atrium’s rich finishes over the course of the day. Museum patrons and the general public are welcome to watch or to dine in the cafe and linger in the comfort of Tulip tables and chairs. Or they might browse the thoughtfully designed and curated gift shop, where daylight is modulated by an exterior cast-in-place concrete brise-soleil.

The scale of the museum both anticipates changes in the urban fabric and responds to the scale of the city’s past, taking confident cues from the historic former Pennsylvania Hotel across the street and the nearby Coliseum Ballroom and Palladium Theater. Given MAACM’s four-sided site, as is typical in car-centric Florida, the design team elected to break up the program into dedicated volumes. The five-story museum block anchors the western edge, while a more diminutive block containing an upscale restaurant and event space acts as a bridge to the parking structure. With its Brazilian granite rainscreen, the museum appears weightier than the mostly glazed restaurant annex, which compensates with a dramatic roof canopy that pins the garage behind it.

Before MAACM opened in September 2021, much of the local media coverage dwelled on the extensive project delays, partly due to COVID-19. A positive spin would foreground the patience and vision that has produced an architectural reminder to not rush something intended to last forever. It’s also a reminder of what an extraordinary client–design team–contractor collaboration can yield and, still more, how regional expertise often exceeds the products of many an anointed starchitect. Just as our universe is packed with constellations, some celebrated for millennia and many more unknown, world-class practitioners in every region are waiting to be seen. We must do better to acknowledge extraordinary practitioners—not as “second-tier starchitects,” as a 2010 article referred to Brad Cloepfil and Allied Works, but as the stars they are when we first catch sight of them. Alfonso Architects’ MAACM makes a most compelling case that our stars are bright in Florida.

Judi Shade Monk is a registered architect and an instructional assistant professor at the University of Florida School of Architecture.

Top left: A towering sculpted stair dominates the full-height atrium. Top right: The inner side of the stair is paneled in rich walnut. The quarter-sawn white oak steps glow with light. Left: MAACM displays hundreds of mosaics, furniture, stained glass, and other objects, which represents a mere sampling of its total collection.
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Steppenwolf Theatre

**Design architect:** Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture  
**Location:** Chicago  
**Landscape architect:** Oslund and Associates  
**Structural engineering:** Thornton Tomasetti  
**Electrical engineering:** Environmental Systems Design  
**Civil engineering:** Spaceco  
**Lighting design:** Morlights  
**Theater consultant:** Charcoalblue

Spending closing night of my high school’s production of *A Christmas Carol* in the company of theater geeks—but not being one myself—I watched enviously as my peers galloped and hollered at the cast party from backstage. They navigated around strange machineries, like spotlights and scaffolds and a forest of ropes dangling from ethereal catwalks, disappearing behind doors to reemerge on stage; they knew where all the trapdoors were. Theater, I learned from this close, is places for architectural magic. What I experienced as a 16-year-old taught me that the back-of-house isn’t only a means to magic but is itself a space of fantasy; what happens architecturally in public must be met with excellence behind the scenes.

Magic, and high school drama, were on my mind as I toured Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture’s (ASGG) new addition to the Steppenwolf Theatre campus in Chicago, where it seems that the firm has adopted the role of magician as well as architect. Though Steppenwolf started out as a scrappy theater company in 1974, it has grown in prestige and audience reach. Its physical space has also expanded through acquiring neighboring properties to the north and, later, to the south. The first phase of the expansion project, completed in 2016, also by ASGG, added a public cafe and community-accessible black-box theater space on the north end of the ground floor. The second phase, completed this past fall, bookends the original theater’s south end, adding a plethora of public-facing amenities like a two-story atrium and two bars. The atrium is conventionally pleasing, using materials like polished concrete and glass to create a sophisticated-yet-industrial feel. Perhaps it felt dull to me because it was empty, but who these days—two years into a pandemic—can imagine a theater atrium aglow and filled with a buzzing crowd?

The lackluster atrium stands in contrast to the new, flexible theater-in-the-round that is positioned as the beating heart of ASGG’s addition. Clad in textured gray glass fiber reinforced concrete panels, and ringed by the atrium, the Ensemble Theater resembles a geometric asteroid in a museum display. Its massive girth and towering height—the volume extends past the atrium roofline—create an identifiable, if ambiguous, cap atop the new addition, providing some visual interest from the nearby El train.

Inside, the architects have created a highly flexible venue, with 500 seats set around an ovoid stage that to me felt surprisingly small in comparison with the exterior’s gargantuan geometry. Seating rows or sections can be removed or added, I learned, allowing the stage to grow from 900 square feet to 2,500 and audience capacity from 250 to 500; the vom can be moved, widened, or eliminated entirely. The stage itself comprises individual platform panels that can be removed or lowered, and with the generous 15-foot trap room beneath, sets can “grow” from the theater substrate. Suspended 33 feet over the stage, the grid, with its movable componentry, can enable “one million lighting positions,” according to Steppenwolf executive director Brooke Flanagan. Thanks to this fly system, performances can move vertically rather than simply horizontally and set designers can flex their creative muscles. The promise is one of exhilarating and intimate experiences for audiences; all seats are within 20 feet of the stage. Exiting the Ensemble Theater from the second floor leads audiences to an intermission bar, the last public space in the new addition. New
back-of-house spaces include six dressing rooms and a greenroom, while the third floor houses the company’s script library and costume shop. Most impressive of all is the top floor, the fourth, which is dedicated to youth programming and theater education. A bright, naturally lit corridor that wraps around the Ensemble Theater’s pointed roof connects three teen spaces—the Lab, the Maker Studio, and the Reflection Gallery, each one outfitted with colorful acoustic paneling and springboard floors—leading to a small patio with views to Halsted Street. It is a startling amount of space—prime real estate at that—to devote to young people who are learning about theater. These classrooms won’t accommodate large groups of donors at a fundraiser; the rooftop patio can fit ten comfortably. These are places for youth, and for nobody else, and that’s where we return to magic.

As so many theater critics have said, the magic of the theater happens when the story—the script, performances, makeup, and costumes, all revolving around a backdrop of sets and props—transports an audience to other places. But when you’re an architecture critic, the fantasticism of theater reveals itself in the structures that support all its other elements, onstage and off. The Ensemble Theater’s otherworldly exterior is a sleight of hand on the part of the architects—we’re looking at the left hand while the right, well, the right hand is 30 feet above you in the catwalk. The new addition to the Steppenwolf Theatre is a testament to back-of-house enchantment: the secrets in the stage trap or above the light rigs that allow sets to soar; the urban aerie where youth can experiment, play, and collaborate among themselves without having to share space with wine-guzzling donors. What happens in secret is key to magic making, and magicians never reveal their tricks.

The Steppenwolf Theatre’s Ensemble Theater will stage its first show, Seagull, on April 28. Anjulie Rao is a Chicago-based journalist covering the built environment.
The Amant Foundation in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is the latest addition to New York’s cultural circuit. It also goes by the name Amant Art Campus, which inspires more than a few associations, above all the cloistered calm of, say, an East Coast university quad—canonically Princeton’s, but take your pick. The campus, Latin for untrammeled recreational ground, is a protective cocoon against the outside world and all its banal commitments. The other word that comes to mind is microcosm, suggesting miniaturist reproduction, as inside a snow globe.

