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### Products: Handles, Knobs, Levers, and Access Control Systems

- Products: Handles, Knobs, Levers, and Access Control Systems
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### More Online

- [txamagazine.org](http://txamagazine.org)
- Meet 2020 TxA President Connie Rivera, AIA, and President-Elect Audrey Maxwell, AIA. Bid farewell to Senior Advocate David Lancaster, Hon. AIA. Learn about TxA’s new John Chase Award for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
The new Denton County Southwest Courthouse is located on 5 acres in a new development along Canyon Falls Drive in Flower Mound, TX. The 32,000-square-foot building will accommodate the county clerk, tax office, constable, justice of the peace, Department of Community Supervision and Corrections, Denton County Juvenile Probation, Department of Public Safety, Health Services, Commissioner’s Suite, a community room, and support spaces. The facility’s exterior material palette consists of heavy timber elements with natural stone veneer and a standing seam metal roof to complement the Canyon Falls Development. Halford Busby served as the cost estimator on the project, which was designed to attain LEED gold certification. Learn more about Halford Busby’s services on projects like this at http://bit.ly/2ORjXZb.
The Land of Nod
by Aaron Seward

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. – Genesis 4:14

It's hard, these days — really, really hard, y'all! — to be a white, male architect.

Before blowing cookies and milk out your nose hyena laughing at that joke, it's not a joke. Some white, male architects actually feel that way. Their professional association, after all, has been working overtime lately to let them know they have a diversity problem. The AIA's “Diversity in the Profession of Architecture” report, released in 2015, found that, while moderate improvements had been made since the 2004 passing of Resolution 04-02, “To Strengthen the Demographic Diversity of the Design Profession,” there is still a long way to go before achieving even a semblance of parity, with only 21.7 percent of AIA members being women and merely 1.89 percent African American.

And then they show up somewhere like TXA's 2019 Annual Conference and have to listen to keynote speakers, some of whom are women and people of color, talk about things like social impact design. Liz Ogbu, for example, presented the manual she worked on, "Dick & Rick: A Visual Primer for Social Impact Design." With the simplicity and directness of a children's book, it contrasts the stories of two designers, Dick and Rick (both white dudes, incidentally), who are working pro-bono on parks for underserved neighborhoods. Dick sees the project as an opportunity to burnish the image of his practice and, after a hasty community engagement process, delivers a nice but ultimately underutilized park. Rick, on the other hand, with humility and honest curiosity, involves himself in a lengthy back and forth with the neighborhood. His empathy and openness pay off, as the project he delivers is not only well used and loved, but the process of designing it collaboratively arms local stakeholders with valuable skills for the further improvement of their community. Ogbu's message to architects: “Don't be a Dick.”

Hardest of all, though, for the white, male architect, might be the experience of visiting a major event like the Chicago Architecture Biennial (p. 28) only to be faced with one exhibition after another detailing the histories of violence, dispossession, and cultural genocide that are the legacies of Western colonization. In the face of this and other such deconstructions and exposés, many yearn for a time when architecture and its related cultural events were just about architecture — the methodologies of design, technologies, regulations, and business models that go into making buildings — instead of the social and environmental ramifications of architecture. But when has architecture ever been so pure as to be separate from the environment and society?

The answer seems to be never. The shapes of the built environment have profound effects on the people who build and live within them. In “Tristes Tropiques,” Claude Lévi-Strauss documents just how deep this influence can go in his study of the Bororo:

The circular arrangement of the huts around the men's house is so important a factor in their social and religious life that the Salesian missionaries in the Rio des Garças region were quick to realize that the surest way to convert the Bororo was to make them abandon their village in favor of one with the houses set out in parallel rows. Once they had been deprived of their bearings and were without the plan which acted as a confirmation of their native lore, the Indians soon lost any feeling for tradition; it was as if their social and religious systems ... were too complex to exist without the pattern which was embodied in the plan of the village and of which their awareness was constantly being refreshed by their everyday activities.

The good news is that if the built environment can be used so effectively as a tool of conversion, it can be used to convert a bad situation into a good one. After all, that's what the Salesian missionaries thought they were doing for the Bororo.

The better reaction to being shown how you/your ancestors got it wrong is not self-pity, it's gratitude. Now is actually the best time to be a white, male architect. Today, we're armed with more information and perspective on the mistakes of our forebears, and thus can do a better job than they did in shaping an equitable, sustainable, delightful future. Out here where we all live, somewhere east of Eden, a little constructive criticism can go a long way.
Contributors


Anjulie Rao is a Chicago-based journalist and editor of Chicago Architect magazine. As a writer, she focuses on livable built environments, equitable design, architecture criticism, and radical urbanism. She enjoys intersections between art, infrastructure, and political narratives. Read her conversation with T4 Editor Aaron Seward about the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial (p. 28).

Michael Friebele, Assoc. AIA, is a project designer with Perkins and Will and an adjunct faculty member with the MADI program at SMU in Dallas. He also serves on the TXA Publications Committee and is a frequent contributor to T4. In this issue, he discusses an industrial condominium in Dallas outfitted by Olson Kundig (p. 72).

Stephen Mueller is an architect, researcher, and author, and founding partner of AGENCY, an interdisciplinary design practice engaging contemporary culture through architecture, urbanism, and advocacy. Mueller also serves as a research assistant professor at the Texas Tech University College of Architecture in El Paso. See page 34 for his review of the 2019 ACADIA Conference, held at The University of Texas at Austin in October.

Letters

The following was emailed to the editor in response to "Perpetual Frontier," published in the November/December 2019 issue.

Aaron, the interesting thing about expanding frontiers is what they leave in their wake: A city that is ultimately more inclusive than exclusive... it's a simple function of area vs. circumference. And while the frontier expands ruthlessly, laying claim with the finest tastemaker materials and Instagrammable spaces, it is only the ragged edge once before it's just another collection of TCAD ID numbers.

Luckily, hopefully, architects recognize that, and our work's true capacity to inspire. Not in an unusual way, but as part of our ordinary daily life. Our work has meaning in that it becomes the source material for someone's Jazz. So take some comfort in the area under the curve and the watering hole it may foster. The future forgotten-pockets are an oasis of opportunity, of an ethic we think may no longer exist. It will always inspire creativity, and the context will be rich enough to support it — both culturally and commercially. It is not a mutually exclusive scenario. Perhaps even because of the frontier, places like Austin will evolve into a real city of diversity, inclusivity, and equity.

To be clear, I think that the risky part of it is our city needs to find a way to proactively engage, educate and support the existing fabric of communities, including their businesses. It may require more rigorous and evolved development requirements, it may be more aggressive spending and program accountability for in-lieu fees. It may be any number of things, but it can't be business as usual. The either-or is suffocating.

Matthew Z. Leach, AIA
Page, Austin

Correction

On p. 79 of the November/December 2019 issue, the name of collaborating architect Sophia Razzaque, AIA, was misspelled.