On a recent visit to Amant, the latter analogue was a more visually apt fit. Two days prior, a winter storm had blanketed the city in several inches of snow that promptly turned to brown slush. In public parks graced with naturalistic features, hills and knolls had been slicked and blemished by children’s sleds. The reverie, however, persisted in Amant’s two inner courts, around which its four buildings are situated. The bounded courts are more than spillover space for installations and opening-night soirees, whose number has been small, due to pandemic concerns. Rather, the pocket quads—particularly the one linking a pair of cast-in-place concrete structures, with its meandering path, manicured gravel, and temporary winter dress—reinforce a sense of order and stillness that are as indispensable to the experience as the art inside.

Whereas traditional campuses tend to accrete over generations, attesting to an accumulative munificence, this one has appeared all at once, thanks to a single benefactor. Founded in 2019 by Lonti Ebers, an art collector and trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, Amant allies itself with midcareer artists of wide-ranging repute, providing them with studios to create work (or not; fellows aren’t held to a quid pro quo) and the galleries to exhibit it. Ebers conceived of the center as a place in which to “slow down art-making processes” (that is, to suspend time, as inside a snow globe). The foundation also operates a residency program in a Benedictine abbey outside Siena, Italy, a standoffish architecture of a different order than that encountered at the Brooklyn outpost.

Designed by borough outfit SO–IL, the 21,000-square-foot compound has two front-ages on Maujer Street, where warehouses, repair shops, a storage facility, and forlorn houses suffer each other in silence. Access is also granted on Grand Street, along which restaurants and a brewery have recently sprung up, offering refuge to the neighborhood’s aging gentrifiers. At their extremities, the buildings are blank and sturdy, relying on ribbed concrete walls and textured bricks for articulation. There is a protectiveness in their gait, but there are chinks in the armor. Walls recede from property lines, as if to tempt passersby to cross over inside. The most forbidding elevation, that of the brutalish residency block south of Maujer, is relieved by a single cut-out window at eye level. Its naive outline is a sly, if slightly cynical, reference to the guileless apertures that Lina Bo Bardi punched into a concrete tower at the SESC Pompeia Factory in São Paulo. At SESC Pompeia the architect helped transform a former industrial works into a pleasure site for its city’s working-class residents; Amant’s core audience is rather more self-selecting.

The Amant Foundation runs out the clock.
the CDMX/New Yorkina office. Evidence of this is in ready supply, such as when the hem of the main gallery's prickly brick apron appears to lift up where the potbelly of the residency studio is undergoing revisions, little more than half a year after Amant made its debut.) How art processes" that Ebers finds necessary to mirror a shapely sculpture opposite? Judging from the preliminary photographs, in a new project for a cultural center in France's Grand Est region (the northeastern point of l'Hexagone), the craftsmanship skewed toward cartoonish.

But Amant, a more modest, delimited endeavor, exhibits a high degree of finesse (owing to efforts of Andrew Reyniak, the architect of record, and SO-IL senior associate Kevin Lamysktskeung). Of course, the architects proffer two expressions of a single idea and stage the results side-by-side. This coupling is a kind of preciousness, but small quantities go down well. Amant is SO-IL’s first stand-alone structure in New York, though they are currently at work on several others. Founding principal Florian Idenburg apprenticed at SANAA and served as the go-between when the Tokyo firm’s design for the New Museum was under construction across the river. It was the early-to-mid-aughts, when architects in the U.S. and Western Europe (Idenberg is Dutch) were obsessed with bigness and daft metaphor (intentional!) or else anxious about defining a stripped-back design tenor—uncomplicated forms gently elaborated upon with craftsman-like attentiveness—would seem congruent, but in truth, the tendency had begun earlier in the decade. They emerged from the same milieu as the Brussels-based OFFICE and, to an extent, the CDMX/New Yorkina office.

As for the exhibition rooms, their dimensions and format vary. The best moment occurs in a double-height gallery that is topped on one side by a large milky light monitor with an eerie, atmospheric glow. Skylights in the largest one side by a large milky light monitor with an in a double-height gallery that is topped on sions and format vary . The best moment occurs As for the exhibition rooms, their dimen is dusted with snow.

The stack bond clinkers are offset from one another, a simple method for creating visual interest that is dificult to execute. The second gallery building offers an alternative strategy for communicating depth: bricks laid out in a stack bond have been notched on their outer faces, creating a delicate field of shadow lines. The stack bonding, now completely flat, continues into an anteroom that leads to the gift shop (a virtual offshoot of left-wing publisher Verso Books) and a pair of bathrooms. Overhead, a skylight is dusted with snow. As for the exhibition rooms, their dimensions and format vary. The best moment occurs in a double-height gallery that is topped on one side by a large milky light monitor with an eerie, atmospheric glow. Skylights in the largest gallery elicit a more natural, i.e., diurnal, tempo}

of discovery. Supple spatial cues, like the curve of an entrance wall, imply directionality. Thresholds are registered in changes in the pavement underfoot, which goes from smooth to slantly hatched at covered walkways, vestibules, and other connective spaces. The brick exteriors of the main gallery building are similarly in thrall to the diagonal; the cement clinkers are offset from one another, a simple method for creating visual interest that is difficult to execute. The second gallery building offers an alternative strategy for communicating depth: bricks laid out in a stack bond have been notched on their outer faces, creating a delicate field of shadow lines. The stack bonding, now completely flat, continues into an anteroom that leads to the gift shop (a virtual offshoot of left-wing publisher Verso Books) and a pair of bathrooms. Overhead, a skylight is dusted with snow.

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As climate change marches the tropics ever northward, Florida is looking like our future. Here we search for clues in the state’s midcentury residences, read the tea leaves in annual floods and residential buyouts, and recline on the porch to consider it all.
WHERE THE SUN SHINES

The phrase “midcentury modern” immediately calls up visions of California. But in the 1950s and early 1960s, Florida experienced a design awakening of its own.

Under a separate cover we are forwarding a proposal for your new house in Gainesville. You will undoubtedly raise the question: “What is a ‘Florida house’?” The question was at the heart of the Florida House Seminar I taught for more than a decade, beginning in 1966. The purpose of the seminar was to look back to a time when the state’s architecture became widely adopted. These houses serve as a reminder that architecture should embody the Florida landscape: the coastal edge, defined by the distant horizon, and the near landscape of the interior defined by dense local vegetation, which varies dramatically from the tropical south to the subtropical north. The latter more often than not occludes the former, so that in settlements and subdivisions along the coast, vistas can be hard to come by.

In our studies, we discovered how often Florida’s early modern architecture has been compared to the Case Study Houses of Southern California. But there is one key difference that has escaped most commentators on the subject: Whereas in California the edge separating the indoors from out could be a thin glass partition, Florida’s climate and landscape demanded a very different relationship.

Midcentury architects working across the state borrowed from the landscape, and, what’s more, invited it into the domestic realm. They reenvisioned the domestic space as a series of relationships and flows that allowed occupants to move from one zone of a house to another, depending upon the time of year. The need for shade was a given, but as the epigraph to the left reveals, from that need could spring forth spatial innovation.

But the Case Study comparison is apt in one way. Like their California counterparts, Rudolph, Seibert, Leedy, and Merritt believed themselves to be developing the implements for a new lifestyle. Not long after the completion of the house Rudolph designed for the Watsons, he sent his clients a few brochures on modern furniture. He didn’t mean to impose, he wrote, but offered the following prescription: “In a house where the glass goes to the floor the furniture should not be too heavy. It should definitely be raised on legs so that the space flows underneath.”

As the following case studies show, the architecture being built in Florida at midcentury marked the intersection of postwar optimism, risk-taking design, speculative provocations, and a heightened awareness of the nuances of landscape. But things would change quickly after air-conditioning became widely adopted. These houses serve as a reminder that architecture should endeavor to commune with the natural world, not be in opposition to it.

THE WATSON RESIDENCE

The Florida House Seminar was prompted, in part, by the renewed conversation about sustainability, and taking a closer look at this architecture seemed obvious. Rudolph, famous for the homes he designed in Sarasota, became a natural focal point, as did the Watson Residence, which had long since been demolished. Prints of the original drawings, some correspondence, and one perspective were all that remained. We reconstructed the house from these materials to understand the spatial impact of the “screened-in” patio Rudolph was evidently proud of.

The house was divided by the courtyard into clear public and private programs. The 1950 letter hints at the seasonal migration within the house to embrace changes in temperature throughout the year. Rudolph made the patio the largest space in the dwelling, justifying his decision with recourse to another design of his. Built in 1948, the Revere Quality House was the result. As illuminated by the Revere Corporation and ultimately drew 16,000 visitors, curious about the look of the new American architecture. Conceived as a prototype for modern living, the Revere Quality House set the template for many early modern homes in Florida.

The one-bedroom, steel-framed residence betrays the influence of European modernism.

The author and students created the house’s floor plan from original documents.

The phrase “midcentury modern” immediately calls up visions of California. But in the 1950s and early 1960s, Florida experienced a design awakening of its own.

Hiss Studio

Philip Hiss, a wealthy socialite turned educator turned developer, nurtured the careers of Paul Rudolph and many other young designers who had traveled to Sarasota to become part of what would later be called the Sarasota School of Architecture. At the start of the 1950s Hiss initiated the Lido Shores development on Lido Key, north of Sarasota. It was intended to demonstrate that architecture would facilitate a new postwar American lifestyle, and many of the early dwellings were treated as prototypes, the most notable being Rudolph’s 1953 Umbrella House.

Hiss had traveled throughout the world and built an exceptional library. He wanted an office/home to manage the Lido Shores development and a library to house all his books. The original drawings were simply labeled House 1.3, and later attributed to Tim Seibert, Architect. The site for the house was a spoil island created by the dredging of New Pass. Very little vegetation existed on this artificially created landscape, giving Seibert and Hiss that rarest— and most modern—of things: a clean slate.

The Hiss Studio is unique among the other houses enumerated here, as it owes its existence to another design of his. Built in 1951; the Hiss Studio in Sarasota, a 1953 design attributed to Tim Seibert; Gene Leedy’s 1956 residence in Winter Haven; and the 1965 Cassisi and Haynes residences by Harry Merritt in Gainesville. We consulted original drawings (when available) or else relied on measurement, photography, drawings, and other methods to try to better understand this era of design before air-conditioning was commonplace.

Florida would seem an odd venue for architectural experimentation. The landscape is sand on a porous limestone substrate, unstable ground. The climate is hot, bright, humid, wet. There are two seasons, and even that is a stretch, with an omnipresent summer briefly interrupted by a cool “winter.” Similarly extreme conditions dominate the one zone of a house to another, depending upon the time of year. The need for shade was a given, but as the epigraph to the left reveals, from that need could spring forth spatial innovation.

But the Case Study comparison is apt in one way. Like their California counterparts, Rudolph, Seibert, Leedy, and Merritt believed themselves to be developing the implements for a new lifestyle. Not long after the completion of the house Rudolph designed for the Watsons, he sent his clients a few brochures on modern furniture. He didn’t mean to impose, he wrote, but offered the following prescription: “In a house where the glass goes to the floor the furniture should not be too heavy. It should definitely be raised on legs so that the space flows underneath.”

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Harry Merritt left Harvard after Gropius suggested he move to Sarasota to work with Paul Rudolph. He then worked with Gene Leedy in Winter Haven before taking over the graduate design coordinator position at the University of Florida and establishing an architectural practice in Gainesville.

Florida’s grand water oaks were favorites of many Florida designers, perhaps none more so than Merritt. He often included oaks in his residential projects and even incorporated their “structural” lessons of compression and cantilever in his university lectures. He deployed the oak as an ordering device at two standout Gainesville projects. The first, the Cassisi Residence, uses bounding walls to enclose the tree, which is on full view to the glazed 20-by-20-foot volume containing the hearth. At the Haynes Residence, building and landscape merge to the fullest extent, or so was the intent. In one of Merritt’s ink-on-vellum drawings, the house seems barely to exist at all, with more draftsmanly skill lavished on the trademark tree. The deep shade created by the oak’s overstory, not to mention the compelling light effects it produced, was an ideal model for the Florida climate.

One of Rudolph’s first apprentices in Sarasota was Gene Leedy, a graduate of the University of Florida’s School of Architecture. He soon struck out on his own and started a practice with a focus on residential design. In 1953, he relocated to Winter Haven leaving the coastline behind for a landscape of lakes in central Florida.

Leedy designed this house in 1956 as a prototype for a residential development in Winter Haven. The house uses bounding walls as a way to construct its own domain, a device that originated with Mies’s unbuilt 1923 brick country house project and that Rudolph revived at his Lamolithic courtyard houses in Siesta Key. The masonry walls extend beyond the residence’s footprint, creating an acoustic and visual buffer from neighbors. Transparency, after all, demanded concomitant strategies for privacy.

The Cassisi and Haynes Residences

Top to bottom: The floorplan illustrates the bounding walls and series of courts; a grand oak anchors the central walled garden; an axonometric explicates the construction logic.

Top to bottom: A wild-looking oak seems to rise out from the Haynes Residence; an original hand-drawn perspective of the Cassisi Residence depicting the main approach; Cassisi’s airy living room is shaded by plentiful flora.

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Top to bottom: A wild-looking oak seems to rise out from the Haynes Residence; an original hand-drawn perspective of the Cassisi Residence depicting the main approach; Cassisi’s airy living room is shaded by plentiful flora.
Voluntary home buyouts are underway in the Florida Keys. But how effective are they?

“When I bought my house in 1995, this was never an issue...and it’s progressively gotten more and more and more with different years being different levels of flooding,” explained Key Largo resident Emily Stewart at a June 2021 special meeting of Florida’s Monroe County Board of County Commissioners. Stewart spoke out at the meeting to express her frustration over 90 consecutive days of flooding in 2019 and 70 consecutive days in 2020, due to seasonal “king tides,” which are increasing because of climate change. Stewart asked the commissioners to act quickly to address the issue, specifically requesting roadway and infrastructural improvements.