A cat peering through a gun port in the walls of the recently restored Trejoño-Uribe Rancho in San Ignacio.
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Houston Endowment Selects Team Including Kevin Daly and PRODUCTORA for Design of New HQ

A Downtown Houston site adjoining Spotts Park that once held an award-winning YWCA by Taft Architects will soon hold another architectural gem: a new headquarters for the Houston Endowment designed by Kevin Daly Architects (KDA) with PRODUCTORA, Tom Leader Studio (TLS) Landscape Architecture, and Transsolar. The Houston Endowment is a philanthropic organization established in 1937 that has contributed significantly to the growth and development of Houston through generous grantmaking activities in the areas of education, the arts, and health and human services. The foundation held an international design competition for its new headquarters and announced the winning team on November 7, 2019.

Following a model more familiar in Europe than in the U.S., the Houston Endowment partnered with UK-based design competition organizers Malcolm Reading Consultants to launch a broad call for interest in June 2019. Following a fairly standard RFQ model, the criteria required no design proposal, but rather a description of the proposed team's composition, experience, and planned “initial approach.” The competition explicitly encouraged cross-disciplinary teams and partnerships between established and emerging firms; this led to a flurry of phone calls locally in Houston, leaving some small firms discouraged when potential partners were already “taken,” and prompting others to join multiple teams to increase their chances.

One hundred twenty-one teams responded to the call, and applications were evaluated by a shortlisting panel composed of accomplished architects and professionals in related fields. All teams received feedback on their scoring. The four highest-rated teams were invited to the second phase, in which they were given 10 weeks and an honorarium to provide a design concept for evaluation. In addition to the KDA-led winning team, the shortlist included Deborah Berke Partners with DAVID RUBIN Land Collective and Atelier Ten; Olson Kundig with Surfacedesign; and SCHAUM/SHIEH with HKS and Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture. The shortlisted teams were invited to Houston to participate in a day of immersion with the stakeholders, with presentation of initial concepts over video conferencing due two weeks later.

The KDA and PRODUCTORA partnership resulted from the relationship of principals Kevin Daly and Wonne Ickx, who taught studios together at UCLA. The two had long searched for an opportunity to work together; ironically, the perfect moment did not present itself until after Ickx, a native of Belgium, moved back to Mexico City, where PRODUCTORA is based. Both offices work heavily in model, and after the visit to Houston, they began generating a variety of schemes. During the video conference presentation, says Ickx, all options were literally on the table, giving Houston Endowment a chance to “look into the kitchen” to both observe the mess and join in the design process. That call resulted in consensus on the general direction of the design, nothing formal or rigid, but rather just what Ickx called the “scaffolding” for the design proposal.

Daly is no stranger to Houston. He studied at Rice University in the ’90s while Lars Lerup was dean and vividly remembers visiting the ingloriously removed Taft YMCA as one of his first architectural experiences in the city. Lerup’s lectures focused on isolated jewels within Houston’s unique green canopy, but visiting the area again in 2019, Daly found the connecting fabric of these sites strengthened, the public realm reclaimed, and the outpost city reasserted as metropolis.

His was not a singular experience: TLS, Transsolar, and PRODUCTORA also found strength in the language and image of a canopy, both as a boundary device and mediator between interior and exterior, creating an intermediate space of comfort and gathering. An early image of Spotts Park with a natural canopy provided recurring inspiration, and the primary design gesture focuses on the re-creation of this canopy, albeit a technological version. Even still, the authors emphasize that the canopy is not
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conceived as an immutable element: They stress it is notational for the space underneath and that they are happy to let it evolve as the project crystalizes. Across the grain of the building, the formal entry moves through to the “back porch,” which spills into a series of terraces, the critical gestures, according to Ickx.

Despite formal divergences in their built work, Ickx and Daly in their studios both emphasize simplicity as a means of addressing complicated issues within architecture. However, their offices are driven by differing concerns, and traces of both are evident in the winning proposal: KDA provides the programmatic clarity and structure, and PRODUCTORA’s voice is evident in the geometric legibility. The architects have stated that working together from these perspectives allowed them to reconcile the proposal and that, as Marlon Blackwell, FAIA, once said to Daly, if it’s identifiable as work from either office, they would have failed as collaborators.

The Houston Endowment’s stated building goals parallel their organizational ones: being accessible to the community; providing connectivity to the context; and proposing “innovation with modesty.” In keeping with those aims, the new headquarters provides one edge to the public park, with amenities around the perimeter. Also, TLS’s landscape design utilized the topography in a nuanced way; stepped paths complement slow ramps, and various nodes provide subtle differences within the park, inviting a range of occupants. This proposal is designed as a community landmark, not a monument.

Construction will kick off this January, with completion scheduled for May 2022. While a multitude of unanswered questions remain, this is intentional and by design: Room has been left open for dialogue. The design team did not pretend to solve every maintenance or resiliency issue in the initial proposal, and the Houston Endowment is trusting that the team will address any concerns as the design progresses. If the communal hypothesis proves true, this experiment may very well open the eyes of local officials and other organizations as a model to be followed.

Jesse Hager, AIA, is principal of CONTENT Architecture and an adjunct professor at the University of Houston.
Austin Code Kerfuffle Continues Contentiously

“Make Austin’s Zoning Weirder” was one of the more unusual pleas during recent Planning Commission public hearings focused on the city’s land development code reform. The citizen at the podium, a marketing entrepreneur named Austin Talbert (who presented with his six-month-old son in his arms), used his allotted three minutes to illustrate several housing scenarios on single-family lots. All were illegal under the city’s current zoning laws. His premise was that the three- and four-unit configurations, more flexible and affordable housing options for everyone from seniors and teachers to musicians and artists. In doing so, he claimed, they could help preserve the diversity and creativity that are central to the city’s idea of itself.

Talbert’s appropriation of the famous “Keep Austin Weird” mantra was a refreshing frame of the issues at hand. Visual aids and compelling storytelling have been notably lacking in the fast-paced code revision process, where two entrenched camps dominate the debate. On one hand are the density advocates, armed with their unit yield targets, data mapping tools, and transit corridor definitions. On the other are the neighborhood preservationists, both wealthy and working class, concerned with property tax increases, ill-scaled changes to neighborhood fabric, and increased congestion.

Vociferous disagreements can disguise the fact that there is common ground. General consensus exists that Austin’s 1984 land development code is a contributing factor to the malaise of escalating home prices and traffic gridlock. From a housing point of view, the code is effective at producing large single-family homes and multi-story apartment complexes, but not much in between. It is cumbersome to navigate, thanks to a maze of overlays, neighborhood plans, and ordinances that have been superimposed over three decades. And it has failed to produce development patterns that can support a robust public transit system, without which the city is falling short of its quality of life, equity, and climate goals.

The new draft code, released on October 4, 2019, is the latest attempt to respond to these concerns. It was authored mostly by city staff, following a contentious consultant-led effort called CodeNext. That process was eventually scrapped before council elections last year, five years after its launch. The current council, which has a pro-density majority and a clearer mandate than their predecessors, is eager to push through the reforms before another election year gets underway.