Impacts like flooding are making the climate crisis very real for Floridians, like those in Monroe County, a largely rural area on the southern tip of the state that includes the Florida Keys. Back in 1974, much of the county was designated an Area of Critical State Concern by the Florida Legislature, which recognized the diversity of resources of statewide significance and called for a land management system to aid in the area’s protection. Since then, it has seen repeated damage from natural disasters, including 2017’s Hurricane Irma, and remains highly vulnerable to sea level rise and extreme weather events.

Florida’s flatness, abundant coastline, and frequency of tropical storms, paired with continued development in at-risk areas, make the state extremely prone to flooding. According to research from First Street Foundation, 4.3 million residential properties in the United States face “substantial flood risk,” and 1 million of them are in Florida. The vulnerability of these properties translates into the highest concentration of expected economic damage in any state, totaling $8 billion in potential annual losses.

Voluntary buyout programs are one option for homeowners looking for a way out and can ultimately be less expensive for the federal government than repeated flood insurance payouts through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Flood Insurance Program. Monroe County oversees multiple buyout programs, including the Rebuild Florida Voluntary Home Buyout Program, created in 2019 in response to Irma with federal community development block grants allocated to disaster recovery. Out of the $84 million in Rebuild Florida funding made available to 11 local governments, Monroe County received $12 million. Prioritizing low-to-moderate-income areas, the county uses the money to purchase properties at market value, then demolishes existing improvements and adapts the land for public use, such as stormwater infrastructure, recreation, or open space.

In early December 2021, Monroe County extended the registration deadline for the buyout program until further notice. When the county submitted its application for Rebuild Florida grant monies in 2019, it identified a pool of 60 potential applicants. However, an extended administrative process, the sale of properties on the open market, and other factors caused that number to dramatically decrease. The Monroe County Land Authority (MCLA) reports the program now has around 30 applicants, with most located in the Big Pine area. The applicants’ properties are dispersed, which inherently limits the public uses possible with aggregated properties, but it’s a challenge the MCLA is prepared for. Since its creation in 1988, it has acquired or assisted in the acquisition of over 4,600 parcels, including 112 parcels totaling over 100 acres in 2020 alone.

Despite government action to reduce risk and damage, the real estate and development community’s response to risk assessments and climate change data remains mixed. According to law firm Berger Singerman’s 2019 South Florida Real Estate Survey, only 35 percent of South Florida real estate professionals felt climate change was the most pressing issue the market faced, and 58 percent indicated that climate change would have zero impact on how they planned or developed. In the 2020 survey, climate change slipped even further in relevance, losing out to concerns about remote working and migration induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The focus on such factors isn’t unwarranted. For those living and building in high-risk areas, the inability to secure mortgages or insurance will inevitably have more impact than climate change projections.

For my colleague Jeffrey Carney, who directs the Florida Institute for Built Environment Resilience at the University of Florida, buyout programs pose broader questions about resilience and how to holistically address community challenges. As buyouts reduce density and the resident population, a community is left with a decreased tax base, maintenance challenges, gaps in the physical fabric, and costly adaptation to utility and transportation infrastructure. He also notes that a focus on mitigation or efforts to lessen the impacts distracts us from addressing the root causes of climate change.

Carney goes on to explain that communities need coherent, multipronged approaches to address climate change, with buyout programs being one available tool. For Monroe County and other Florida communities administering them, Carney points to the need for adjusted development patterns and the use of complementary tools to deter new construction in at-risk areas: “What is the net benefit if you remove four houses from a community and a developer goes and adds six new ones?”

Sarah Gamble is an assistant professor at the University of Florida School of Architecture.

Change in total annual loss from 2021 to 2051

According to First Street Foundation, in Florida the annual average loss per property due to flooding, currently at $8,788, will grow to $15,557 in 2051—an increase of 77 percent. The state currently has 906,465 residential properties at substantial risk of flooding, which is about a quarter of the national total. Over the next 30 years, an additional 67,069 properties are expected to undergo financial loss from flood damage.
FLOAT YOUR PORCH
An architect glimpses the future of climate change from his West Florida cabin.

The following excerpt is from the first chapter of University of Florida professor Charlie Hailey’s new book, The Porch: Meditations on the Edge of Nature (University of Chicago Press). From the telltale exterior of a humble cabin by the Homosassa River, the architect/writer addresses the effects of climate change and sea level rise as experienced from this place, while ruminating on precedents as varied as a screened sleeping pavilion on the roof of the White House, the stoa of ancient Greece, and the work of Sigurd Lewerentz and Louis Kahn. Ultimately, his musings accumulate into a sort of manifesto offering up the porch as a typology capable of reacclimating humankind to a natural world that it has thrown off-balance.

Aaron Seward

In addition to writing, the author records his impressions in blind contour drawings.

A manatee’s breath drifts across the porch screen. It is a sound so delicate yet insistent that I stop breathing, I count time in the rings of smoothed water that drift with the river’s current toward the ocean. I listen for the next breath but this manatee is moving fast, and its footprints blend back into the burnished roll and flicker of the river that holds its own breath between tides. The manatees are on the move this January day as Florida warms after a cold snap. What we call fire weather is what most other parts of the country think of as winter, but manatees are on the move this January day that holds its own breath between tides. The extraordinary can happen. I hear my own breath again, waiting.

When I walk out on the porch now, I instinctively check the water for signs of change. I watch and hold my breath. I am learning to read what’s around me. Check needles, tiny bits of shell and soil, left there from this fall’s hurricane, seem trivial compared to what happened up north in Mexico Beach, but it’s all part of the same thing, this living on the coast, which is really living in the coast, deeply embedded in the littoral. Not fixed in place, but held adrift between tides, floating. Like all the things that Hurricane Hermine and her 7-foot storm surge set afloat in our porch and its cabin, four years ago.

When we took the boat out to the cabin the next day, the tannin-stained water was still lapping onto the porch. When my son and I stepped up onto the porch, we walked into a washing machine that had just finished its cycle, one set for heavy soil and turgid water moving this way and that. Even though no doors were ajar or windows broken, it was like someone had ransacked the place, leaving it turned in on itself. Like something had been inundated once, and nearly a second time. This porch where I write will soon be underwater. For seven decades it rode hurricanes and winter storms. In another seven, the sea will cover the boards where three layers of flaking paint sandpaper my bare feet. We do not complain about this reality, neither the porch’s vulnerability nor the paint’s inconstancy. In a position both privileged and ill-advised, I sit here by choice, aware of what’s coming and what’s at stake, saturated by a knowledge of this place and its climate—one that is constantly and dramatically changing. Here, on the porch, theory meets practice. There’s the idea of a changing climate, and then there’s actually witnessing its effects. Here on a porch, the unseen is inescapable, like the manatee. And the mullet who just splashed in the brackish water taut with low tide. I didn’t see the fish, but I heard the dazed flump of reentry into a river saltier than it was last year, and now watch the ripples widen from unseen is inescapable, like the manatee.