Assuming the revised code passes in one form or another, one of the most significant changes for the architecture community will be increased opportunities for designing “missing middle” typologies — housing forms that, quite frankly, Austin architects have not had much practice with. “Missing middle” is a term coined in the last decade to describe multi-unit “house-scale” buildings such as triplexes, fourplexes, bungalow courts, and townhomes. These housing types were common in pre-war cities but were widely eliminated in zoning codes across the U.S. as auto-centric development took hold. Cities across the country are now championing them as desirable ways to achieve walkable infill development that is sensitive to existing neighborhood character.

In Austin, single-family lots, which dominate the city’s land use map, will be rezoned to RR, LA, R1, R2, R3, R4, or RM1, depending on their proximity to transit corridors. These new zoning categories would allow, at a minimum, more flexibility in how two units can be developed on a lot (R2 zones). At the upper limit, six units will be permitted (RM1), with an affordability bonus allowing up to 10 if income-restricted units are provided. Other provisions will shape future development too. On-site parking minimums will be loosened considerably. A “Preservation Incentive” awards an additional unit of entitlement in return for retaining a structure more than 30 years old.

It’s estimated the changes to residential house-scale and transition zones will add approximately 110,000 of the 400,000 units of additional housing capacity that city council set as the key benchmark of the new code (the rest will be realized in higher-density residential multi-unit and mixed-use zones). These “missing middle” homes are seen not only as a tool to expand housing supply, but also housing choice. In the more intensive R4 and RM1 “transition” zones (which make up 15 percent of single-family lots), the idea is that more units on a lot will result in smaller residences with lower costs per unit relative to current trends of one-to-one replacement of single-family homes. Critics worry, though, that it will accelerate displacement because of rising land values related to increased entitlements (current floor-area ratio [FAR] limits will be doubled in RM1 zones, for example). This is a major reason that the council directed staff to map transition zones less intensely where gentrification dynamics are most acute.

There are also modifications that would influence current development patterns on the 85 percent of single-family lots that would still only be able to develop two units by right (R2
Minimum lot sizes have been incrementally reduced, from 5,750 sf to 5,000 sf. ADUs, capped at 1,100 sf, would be easier to build due to more flexible requirements and would require no parking. Duplexes, previously only allowed on lots larger than 7,000 sf, could be developed on all lots, and an onerous “common wall” requirement would be relaxed. And the Preservation Incentive would allow three units to be developed instead of two.

These R2 zoning changes would almost certainly increase supply over the current code. Whether they would increase housing choice, in the form of more affordable options, is murkier.

In an effort to incentivize more than one house per lot, duplexes would be granted a 50 percent increase in FAR entitlements over existing zoning (from 0.4 to 0.6 of lot size), and FAR limits would be lifted altogether where the Preservation Incentive is used. These significant increases in developable floor area seem destined to further exacerbate Austin’s “large house” problem (approximately two-thirds of new homes built in Austin's single-family neighborhoods are over 2,000 sf), a perplexing divergence from the council’s direction to make “housing affordability ... the primary policy driver of code” and incentivize the “development of smaller houses on smaller lots.”

Of course, all of these new provisions may yet be recalibrated and revised after the public consultation period. One thing is clear: There is an urgent need for architects in Austin to engage constructively to make sure a sorely needed new code is the best it can be. AIA Austin’s Land Development Code Advocacy Task Force has made an important start here, with scenario testing and a list of proposed amendments for the council’s consideration. Many architects are active in their local neighborhood associations, which can submit alternative zoning maps that propose more context-sensitive ways to realize council directives.

There’s more to be done. The critical difference high-quality design will make to the success of new infill development has gone largely unnoted in hearings and discussion. To this end, architects have an opportunity to capture the imagination of the public — including planning staff, politicians, and developers — making well-designed missing middle housing become a valuable part of Austin’s urban fabric. This could start with highlighting the numerous examples in Austin that were built prior to the current code, such as the cherished 1930s Calcasieu cottage courts. Some excellent recent examples exist in the Mueller PUD development too. Then there are best practices (as well as cautionary tales) to be gleaned from other cities’ experience, within the U.S. and abroad. Discourse needs to be nurtured through public debate and cohort groups, and recognition bestowed on those doing it right. Brent Toderian, a respected urbanist (and former chief planner of Vancouver B.C.), articulates it this way: “A lot of cities have not set up the culture, the structure, the capacity, the training, or the tools to deliver quality. So when NIMBYs express a fear of change over density, they’re often right. The conversation needs to be around quality city-making, so I talk about QIMBY ... quality in my backyard.”

Architects understand better than most how good growth and good design go hand in hand. Talbert’s campaign offers a template for communicating this message: appealing visual content; people-oriented; and rooted in Austin-specific identity and culture. Through exhibitions, online resources, publications, and civic dialogue, architects can help envision a future with a housing stock weirder than it is right now and thus more welcoming for people of all types, incomes, races, and ages who want to keep or make Austin home.

Lucy Begg, AIA, is co-director of Thoughtbarn in Austin.
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Collaborating Architects in Houston and Kingston Win Jamaican Parliament Design Competition

In March, Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness announced Kingston-based firm Design Collaborative as winner of the Government of Jamaica Houses of Parliament Design Competition. The proposal received first place from the jury and the people of Jamaica, who were invited to participate in the People's Choice Award. Launched in May of 2018, the competition invited teams, led by a registered member of the Jamaican Institute of Architects, to submit proposals for a new democratic center in the nation's capital. A total of 37 proposals were submitted, of which five were shortlisted. The shortlist was competitive, with icons such as David Adjaye and David Hutton appearing among the participants. Nevertheless, a team of four independent Jamaican architects, three of whom live in Texas, managed to capture the crown.

Daimian Hines, AIA, Gregory Lake, AIA, and Christopher Bent, Int. Assoc. AIA, occupy various roles in the Houston architecture scene. Previously only loosely connected by the profession, the group joined forces to produce the winning scheme for the international design competition. The competition, sponsored by famed Jamaican-born architect Gordon Gill, required that at least 50 percent of each team be of Jamaican heritage. This prompted a meeting among Hines, Lake, and Bent, who connected the group to long-established Jamaican architect Evan Williams. After assessing their team's capabilities in design, communications, and project management, they decided it was time to “lock the door for a few months and deliver a design.” As Hines says: “This was more than just a project. This was an opportunity to work on the most significant building in the history of the country where we were born.”

The competition called for a design, sited in Kingston's National Heroes Park, that both represented the rich history of Jamaica and propelled the nation into the future. Designers were tasked with creating a public, democratic center and greenspace that would vitalize local urbanism and establish a welcoming sense of community. The complex program called for the accommodation of contrasting spaces — both private governmental functions and open, public areas that encourage discourse and interaction. The jury, made up of leaders from various Caribbean architectural societies, schools, and professional institutions, found those qualities in the proposal by Design Collaborative.