In our time here, the porch’s floor has become routine, but it never gets old. Set back from the river, we don’t always see them, except when we catch a black snout sending out its wake like a skidding duck or a piece of driftwood plowing the current, and except that time when a mother came into our lagoon with her calves—the littlest looked like a puppy. There’s another one, louder, closer, but on a porch earshot isn’t necessarily eyeshot. It rained last night, and the cedars drip like metronomes. A kingfisher calls, far enough away to mix with the gentle lapping of breeze and river on limestone. It is quiet today, but it feels like anything can happen. I hear my own breath again, waiting.
The porch and its cabin were built in 1950, one of the first on the Homosassa River. Here, amid the river’s latticed marriage with the gulf, the fishing is good, so good that Winslow Homer, Grover Cleveland, and Thomas Edison, and John Jacob Astor all came looking for redfish, trout, and tarpon.

Land and water are relative terms here. Where one starts and the other stops changes every day, every hour, every minute. If pressed, we could say the cabin is halfway between land and water, halfway between the mainland and the gulf. The cabin is boat-access only, and our car is 2.5 miles away, the same distance that our pontoon travels to reach the open water, along the Homosassa’s winding channel. I call it a channel because the Coast Guard marks it with buoys and a few fixed posts. But the metal shafts rust through at their water lines, the floating drums drag with flood tides and storms, and oysters build new props, and even the whole lower units of actual gates. From our porch, we hear skegs, treacherous, even for boaters who know it, like the sheriff, who once bumped the bottom twice in a low winter tide at the Hell Gate narrows, where my son and I were gathering boat propellers. The town of Homosassa used to close that pass at night with actual gates. From our porch, we hear slugs, props, and even the whole lower units of motors grind across oyster bars and limestone. When the shrimp boats gear down, they are passing those narrow gates of hell.

Homosassa isn’t Venice, the cabin is no palazzo, and our pontoon—except when we pole it over mudflats in winter—has no kinship with gondolas, but we feel a connection with gulls and redfish, and mildew blossoms. I had to rust dances, and habitually floods this porous limestone.

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A house has its own air. It may hold air like a sealed ball jar or, if it’s one of the old houses, breath air like a torn shirt or split jeans. Airtight or leaky, the walls of a house still protect from weather and the changeable conditions of open air. A porch holds nature’s air, and going out on a porch has traditionally offered changes in climate and perspective.

When you step out on a porch now, you board a vessel on a sea of change. As you sit there, time shifts in temperature and breezes, the ebb and flow of sounds, drifts of smell, an upwelling of vision. But today, firmly lodged in the Anthropocene where human activity governs, a porch brings other changes as well. Whether you realize it or not, you and your porch are moving.

Open to the environment, your porch shifts climatically, while its conditioned house essentially stays put.

I remember reading in Granta that the average English garden was effectively moving 66 feet south every day, as it warmed. Four and a half miles a year. That was in 2003, when reports fretted about the prospect of a single Celsius degree rise in global temperature. Now we regularly talk about two or three times that—a pace that sets the Northern Hemisphere’s porches racing southward. They leave their air-conditioned houses in a wake of energy consumption and hermetic isolation.

Today the Homosassa porch moves south a hundred feet every day. Since we bought the cabin seven years ago, we have effectively moved to Tampa, 50 miles away. Current estimates for the next decade send the porch farther south, past Florida’s Venice and on to Naples. When the porch arrives at that latitude, north Florida will have become south Florida.

But our porch is also heading west. This part of the Gulf of Mexico is exceeding ly flat, and a local rule of thumb says that water depth changes a foot for every mile of distance. Assessments of the rise in the gulf’s levels vary, but a conservative estimate of 1 inch every two years would mean a foot every 24, and would place our porch—towing its cabin with it, since sea level rise happens whether the air conditioner is on or not—in open waters in another 70 years. As dramatic as that might seem, it feels slower than the porch’s plunge southwest. But when you factor in spring tides and storm surges, we would do well to have half that time.

On its voyage south and west to the tropics and out to sea, our porch passes mangroves and Brazil pepper trees heading north. Red mangroves are moving farther and farther up the coast. They ride the warmer temperatures, making land as fast as it is receding. They don’t mind the saltier water, and they have adapted to the sea’s rise and fall. As the mangroves move north, they also head east, slowly and methodically inland. Clinging to the river’s edge, the mangroves are silent witnesses and respectable ushers as native coastal trees also move inland, away from the salt of rising seas. Their retreat is hurried along by the invasive pepper trees that thrive in the warming temperatures and shelve aside red cedars and live oaks that are still alive but declining.

On its westward voyage, the porch also encounters rampikes, trees that have died as saltwater replaces freshwater. Each turn of the river toward the gulf opens a longer vista, bringing more rampikes into view. After Hell Gate, countless palm trunks prick the horizon, a forest of telephone poles. Hammocks of cedars and a few oaks cluster among the palms like so many mourners. Others are solitary, roaming the horizons of marsh grass and mangroves. Their skeletal remains, mostly cedars, some of them ancient, already look like driftwood long staked in the ground.

Moving back and forth between salty gulf and freshwater spring, it becomes clear that the porch occupies the cusp of this transition, this rampike wave, this roll of pepper trees and mangroves, a brackish tipping point between land and sea. The porch floats like driftwood in a slackened tide. Porches wait, and this one, loosely anchored to the limestone of its ancient coral bed, pauses with chain pulled tight, and its ropes straining, as the flukes of its foundations still try to dig in.

And so the porch charts its course. It is a moving vessel on a sea of change, yet it taries in one place. It waits as change approaches. Sit out here for a little while, and you will feel the weather turn. Sit out here for a little longer, and climate change will come to you.

On a porch, you travel without leaving home.

Charlie Hailey is an architect and writer and a professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Florida.
In the decade after World War II, Florida's population nearly doubled, leading to a boom of residential construction up and down the state. That growth continues to this day, despite national stagnation. Since the last census Florida has increased its population by more than 14 percent, even as much of its low-lying littoral geography began to disappear beneath rising seas. So how are Floridians housing themselves? In the following pages, we highlight three case studies from the Sunshine State that point to promising housing solutions. Additionally, we call out the latest innovations—from IoT wares to uber-efficient HVAC systems—in the residential construction space.
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BRING YOUR VISION TO US
Situated on the channel side of Davis Island, facing the Port of Tampa, Traction Architecture's Five Twelve House is a resilient residence that revels in the excitement and precariousness of its location. Traction founder Jody Beck found inspiration in the 1950s ranch houses that predominate on the island, the purity of the forms of the industrial port structures across the channel, and the very, very large boats that pass by regularly. "We love it," said Beck. "It’s really cool. When you're in the house you see freighters and cruise ships go by—like a giant moving wall or a building moving across the horizon. It’s a crazy scale."

The other main design driver was the FEMA flood line, which on this 50-by-110-foot lot is 10 feet above sea level. With the site at 5 feet above sea level and code requiring living spaces to be 1 foot above the flood line, Traction had to perch the living spaces of the 2,700-square-foot house 6 feet above grade. That change in elevation formed the section, called out by a switchback blackened plate steel staircase with open risers that carves out height-and-a-half spaces throughout the interior. The main (second) floor is left completely open, such that "you could throw a ball from one side to the other," said Beck. Recessed balconies on either end can also be kept open for natural cross ventilation when the weather is mild, which it usually is from November to April.

On the upper level, three bedrooms and an office are separated by a double-height void overlooking the dining area. A bridge—made from the same graphite steel as the stairs—spans this little atrium, which is topped by a Kalwall skylight, oriented on the north side of the gable roof for diffuse natural illumination. Scissor trusses supporting the roof allow the gable to be expressed inside, where prominent white oak surfaces give the impression of a ship's cabin.

The structure is robust, able to take on any hurricane. The poured-in-place reinforced concrete columns, tie beams, and rake beams are infilled with concrete block and finished with stucco. The standing seam metal roof is equipped with photovoltaic panels for on-site electricity generation. And just as the living spaces are elevated above the flood line, so too are the mechanical systems (concealed within the spaces of the trusses). Five Twelve House is tough, which is not to say rough and ready, and thoughtfully incorporates its influences. Aaron Seward
Pulp Studio was founded in 1996 by Lynda and Bernard Lax out of necessity.

They couldn’t find a glass fabricator to create custom glass for their new home, so they developed a way to embed decorative paper into glass for their dining room, kitchen, and powder room. Their background in the textile industry and their business acumen and creativity fueled the success of Pulp Studio. Over the years, Lynda and Bernard pioneered decorative glass for commercial applications and grew their company into a leader and innovator in the glass industry.

Today, Pulp Studio has more than 150 employees whose capabilities include bending, color coating, glass carving, direct-to-glass print imaging, chemical strengthening and more. Every project, whether it’s creating glass panels for the Space Needle’s observation deck or printing glass installations for community sculptures, is another opportunity for Pulp Studio to further enrich the idea of glass as an artistic endeavor.
Modern Family
The Zahrada townhomes tap into Sarasota’s midcentury modern legacy.

Over the past decade, Sarasota’s Rosemary District has transformed from a sparse and neglected stretch north of downtown into one of the city’s liveliest corridors. In 2014, the City Commission tripled the allowable density in the district from 25 to 75 units per acre, setting off a buying frenzy among developers, who have since introduced over 1,700 new homes and numerous restaurants, shops, and offices.

The new developments come in all shapes and sizes, but few are as considered as Zahrada, a mixed-use complex with midcentury flair. Large apertures that recall those used by Paul Rudolph in his 1950s residential designs help set the row of white stucco-clad townhomes on 4th Street apart from its neighbors, while an intricate section (also redolent of the architect) neatly delineates the ground-floor office and retail spaces.

“Like Rudolph, we always try to take advantage of Sarasota’s agreeable climate and provide nice, shaded outdoor spaces, and seamless transitions from inside to out,” said John Pichette, founding principal of local firm Halflants + Pichette Architects.

Each of the six high-end homes contains four bedrooms, a pool, a detached granny flat, and an oversize two-car garage. Impact glazing frames views of the inner courtyard, which features plantings by DWY Landscape Architects. To Pichette’s point, sliding doors and undifferentiated concrete flooring extend the main living area into the (enclosed) pool patio. The flooring also mitigates the transmission of noise to the storefronts below.

This winter, construction will begin nearby on Zahrada 2, also designed by Halflants + Pichette. Though it follows a more traditional mixed-use format than its predecessor, Zahrada 2 will take greater advantage of the new zoning allotments by upping the occupancy area to 22 units, or 18 homes and 4 retail/office leases. There’s a dash of Rudolph in there, too. Sophie Aliece Hollis

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Houses of Cards

At Heron, a two-tower complex in downtown Tampa, angled structural walls create visual excitement.

Architecture: Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates
Location: Tampa, Florida

Interior designer: Cecconi Simone
Construction manager: Coastal Construction
Structural engineer: DeSimone Consulting Engineers
MEP engineer: Cosentini Associates
LEED, WELL, and energy modeling consultant: Thornton Tomasetti
Exterior wall and roofing consultant: Vidaris
Landscape architect: Raymond Jungles
Concrete consultant: Red Hough Associates

Heron, designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates (KPF), is part of the first phase of Water Street Tampa, a major development that is doubling the size of downtown while seeking to be the world’s first WELL-certified neighborhood. The LEED Gold–certified mixed-use project comprises two “sister” towers of rental apartments over a retail-and-parking podium.

“We were inspired by notions of wellness and how people function and live in and around these buildings,” said KPF design principal Trent Tesch. “We set out early on to think about what we could do from a planning and logistics perspective to make the towers elegant and straightforward and build with as little stress on the environment as possible.”

Constrained by a tight budget and truncated schedule, Tesch’s team cast about for ways to turn these limitations to their advantage. Working with the client to establish project priorities, which included maximizing daylighting into and views out of the residences as well as a pool deck, the architects developed a computational model with which to test myriad massing options—upwards of 400—before hitting on the most optimal orientations for the towers and their terraces. This methodology reduced the design timeline from several months to a mere three weeks.

On each tower, terraces provide shading for monolithic laminated glass windows set between dark gray stucco walls and bounce indirect light deep within the units. Structural board-formed concrete partition walls add texture. The walls start out orthogonal at the base of the towers and bend at increasingly agitated angles as they move up the elevation, lending some intriguing formal play to the inchoate skyline. The aluminum railings are an off-the-shelf product, chosen for their elegant profiles.

The parking stack sports a different cladding solution: perforated aluminum panels set at varying angles and painted a copper color that references the brick warehouses belonging to the local Cuban cigar industry. (Heron’s client was adamant that the architects avoid using the color white on exteriors—this is Tampa, not Miami.) The mechanical suite sits atop the parking deck, whose roof is vegetated with local grasses and crisscrossed by paths connecting the two towers. At the corner of Beneficial Drive and Channelside Drive, KPF pulled the podium 60 feet back from the curb to create a little plaza and supported the tower above on a split concrete column.

“We feel good about the building,” said Tesch. “There’s a real truth and honesty about materiality and structure. You can see the units, you know where the parking is, you know the amenity floor. Like a salad, you can see all the layers.” —Aaron Seward
33 Products

Surfaces

These cleverly engineered surfaces—produced using natural, composite, and synthetic components—are both stylish and incredibly durable. As earth tones, a subtle organicism, and bold geometric forms return to the fore, these materials reflect changing trends but also come in a wide range of variants for those looking to go their own way. By Adrian Madlener

Living Impressions
Collection
Formica
formica.com

AURORA
Nemo Tile
nemotile.com

Puzzle Pieces Collection
LIVDEN
livden.com

Silestone Ethereal Noctis
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cosentino.com

Light Haze
Durasein
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EARTHTECH
Fiorim
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Handles, Nobs, & Pulls

Masterfully crafted, these hardware products beg to be made key pieces of any FF&E vision. Some offer a sumptuous look, others IoT tie-ins, while all feature clever detailing. When paired with innovative doors and refined cabinetry, these handles, knobs, and pulls are sure to stand out. By Adrian Madlener

Carrera
Thom Filicia, Accurate Lock and Hardware
accuratelockandhardware.com

22447-32 Pull
Schwinn Hardware
schwinnoriginals.com

Stella Crystal Knob
Viaggio Hardware
viaggiohardware.com

Knurled Bauhaus lever (1255)
Ashley Norton
ashleynorton.com

Patton Cabinet Knob
Sugatsune
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**Southeast**
February 2

**Tri-State**
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**Midwest**
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**Landscape**
March 16

**Pacific Northwest**
April 6

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LP Legacy
LP Building Solutions
lpcorp.com

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One can’t address questions of energy efficiency without looking to HVAC systems. Whether integrated into the structure of a home or serving as freestanding units, these new, improved devices—many featuring smaller physical footprints than ever before—work hard to keep interiors cozy.