Titled “Out of Many, One People” — the motto emblazoned across the Jamaican coat of arms — the proposal is representative of the history of governance and intersecting cultures that have generated Jamaica's modern national identity. Alongside the African majority, Jewish, Syrian, Lebanese, Indian, Chinese, German, English, Scottish, and Irish populations have also put down roots on this Caribbean island. Reminiscent of traditional Jamaican colonial architecture, the design's rectangular crossing columns metaphorize Jamaica's historic cultural melding while simultaneously mirroring the nation's flag, first flown in 1962 when Jamaica established political independence from Britain. The columns also represent the inter-connectedness of citizens and elected representatives working together to advance the nation. The building's circular plan is equally significant in symbolism and distinction. This form not only represents unity, but also eliminates any hierarchy of front, back, and side. The 52-acre oval site allows access from all directions, prompting the team to design a building that welcomes visitors from any angle. The jury appreciated the complex narrative embedded in the design, noting that “the bold and circular form asserts the symbolic value of the parliament and successfully accommodates the functional requirements.” With the help of OJB Landscape Architecture, the team integrated this visual statement into the existing park by submerging service areas and parking to create public greenspaces, such as the “People’s Plaza,” a sculpture garden, and an outdoor amphitheater. While the original competition only called for the development of a singular building, the Government of Jamaica broadened the scope of construction to include the proposal's complete park redesign.

The project is set to break ground next fall, and completion is anticipated in 2023, just one year after the 60th anniversary of Jamaican independence.

Sophie Aliece Hollis is an architecture and journalism student at UT Austin and 7A’s editorial intern.
Waterloo Greenway Stages Sixth Annual Creek Show

Waterloo Greenway (formerly Waller Creek Conservancy) welcomed a record-setting 60,000 guests to its 6th Annual Creek Show. This temporary, interactive exhibition featuring site-specific light installations spanned the banks of Waller Creek between 9th and 12th streets in downtown Austin on November 7-17. Six local teams of designers and fabricators united to provide an experience rich with food, live music, and fun for all ages. The event has evolved from its humble beginnings: What started as a single-evening affair in 2014 has become one of the can't-miss events of the fall season.

“Light House,” a collaboration between Sunny Schneberger and Norma Yancey, AIA, anchored the southern edge of the show. Curtains of illuminated chords dangled from a gabled frame. As visitors moved through the installation, they were forced to navigate these “boundaries” of light, which proved to be more permeable than they seemed from a distance. Conceived as a metaphor for life’s obstacles, the installation was intentionally malleable, suggesting that elements in our own lives that may seem impassable are often navigable when confronted directly.

Design Workshop’s “Downstream Upcycle” employed more than 17,000 hotel shampoo bottles that were filled with UV-reactive dye and then mounted onto an array of recycled metal barrels. Bathed in black light, the aggregation was not only a dazzling backdrop for countless selfies, but also a stark visual reminder of the waste created each day by hotels benefiting from Austin’s booming tourism industry.

“Light House” by Sunny Schneberger and Norma Yancey, AIA.

Striking for both its scale and simplicity, “Aurora,” by 1909B, was a sprawling matrix of vertical white LED light tubes that rested directly on the creek bed. The fixtures responded to adjacent sounds in unpredictable ways, making use of the installation’s broad footprint to create a hypnotizing, albeit occasionally abrasive, environment at the center of the show.

Facing top The new Jamaican Houses of Parliament welcomes both government officials and citizens to participate in its active green space.
Facing bottom Sited at the center of a 52-acre park, the circular structure’s unique crossing colonnade is visible from any direction.
Left “Downstream Upcycle” by Design Workshop.
Below “Light House” by Sunny Schneberger and Norma Yancey, AIA.
As visitors moved north, the creek bed narrowed to accommodate an overpass at 11th Street. Frances Peterson and Kevin Sullivan worked within the confines of the tunnel infrastructure to create “m e a n d e r,” a field of dangling white “tendrils” illuminated by black light. Dense clusters of strands yielded to a clearing at the tunnel’s midpoint that became a natural moment for gathering. Envisioned as a metaphorical “fissure in a supernatural aquifer,” the installation aimed to remind visitors of the “invisible forces responsible for the natural features that all Austinites cherish.”

BOKA Powell’s “String Theory,” which inhabited the next overpass, at 12th Street, held back from the pedestrian path to hover over its own reflection in the creek water below. Eight harp-like LED armatures were mounted according to the cadence of the structural beams supporting the road above, twisting from top to bottom in varying degrees. The formal gesture was subtle, but visually compelling. “String Theory” was meant to symbolize life’s twists and turns and dark and light moments. The clean detailing and adept siting made it one of the show’s most visually striking installations.

Arguably the most technically sophisticated exhibit, Nelsen Partners’ “The Ghost Boat” imparted its own lore to Creek Show’s ever-evolving fable. Instead of invoking a metaphor,
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the architects (and fabrication partner Mother Built) designed a kinetic installation consisting of a series of fluorescent white oars reconstructing the motion of rowing. Cloaked in mystique and refreshingly literal, “Ghost Boat” romanticized the eerie, undefined fate of an Austinite lost roaming the beauty of the creek in a bygone era. Contributing to the mystical aura was a custom soundscape provided by local musicians Slow-Burst and guesthouse.

As Waterloo Greenway celebrates Creek Show’s considerable momentum after six successful seasons, it’s worth pausing to consider the potential of the next decade. Austin’s local design community has been rightfully prioritized during these foundational years, but as Creek Show continues to grow in scale and audience, perhaps the time is upon us to open the call for entries to a broader swath of designers.

Christopher Ferguson, AIA, is an architect at Clickspring Design and co-founder of DO.GROUP.
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Calendar

JANUARY

Sunday 5
EXHIBITION CLOSING
Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures
Nasher Sculpture Center
2001 Flora St.
Dallas
nashersculpturecenter.org

Sunday 12
EXHIBITION OPENING
Jose Dávila: Directional Energies
Dallas Contemporary
161 Glass St.
Dallas
dallascontemporary.org

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Contemporary Practice
Houston Center for Photography
1441 W. Alabama St.
Houston
hcponline.org

Wednesday 15
EVENT
Committee Fair
AD EX
325 N. Saint Paul St.
Dallas
aiadallas.org

Sunday 26
EXHIBITION CLOSING
Fortlandia
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Ave.
Austin
wildflower.org

Wednesday 29
LECTURE
DAF Lecture Series: Kevin Alter
Horchow Auditorium, DMA
1717 N. Harwood St.
Dallas
dallasarchitectureforum.org

Saturday 15
TOUR
AIA Houston’s 2020 Interior Architecture Tour
Sawyer Yards
Houston
aiahouston.org

Monday 10
EVENT
Decolonizing the Spatial History of the Americas Conoío
Goldsmith Hall
310 Inner Campus Dr.
Austin
soa.utexas.edu

Tuesday 11
LECTURE
DAF Lecture Series: Mary Margaret Jones
Horchow Auditorium, DMA
1717 N. Harwood St.
Dallas
dallasarchitectureforum.org

Friday 7
EVENT
Moving Towards Gender Equity in Architecture
Goldsmith Hall
310 Inner Campus Dr.
Austin
soa.utexas.edu