By Adrian Madlener

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rbmmore.com

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Carrier
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LG HVAC
lghvac.com

Deluxe Wall-Mount System
Mitsubishi Electric
mitsubishicomfort.com

Portable Air Purifier
Rensair
rensairus.com

LYNX 18 Inverter Heat Pump
Allied Air Enterprises
alliedair.com
### Adhesives, Coatings, & Sealants

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  - 3m.com
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- CertainTeed
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- ROCKWOOL
  - rockwool.com
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  - sherwin-williams.com
- Sto Corp.
  - stocorp.com
- Tubelite
  - tubeliteinc.com
- USG
  - usg.com

### Heating & Cooling

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- Mitsubishi Electric
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- LG HVAC
  - lghvac.com
- RBM More
  - rbmmore.com
- Rensair
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### Smart Locks & IoT Systems

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  - getbuzz.com
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- Leviton
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- Lutron
  - lutron.com
- Rocky Mountain Hardware
  - rockymountainhardware.com

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- Neolith
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### Handles, Nobs, & Pulls

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**44 Highlights**

**West**

**The Great Ruins of Saturn by Alvaro Urbano**

Storefront for Art and Architecture
97 Kenmare St, New York, NY

Open through February 26, 2022

The future doesn’t age well. That holds doubly true for that futurophilic 20th-century typology—the World’s Fair. The 1964 edition held in New York’s Flushing Meadows Corona Park has had a long afterlife, at least in the set design department: fair icons like Wallace Harrison’s New York Hall of Science and Philip Johnson’s Tent of Tomorrow have cropped up in Mad Men and The Avengers to lend period-accurate vibes. These structures, both of them slight in terms of design quality, are the fair’s most permanent holdover, though at least Harrison’s has been continuously in use; Johnson’s folly for some kind of cosmic circus has been continuously out of use. (It’s been said demolition would be too costly.) The Great Ruins, a film by artist Alvaro Urbano, takes the Tent of Tomorrow (official name: the New York State Pavilion) and runs with it. This cautionary tale about capitalist progress and humanity’s hubris returns us to Plato’s cave (there are shadow puppets) even as it reaches for the stars. **Samuel Medina**

**Houses of Tomorrow: Solar Homes from Keck to Today**

Elmhurst Art Museum
150 S Cottage Hill Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126

Open through May 29, 2022

The Elmhurst Art Museum turns 25 this year and has planned a slate of exhibitions and events to coincide with the anniversary. The first of these is Houses of Tomorrow, which explores the earliest example of a glass house found stateside. The House of Tomorrow was designed and built by George Fred Keck of local firm Keck & Keck for a different World’s Fair, 1933’s Century of Progress. Keck’s renderings depicted a faceted crystalline structure, almost more chandelier than architecture. As built, the prototypical dwelling made for a far less ethereal experience, but its modern conveniences—General Electric’s inaugural dishwasher device among them—won over crowds. As Elmhurst curators are keen to point out, Keck’s folly (which is extant and awaiting restoration) anticipated the ferro-vitreous residences designed by Mies van der Rohe, like the McCormick House, which the master designed in 1952 and which currently sits on the museum’s campus. **SM**

**The Architects Collaborative 1945-1995**

Pinkcomma Gallery
46 Waltham St, Boston, MA 02118

Open through March 1, 2022

The brutalist craze of the 2010s shocked everyone, and American concrete converts have partly to thank Chris Grimley, Michael Kubo, and Mark Pasnik for the style’s cultural reappreciation. The trio accomplished this feat with a skillful rebrand: in 2015, they published the book Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston to commemorate the city’s concrete buildings, many of them public. With the wind in their sails, Grimley, Kubo, and Pasnik next founded Pinkcomma in the Shawmut neighborhood, a sliver of a gallery dedicated to exhibiting works of architecture. Its latest show, about the profession-al collective Walter Gropius founded in 1945, dispenses with the heroic label altogether. The Architects Collaborative, or TAC, as the firm was often referred to, certainly exhibited a facility for the brutalist idiom, but more importantly for the curators, it established a model of practice well ahead of its time. The displays describe TAC’s staffing structure and other materials to reveal certain progressive indicators. Case in point: among the eight founding principals, two were women—unheard of at the time. **SM**

**Florian Hecker – Resynthesizers**

MAK Center for Art and Architecture
8078 Woodrow Wilson Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90046

Open through March 13, 2022

In other anniversary-related news, the Schindler House in Los Angeles will celebrate its centennial this coming summer. The low-slung modernist house—the first to have appeared in the city—serves as the headquarters of the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, which holds exhibitions and events on the property, as it does at another Schindler-designed address, the 1936 Fritzpatrick-Leiland House. Compared with the West Hollywood bungalow, the Laurel Canyon residence is light and airy, emphasizing the vertical as it navigates its sloped site. The architecture diligently accords with the “plastic” conception of space held by Schindler and other self-described modernists, making the home an interesting receptacle for the three aural pieces that make up Resynthesizers. Sounds emanate from speakers stacked totemlike, while artisanally crafted fragrances add further stimulus. The now-vintage abstraction that characterizes the house and its period furniture softens those algorithmically generated, 21st-century whirs and sprays. **SM**
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2022 EVENTS

Atlanta
February 25

Philadelphia
March 8

San Francisco
March 23

New York City
April 13+14

Austin
April 27

Boston
June 7

Toronto
July 21

Dallas
September 9

Denver
September 21

Chicago
October 7

Los Angeles
November 3+4

Seattle
December 2

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The mid-20th-century writer and philosopher Marshall McLuhan first used the phrase “The medium is the message” in his 1964 book, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. For McLuhan, the content of a television series or a picture book was less impactful than the way the message itself was delivered. In that same book he distinguished between “hot” media, which overwhelm our critical resistance and wash over us with direct intensity, and “cool” media, the kind that retreats into a detached and hazy distance, beckoning us to participate in completing the picture.

When it comes to messages about climate crisis, the form and content are usually both hot. “They use 40 percent of the world’s energy, emit 50 percent of its greenhouse gases,” Brad Pitt tells an audience of architects in a short film produced for the green design documentary series e design, produced by Autodesk and PBS in 2006, “they are the buildings where we work, live, and grow.” The repetition of these statistics and the subsequent imperatives to reduce carbon footprints can have a numbing effect; too much of this heat (climate doom and gloom) often leaves designers feeling powerless and burned out.

Two recent essays in speculative design research are trying to cool things down in a new way. Planet City was put together by Los Angeles- and London-based architect Liam Young, and The Planet after Geoengineering, by Design Earth, a collaborative practice led by Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Ann Arbor, Michigan, respectively. Both projects—each pairing a book and film—use experiments with genre and media to lead us into stories about, as their titles suggest, possible Earths. Instead of a hot insistence about an eternal festival procession that winds continuously through the city. With so many cultures in one place, every day is a holiday or a holy day, and this is a party fit for the heavens, partying in Baltimore, Maryland. His book Design Earth’s fictive enterprises show us some of the best and worst possibilities for a future in which humans work to remake the planet. But these hopes and fears have never looked so cool. Planet City could be a teaser for a show that would sit among the streaming prestige television spectacles, like Game of Thrones or The Expanse. Meanwhile, The Planet after Geoengineering could be the start of a whole new publishing category: the speculative dystopian children’s picture book.