FEBRUARY

Friday 21
EXHIBITION OPENING
Think of Them as Spaces: Brice Marden’s Drawings
Menil Drawing Institute
1412 W. Main St.
Houston
menil.org

Sunday 23
EXHIBITION CLOSING
Paris: Notre Dame and Beyond
McNay Art Museum
6000 N. New Braunfels Ave.
San Antonio
mcnayart.org

Wednesday 25
LECTURE
DAF Lecture Series: Frida Escobedo
Horchow Auditorium, DMA
1717 N. Harwood St.
Dallas
dallasarchitectureforum.org

Thursday 27
EVENTS
The Climate of Urban Design Symposium
Goldsmith Hall
310 Inner Campus Dr.
Austin
soa.utexas.edu

Health Symposium
Exhibition & Social Third Coast
6550 Bertner Ave.
Houston
aiahouston.org

Saturday 15
TOUR
AIA Houston’s 2020 Interior Architecture Tour
Sawyer Yards
Houston
aiahouston.org

Sunday 16
EXHIBITION CLOSING
Will Boone: The Highway Hex Contemporary Arts Museum Houston
5216 Montrose Blvd.
Houston
camh.org

FOCUS: Hrair Sarkissian
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
January 24 through March 15
Hrair Sarkissian’s debut solo exhibition in the U.S. features three major works that explore how violence can be made invisible, histories of erasure and restitution, and the sediments of conflict. Sarkissian was born in Damascus and currently lives in London and The Hague. “FOCUS: Hrair Sarkissian” is guest curated by Omar Kholeif, director of collections and senior curator of the Sharjah Art Foundation.

Radical: Italian Design 1965–1985, The Dennis Freedman Collection
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
February 14 through April 26
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, examines Italy’s postwar explosion of disruptive design in the exhibition “Radical: Italian Design 1965–1985, The Dennis Freedman Collection.” Nearly 50 years after MoMA’s defining 1972 survey, “Italy: The New Domestic Landscape,” this is the first major U.S. museum exhibition to assess the now-iconic movement from a historical perspective. The exhibition presents nearly 70 pieces of furniture, lighting design, architectural models, paintings, and objects.
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Western Canon

The Lisbon Architecture Triennial
Lisbon, Portugal

by Ibai Rigby

The art and architecture biennial is an invention of the pre-Internet era. Borrowing the format of the 19th-century Expositions Universelles, its goal was to showcase a selection of the best works produced by architects and artists during the years preceding the exhibition at a regional, national, or international level. If the Modern Olympic Games, begun in Athens in 1896, hoped to bring the newly established nation-states into competition through sport instead of warfare, the Prima Mostra Internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia of 1895 (now known as the Venice Biennale and the grandfather of every art and architecture biennial organized ever since), aimed to celebrate competition among nations in the arena of artistic ideas and concepts.

Much has happened since then. Information and communication technologies have rendered obsolete the need for a physical event to present the latest achievements in the realms of art and architecture. However, the competition imperatives among cities to attract investment and talent has made art, architecture, and design mega-events part of the branding processes of municipal governments. Besides, architecture festivals can be employed to re-activate marginalized neighborhoods or disused monumental buildings, serving as a catalyst for gentrification and land revaluation processes cherished by city authorities and real estate developers alike.

In the meantime, the architect's profession has evolved. Traditionally, architects' main activity consisted of producing buildings, while hoping these would eventually be part of a significant exhibition through drawings, images, and models. Lately, economic priorities are jostling those architects engaged in the profession as a cultural discipline — and not merely as service providers — to find outlets for their expression outside the built environment. Architecture mega-events have transitioned from being mediums to display existing architectural objects to becoming architectural objects themselves. Drawings, models, and photography have increasingly been abandoned in favor of temporary large-scale architectural installations, like those of the Serpentine Pavilion in London or the Young Architects Program at MoMA PS1.

On the other hand, throughout history, buildings have frequently played a role as a means of communication, from the pyramids of Egypt to the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Built work was for a long time the only publicity allowed to architects in most European countries, until liberalizing policies changed the rules in the 1990s. Again, economic priorities — but this time those of the design agencies — have obliged architecture to find different ways to express itself, outside its disciplinary boundaries. It is in this context that the explosion of architecture festivals, exhibitions, museums, publications, and digital platforms is to be understood.

The Lisbon Architecture Triennial (Trienal de Lisboa) is probably one of the recurring architectural celebrations that better represents the format evolution. Founded in 2007 by the professional association of Portuguese architects (the Ordem dos Arquitectos), its first edition, entitled "Urban Voids" (Vazios Urbanos), addressed the local demands of Portuguese cities. Its second edition, "Let's Talk About Houses" (Falemos de Casas), curated by Delfim Sardo, revolved around the topic of the vernacular house in Portugal and its former colonies (Brazil, Uganda, Mozambique), as well as in countries like Switzerland that had an important presence of Portuguese immigrants. Organized at the peak of the economic crisis, there's little doubt about the diplomatic vocation of this edition, which aimed to reestablish commercial links with countries enjoying better growth perspectives than those of the old metropolis.

The 2013 edition attempted to distinguish itself from the Venice Biennale, which so far has been curated only by senior architecture critics or star architects. The curator was chosen after an international competition, with the idea of recruiting emerging talent and bringing forward groundbreaking ideas. Young British curator Beatrice Galilee lived up to the Triennial's expectations, exploding the limits of what is to be understood as architecture. Celebrating
**Reviews**

**Previous Page** Different kinds of media that allow for the circulation of architectural thought are presented in a nonlinear genealogy as a wunderkammer in Maria-bruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli’s exhibition, “Inner Space.”

**Right** The exhibition “Economy of Means,” curated by architect Éric Lapierre, explores how the study of typologies has allowed architects to find meaning in ordinary buildings and learn from the organic construction of the city.

**Below** In “Inner Space,” Fabrizi and Lucarelli argue that digital territories create a new framework where reality and fiction merge and are informed by the tradition of the architectural imagination.

“speeches, conversations, plays, stories, campaigns, competitions, dinners, debates, parliaments, publications, interfaces, atmospheres, experiments, inventions, and civic actions” in several corners around the city, the Triennial attracted the attention of the international media, though not without generating some resentment from a local architecture scene that felt it had been left behind.

As a reaction, the edition by Portuguese curators André Tavares and Diogo Seixas Lopes three years later was to be understood as a rappel à l’ordre, bringing the building aspect of architecture back to the center of the scene. From a detailed display of the construction process of Rem Koolhaas’ Casa da Musica to a 1:1 model of a collage merging fragments of houses by Johnston Marklee, Nuno Brandão Costa, and Office KGDVS, the 2016 edition, “The Form of Form,” anticipated many of the topics that would later be developed at the 2017 Chicago Biennal, “Make New History” – mainly the call to return architecture to its disciplinary autonomy.

Building upon the previous edition, the 2019 Triennial, “The Poetics of Reason,” is curated by a team of architects, all professors at the Marne-la-Vallée School of Architecture near Disneyland in the eastern outskirts of Paris. The Doric column, both a pole bearing loads as well as a sculpture, is employed as a metaphor for architecture in addition to being the pervasive logo for this triennial edition. It is in this integration of the rational and the poetic that the specificities of architecture are supposed to lie.

The opening press conference, presented in broken, French-accented English (the pride with which the French deprecate the language of the perfidious Albion is well known), left no doubts about the curators’ position: Architecture is historically a shared way of knowledge — knowledge that is legible and transmittable by all, including non-architects. Architecture should not be breathtaking; contrarily, it should provide the image of stability that brings your breath back. Architecture is, per sé, conservative: It can only evolve in continuity with its own past.

The Triennial is distributed among five exhibitions around the burgeoning city of Lisbon, each concentrating on a singular aspect of architectural history. “Economy of Means,” by emerging architect Éric Lapierre, reflects on the fundamental necessity for shelter as the shared basis on which architecture builds itself. Employing a series of metaphors, such as “Architecture is to building what gastronomy is to cooking,” or “Small buildings are like poems,” the French architect attacks those who rely too optimistically on technological advancements. In his words, “We cannot find solutions to contemporary challenges, such as climate change, by using those same technologies that created those challenges,” an argument he uses mostly against the superficial formal experimentation enabled by digital technologies. (He seems to forget that reinforced concrete — one of his favorite building materials, which can be seen in many of the buildings designed by his office — is precisely one of the modern technologies that plays an essential role in the production of global CO2 emissions.) The exhibition is a collection of drawings familiar to those accustomed to the Western canon of architectural history, reaching the 21st century through photographer Eric Tabuchi’s work on the French suburban landscapes and a selection of architectural models of buildings produced by designers operating mostly from France, Switzerland, and Belgium. Architecture here speaks French.

“Taking the Country’s Side,” by Sébastien Marot, landscape professor and philosopher, makes a different statement. He presents the following paradox: Planetary urbanization is both inevitable and impossible. Leaving architecture aside for a moment, the exhibition explores what he claims to be a “sister” discipline, agriculture, which, together with architecture, has taken a long time to become industrialized and still provides much of our food as well as fibers and building materials. Through anecdotal evidence, he proves the links between both fields, presenting the Greek temple as the sublimation of the granary, the Piazza del Campo of Siena as a miniature of its rural surroundings, or New
York's Central Park as the image of the world. It is in this other disciplinary history that we can find moments of historical urban collapse and a consequential return to the fields, and therefore the seeds for designing a future habitat that is more considerate of the environment.

In the exhibition “Natural Beauty,” young architects Laurent Esmilaire and Tristan Chadney argue that inherent architectural quality lies in its construction rationality. The basic assumptions are that architecture can only be imagined through brick and mortar, that gravity forces have not changed throughout history, and that a rationale that doesn’t include the latest developments in structural computation, material science, or 3-D printing is the way to go. The central piece of the exhibition is a stereofunicular scale model by Gaudi dating back to 1898-1914 that shows how the Catalan architect’s shapes are derived from a structural logic.

The late postmodern building of the Caixa Geral de Dep1sios hosts the exhibition “What is Ornament?” curated by Ambra Fabi and Giovanni Piovene and designed by Richard Venlet, that questions whether ornament ever abandoned architecture. While early modernist architects such as Adolf Loos equated ornament with crime, Mies’ use of precious stones and the current reappearance of adornment facilitated through digitalization processes in the design and production of architecture speak to a debate that is far from settled.

The last core exhibition of the Triennial deals with “Inner Space,” or the construction of the architectural imagination. A beautiful display, curated by architecture scholars Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli and designed as a Wunderkammer, identifies how the architectural imagination is capable of nourishing other disciplines, including art, video games, virtual reality, comic books, and even forensic investigation. The exhibition, however, relies too heavily on the use of reproductions rather than original objects, something that is at odds with the spirit of the hosting venue, the National Museum of Contemporary Art (Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea). Nonetheless, at this stage of our visit, it’s very much appreciated that at last someone thought about leaving the door open to breathe a little bit of fresh air. An architecture too obsessed with its own autonomy is doomed to become a caricature of itself.

Is this edition of the Triennial reactionary? Yes, definitely. In the words of former Triennial curator André Tavares, a whole generation of...
architects is increasingly getting engaged with stratospheric discussions while dismissing aspects of effective architectural practice. The latest Chicago Biennial, to mention an example that is also reviewed in this issue of *Texas Architect* (pg. 28), does a great job of presenting all the social, economic, and environmental issues we face as a society, but almost forgets the role architecture can play in finding solutions. On the other hand, this Lisbon Triennial reminds us that architecture has always been a social practice, an arena for negotiation that is used, suffered, and enjoyed by all. An architecture of continuity, deeply rooted in its own tradition, is, in Eric Lapierre’s words, the opposite of spectacular architecture, and the opposite of architecture that is superficial and shallow. In another of his eloquent metaphors, an architecture only obsessed with its apparent image is the architectural translation of political populism: fake architecture.

Nevertheless, by limiting the scope of architectural references to the Western canon of architectural history, the curators, probably unconsciously, perpetuate the idea of Western supremacy that is at the very origin of much of the extremist populist views they criticize. With the exception of the installation by Sam Jacob and Priya Khanchandani, which explores post-colonial and contemporary responses to Owen Jones’ 1856 book, “The Grammar of Ornament,” the narrative of the whole show considers architecture basically as a Western discipline. Any professor in the U.S. would provoke the outrage of their cosmopolitan students should they convey such a narrow understanding of the discipline. And I’m sure it is no different in Marne-la-Vallée.

Outside the main exhibitions, it is worth mentioning a couple of satellite installations. “A Certain Kind of Life,” the only participation from the U.S., by a plurinational team of professors from the University of Illinois at Chicago, presents a 1:1 scale model of a cell inside an abandoned Carthusian monastery, accompanied by a series of scale models representing different compositional methods. The word “cell” is emphasized over the word “room,” as it involves an existence among other cells, and therefore embodies within it the idea of a collective. A series of talks exploring how the individual becomes part of the collective not by merely sharing space but by sharing a set of rules is to be celebrated inside the cell. Here, architectural history is not only explained through archival drawings, text, and interpretations, but is also put to work in the form of a project — a project in dialogue with its site.

In addition, “Double Exposure: the photography and the photographer,” an exhibition dedicated to the internationally known Portuguese architecture photographer Fernando Guerra, curated by Andreia Garcia and designed by Diogo Aguiar, does a better job than the main exhibits of reminding us that architecture and its current challenges are global. Seducing the viewer through the collection of objects, stories, and images by the cosmopolitan photographer, this exhibition contributes to generating the kind of empathy we need for avoiding global conflict and achieving worldly understanding and global connectivity instead.