These practitioners are no strangers to speculative architecture will recognize the rituals, and the outfits. The Planet after Geoengineering unfolds like a children’s book, with clear, yet abstrat graphics and direct narrative text. But this is no simple bedtime story. The fables told here, in short, clipped sentences and richly textured bold, (mostly) grayscale images, are as morally ambiguous and deeply unsettling as classic old-school fairytales. Since accidental intervention into Earth’s climate has destabilized things, what might a more intentional attitude toward designing the world look like? These practitioners’ popular children’s picture book, Planet City, suitably cool and abstract. There is no narrative here, just slow pans and frozen, pregnant moments, animated with potent original music by Forest Swords and cut with scenes of dancers in fantastastic costumes produced under costume director Ane Crabtree. The short film is an ambient depiction of an eternal festival procession that winds continuously through the city. With so many cultures in one place, every day is a holiday or a holy day, and this is a party fit for the heavens, partying in Baltimore, Maryland.

Other architects, designers, and planners who want to get their messages and warnings out to the world at large should take note of these mediums and methods. We don’t read the newspaper, McLuhan wrote, we step into it like a warm bath. Hot or cool, to reshape Earth, these multimedia projects about climate crisis suggest, designers will have to get out of their comfort zones. These two projects are worth immersing oneself in.

Fred Scharman teaches architecture and urban design at Morgan State University. He is the co-founder of the Working Group on Adaptive Systems, an art and design consultancy in Baltimore, Maryland. His book Space Forces: A Critical History of Life in Outer Space is out now from Verso.
Fly on the Wall

Trump’s wall failed—or did it? A new exhibition is a testament to the conceptual resilience of “the wall.”

What exactly was “the wall”? On August 4, 2014, a second-tier New York City real estate developer turned television game show host took to Twitter to voice the demand, as he put it then, to “SECURE THE BORDER! BUILD A WALL!” This was the first time that the future president would declare his support for the endeavor and by no means the last time he would do so without furnishing any real specifics as to what precisely he had in mind. In fact, throughout his tenure, he never really explained what “the wall” was.

In November, the National Building Museum (NBM) in Washington, D.C., unveiled an exhibition that attempts to fill in the gaps. Curated by Sarah A. Leavitt, The Wall/El Muro is a modestly scaled but engaging, informative exploration of the odd history and troubled present of the United States’ southern border. More specifically, the show is about the structures—ranging from memorial-type markers to chicken wire, to somewhat taller fences—that successive presidential administrations have erected in an attempt to demarcate that border and render it less permeable. Through illuminating photographs, wall text, video, and artifacts, Leavitt, who previously served on NBM’s full-time curatorial staff, successfully walks a line as fine and as fraught as the conceptual abstraction that is the border itself. Two lines, really: On the one hand, how to render such a sprawling and complex subject in the space of a few white-walled rooms? On the other hand, how do it in today’s polarized climate, without quickly alienating half the visitors?

The solution on offer at NBM is appropriately subtle. Especially through the use of real-life material collected at borderland sites, the show packs the small display space with the kinds of compelling, stare-worthy objects whose very aura speaks louder and more eloquently than any verbal polemic ever could: asylum application forms, an old section of chain link, the discarded belongings of migrants crossing the desert. The delicate yet creepy modularity of the 2017 wall “prototypes”—the ones that the previous presidential administration plonked down in the California desert, re-created here by Pratt Institute’s Ane Gonzalez Lara—as well as the gray gallery walls, perforated to resemble the barrier structures actually in place on the U.S.-Mexico border, all help produce an environment with exactly the right air of tension, confusion, and melancholy. About the only thing missing (though it does seem a glaring omission) is one of the old surplus Vietnam-era helicopter landing mats that were the default fencing material in the San Diego sector from the 1990s until quite recently. Their battered surfaces, and the singular histories they represented, would have made a perfect complement to the show’s layered ambience.

It would seem only fair at this point to disclose that I wrote a book on a related topic a couple of years ago, an architectural history of border walls generally and of the wall in particular—the “build the wall” wall, the one that was supposed to be made of solar panels or possibly of unscalably smooth supermetal, was supposed to run the whole length of the border and was definitively, definitely not going to be a “fence,” one GOP also-ran once suggested. In this connection, The Wall/El Muro was something of a trip down a very bumpy memory lane, full of familiar scenes and faces; even the livery of the wall placards was exactly the same red, white, and black as my book’s cover, though I’m quite confident this was pure coincidence. Written and researched at the same time that said presidential administration was trying (and trying, and trying) to remake the border, the book was really nothing more than a snapshot, a blurred image of something seen at too-close range and moving too fast. So what, with the perspective of at least a little time, does Leavitt now see?

The answer, worrismonly: still too much and still nothing good. The statistics, aerial photography, and documentary evidence on display in The Wall/El Muro suggest that the region and the topic remain as rife as ever with endemic problems, along with loads of misbegotten ideas—detaining children, for starters—to address them. If the NBM show is right, we can be all but certain that the border and its barriers will keep on providing political fodder for some of the worst tendencies in American political life. We’re no further out of the woods than we were a year ago, and we’re definitely not over the wall.

Willi Dorner is an artist and choreographer. Lisa Rastl is a photographer. They are married and live in Vienna, Austria. Since 2006, they have been engaged in a project called Bodies in Urban Spaces, site-specific performances for groups of dancers that lead audiences on meandering processes through the streets of various cities. Along these trails, the dancers, who wear brightly colored sweat suits, interact with features in the built environment. They use porticoes, awnings, balconies, thresholds, windows, railings, and light posts in ways that their shapes might suggest to the body, but for which these implements were certainly not intended. The performances have some kinship to parkour, but rather than indulging in hair-raising feats of derring-do, they assume an inquisitive and critical stance: The dancers wedge themselves in gaps, hang themselves from ledges, drape themselves across steps, plaster themselves to walls, and assume other interrogatory postures that appear both uncomfortable and humorous.

Humorous, that is, to some. Others are quite offended. As Dorner explained to AN, “We are sometimes approached by people who are quite upset by what we are doing, and they get aggressive with us.” Yet others take the opportunity to grab a selfie with the odd dance troupe, rightly recognizing an opportunity to hook in Instagram likes and followers. The municipalities themselves—Bodies in Urban Spaces has run in 110 cities so far—have also taken notice and responded with varying degrees of regulation. In the beginning, the performances were not announced. Timed with festivals, they’d merely pick up what following they could attract. Now, permissions must be obtained to avoid disciplinary actions. In the U.K., sheets must be handed out to audience members with instructions on how to move and behave. This authoritative control of what was originally a spontaneous happening is a bummer. It also proves the subversiveness of the performance and, hopefully, encourages us to think in new ways about freedom and public space.

Aaron Seward

Top: Bodies in Urban Spaces, performed in Salzburg, Austria, in 2013

Bottom: Bodies in Urban Spaces, performed in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2017
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