Ibai Rigby is a trained architect and editor at urban-Next.net. He lives in Austin.
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-Clarice Jones, Project Architect, Catania Engineering Associates
Dark Side

...And Other Such Stories
Chicago Architecture Biennial

The third edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial opened on September 19, 2019. Titled “...And Other Such Stories,” it was curated by Yesomi Umolu, Sepake Angiama, and Paulo Tavares. Hosted at the Chicago Cultural Center and four offsite venues, the exhibition elided the formal and technical aspects of architecture to focus on problems of equity and historical violence in the world in which architecture operates. Here, Chicago Architect Editor Anjulie Rao and Texas Architect Editor Aaron Seward discuss some of what they absorbed at the event.

Anjulie Rao: Those critiques are rather reductive. Folks who work in/around architecture seem to be motivated by physical structures and use social structures like poverty and redlining as props for a practice that, without those qualifying props, would have little radiating meaning. You see it in how architecture journalists praise private buildings’ “plazas” as “inviting community spaces,” whereas in reality, they are highly controlled, policed spaces. While that is a basal example, that idea extends to how architects commune between private and public entities. So of course folks wail when they don’t see buildings on display — it forces them to confront the idea that “social practice” is not a real part of their practice because it’s not a monetizable form of labor. It exists outside of conventional market exchanges. It’s not quantifiable. It doesn’t integrate well into the traditional way of running a practice.

Calling it “art” only exacerbates how sad this situation is: What they expect from art dramatically differs from what they expect from architecture. Only art, by their definition, is allowed to form complex ideas that point to histories of disenfranchisement and neglect; art is allowed to live and breathe in environments of contradiction.

You’re very much correct in your idea that the research is missing; I’d go so far as to say that many architecture practices should be relieved that there are other people doing this absolutely necessary labor for them. We should all be rejoicing that meaningful, long-term engagements are taking place without architects having to complain about “billable hours.” That there are folks doing the deep, scary, swampy research into how predecessors perpetuated segregation and disinvestment in communities of color.

AS: That’s an interesting way to look at this Biennial, as a resource library for architects who want to be better citizens of the world. I was moderating a panel last night and one of the panelists, UT Professor David Heymann, said something like, “There’s only one certainty in architecture and that’s gravity; everything else is a choice.” It seems, or one might hope, that if armed with the awareness of the precariousness of our situation at the global as well as local scales — and this Biennial is very much about trumpeting just how precarious that situation is — then when making decisions about a project beyond the first necessity of it standing up and
Reviews

not collapsing and killing people, those decisions would result in work that is less harmful to the environment and more supportive of the communities it serves. This sort of awareness, and decisions based upon it, are just what's lacking in architecture produced from strictly Neoliberal economic concerns, which focus solely on increasing profit margins.

It should be said that while not a ton of architecture is on display, a lot of the projects are by architects in collaboration with other disciplines and organizations. And the subject matters are all things that architects are, or should be, interested in: problems in contemporary urbanism; the depredations of resource extraction; the bloody history of colonialism; the continued oppression of communities of color; theories about society; climate and ecological crisis; etc.

I was particularly taken with “Decolonizing the Chicago Cultural Center” by the Settler Colonial City Project (SCCP), which is led by two architects, Ana María León and Andrew Herscher, in collaboration with Chicago’s American Indian Center. It comprises several signs posted throughout the Cultural Center that describe how this decked-out, Beaux Arts building — which is quite beautiful and strange in its own right — is made up of materials extracted from land stolen from indigenous peoples, not to mention built on such land and completed with labor practices that don’t live up to contemporary ethical standards, while also being frosted with decoration and messaging that romanticize indigenous peoples as “noble savages” and normalize the removal and reduction of their populations. It’s sort of the equivalent of reading the full ingredients list on the bag of Doritos you’re eating and thinking “damn these are good, but holy shit!” Or it’s like the scene in “The Shining” when the elevator doors open and an ocean of blood — the blood of slaughtered Native Americans — floods the hallway.

SCCP states that the project is not meant to take away from the grandeur or importance of the building, but to “complement and complicate” its history. This begs the question, what happens to us once the nightmarish history embedded within our built environment is decoded? Do we wind up murderous and crazed like Jack Torrance in “The Shining,” or do we become Care Bears and band together to defeat Professor Coldheart with the Care Bear Stare?

AR: The SCCP project is definitely the standout display at the Biennial. The way I tend to evaluate architecture exhibitions begins with
examining power: Where is it displayed, where is it ceded, and how? SCCP works in very unnuanced ways with power. The Forensic Architecture display does something similar. The group uses architectural design principles and practices to investigate cases of state violence, recreating events to deconstruct scenarios in which armed conflicts lead to deaths and environmental destruction.

For the Biennial, they were commissioned to display their investigation into the murder of Harith Augustus, a Chicago resident who was shot to death by police. The dash and bodycam footage was released more than a year after his killing, and Forensic Architecture, in collaboration with the Invisible Institute (a local journalism production group that uses reporting, documentation, and litigation to advance citizens’ ability to hold government institutions accountable) put together a multimedia model re-creating what happened when Augustus was brutally murdered.

The piece was removed from the Biennial, and in its place, an essay by Jamie Kalven (the head of the Invisible Institute) was displayed. The essay, titled “Looking and Showing,” tells us why the installation was removed:

This is the context in which we undertook our investigation of the police killing of Harith Augustus. As we became immersed in this year-long collaboration, certain questions surfaced .... However, over the course of the project, we were confronted by an apparent contradiction between the necessity of looking and the difficulty of showing. We became increasingly concerned about presenting graphic scenes of police violence against a black man in the context of an exhibition, about the danger of foreclosing other ways of engaging with the life of Harith Augustus by repeatedly showing his last moments, and about inflicting difficult images on visitors who had not consented to view them.

The installation is instead displayed at The Experimental Station, where the Invisible Institute, among other amazing organizations, is housed.

I don’t fully understand why one context/place is more important than another; it seems their concerns about looking/not looking could be solved through careful installation. In many ways, I feel comforted knowing that the piece exists and exists someplace. But can we draw power back from terrorizing institutions like state-sanctioned police violence just by knowing violence occurred? Do we become more powerful by visualizing more just worlds? If not being forced to confront it, do we become more complacent in violence?

The ideas I’m raising, I think, are more complicated than becoming villains or Care Bears (though I appreciate your deep knowledge of Care Bear politics); rather, I’m addressing how we see ourselves in relation to the built environment and the minutiae of how we contribute to or run away from the violence within.

The fact is, nothing happens when we confront historical violence in exhibitions. Nothing happens because the people currently in charge of displaying that history are, for the most part, white, affluent, and male. And those people in charge of those histories have a stake in maintaining the conditions in which they amassed power, the conditions created by historic violence. People of color, particularly women of color, know these histories all too well and are confronted by them or their residues on a daily basis. Many people still suffer from historic violence, and putting it on display is a step forward but doesn’t do a whole lot to disseminate power or build opportunities to remedy injustice. That happens before the hole is dug or the building is designed. It happens when land is ceded; it happens when communities are engaged. So, again, is looking enough, Aaron?

AS: Well, Anjulie, I suppose the answer to that is, No. But maybe there’s more to looking than you’re allowing.

Kalven’s “Looking and Showing” essay is very interesting. I think it’s peculiar that Invisible Institute and Forensic Architecture should worry about “inflicting difficult images on visitors who had not consented to view them.” First off, proceeding from the premise with which we started this discussion — that possibly this is more of an art biennial
than an architecture one — since when has art been worried about inflicting difficult images on viewers? (Remember Jordan Wolfson’s virtual reality installation at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, “Real Violence”? Art, actually, has been in a funk over the last few decades because it feels like it no longer has the ability to shock audiences. Are we to conclude that poor architecture can’t even get an art biennial right because it’s too worried about triggering sensitive constituencies by showing pictures that raise awareness of terrible problems in society and the environment?

I suspect the decision to not show the Forensic Architecture piece had more to do with not wanting to rattle the Chicago Police Department — showing it at an obscure venue is one thing, but exhibiting it at the international venue of the Biennial is another thing entirely — but I also think that architecture really does have a problem with reticence. After all, architecture needs clients, and so the perception among the majority of the profession in this country is architects should be careful about what they say. But that perception isn’t entirely accurate. Just consider Rem Koolhaas, who manages to be a very outspoken critic and get major commissions at the same time.

Another installation that grapples with gun violence, one that actually made it into the Biennial and has received a lot of attention, is the “Gun Violence Memorial Project,” a collaboration between MASS Design Group and the artist Hank Willis Thomas. It comprises four gable structures situated in the Cultural Center’s north lobby, each one made of 700 glass bricks, representing the number of Americans killed each week in shootings. Within many of the glass bricks are objects owned by victims of gun violence. It’s great in that it handles its subject matter in a way that highlights one of architecture’s purported strong suits: the ability to think across multiple scales. Here, all at once, you understand the enormity of the problem — 700 deaths per week — and the intimacy of individual lives lost as represented by things that were precious to them.

So what makes this memorial project suitable for showing at the Biennial, whereas the Forensic Architecture project is a no-go? I think it’s because the “Memorial Project” is architecture operating as a work of art. It speaks through metaphor. Like MASS’ lynching memorial in Montgomery, Alabama (The National Memorial for Peace and Justice), it’s an alluring object that beckons you inside. You can become absorbed in its curious formal qualities and appealing materials, in its fascinating little objects that someone once cherished, without realizing right away what it is saying. Then, when it becomes clear what it is saying, when that dawns on you, and the whole monstrous weight of history comes crashing down on you, you hopefully undergo a catharsis.
and emerge on the other side as a better person. The seduction and absorption coming before the message reveals, I think, is crucial. The Forensic Architecture piece, on the other hand, is literal. It uses the architectural skills of analysis and visualization (3-D model-building) to reconstruct a murder in minute detail, like a piece of evidence presented in court, in order to catch the CPD in a lie. Its intention is immediately clear, but if you’re inclined to put up your defenses against its position, you’ll more easily be able to deflect it than if you were already drunk on its beguiling charms.

So that’s one way that looking might be more than just looking, by the object actually creating a change in the subject who sees it. I’d posit that that sort of thing happens all the time, in subtle ways and not-so-subtle ways. Maybe if there was more stuff to look at in our built environment like the “Gun Violence Memorial Project” and The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, we might eventually get to a place where there is greater consensus to right the wrongs of our history of violence, to make reparations and tell the stories that have been buried. I feel like that project is already underway; we’re just digging ourselves out of a very deep hole, and the current political regime in Washington, as well as the constituency that put it in power, is a reaction against that change in our society. Or am I being naive?

And did you feel like this Biennial didn’t focus enough on climate change? Or does the environment not fit as an “Other Such” story?

AR: I also appreciate the “Gun Violence Memorial Project,” though I’ve been hearing critique. I think that the critics feel it doesn’t speak deeply enough to systemic violence and the social and physical structures that make violence possible. Maybe that critique displays the gaps between our academic, built, and social lives; some folks want solutions, and others need to hold feelings of grief and injustice. I don’t know if I fully agree with your evaluation of transformation—that we might emerge “better people” after looking at an exhibit. Rather, I think that looking allows us to experience difficult conditions in new ways; we don’t become better people but rather more conscious observers.

I often lament over the difficulty of not having language to discuss or convey emotions. When you feel a combination of grief, guilt, rage, and frustration, is it enough to merely list those feelings? Is there a way we can use words to impart that experience; or is it enough to be able to hold all those messy things at once? I think the “Gun Violence Memorial Project” does the latter. It creates a physical space for holding all those unspeakable, unnamable sensations that come from losing a loved one, or from being a civilian living in an environment colored publicly by violence. I don’t want to be a better person. I want to be a person, in all my incapacities and linguistic failings. Looking at those personal objects within that space accomplishes this.

Honestly, I didn’t spend enough time perusing the Biennial looking for climate change as a topic to be addressed; notably, I believe that racial injustice and climate change go hand-in-hand. Unlike the “Dimensions of Citizenship” exhibit at the Venice Architecture Biennale, which addressed climate change directly through compelling installations, the Chicago Biennial acknowledges the difficulties of being an under-resourced human in the era of apocalypse. While we look at the Chicago installation “Sanitation and Equity,” a research initiative to bring clean water to the 70 percent of the Indian population that doesn’t have access to it (done by the Mumbai and Boston-based firm RMA Architects), we learn to think abstractly about the effects of human negligence on equity. The installations at the Chicago Biennial don’t scream “Sea levels are rising!”—we all know that. Rather, how can we see climate and inequities built into living environments as being a symbiotic disaster?

I’m speaking lightly. I don’t think the Biennial is fully successful. I’d argue that this edition was the least-discussed of all three. Maybe there was less fanfare due to the curators not being starchitects; maybe it was because the theme wasn’t as compelling as the previous two: “Make New History” and “The State of the Art of Architecture.” But there was something deeply personal to me about this exhibition. It wasn’t a “throw-your-hands-in-the-air-for-Frank-Gehry” spectacle. It was quiet. Sometimes I’ll see a new building and think, “It’s a nice new building. So what? Have you felt my heart lately?” It’s really all I need to say.
A City Center Reborn with Art at Its Core

An artful human touch has redeemed a desolate city block with the Savannah Cultural Arts Center. Architects took heart from nearby rail buildings and a historic fragment onsite, using two colors of brick, and one glazed accent, to create performance spaces and art studios in a vibrant community hub. Sealed concrete block completed the industrial motif. History favored these tried and true materials for a demanding fixed budget on the harsh Georgia coast.
"Brick was better for design, and more economical than structural concrete or stucco. We used corbelling on the red brick structure as a reference to historic solid masonry structures. Normal weight concrete block allowed us to avoid painted walls. Its finer, denser texture is beautiful when clear-coated. Masonry gives the overall monumental building a human scale, too." – Patrick Shay, AIA, LEED AP, Principal, GMSHay

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The presentations and activities at the 2019 ACADIA (Association for Computer-Aided Design in Architecture) conference gave attendees a glimpse of potentially disruptive technologies and workflows for computational architectural production. The conference was held in Austin on October 24-26 and was organized by UT faculty members Kory Bieg, Danelle Briscoe, and Clay Odom.

The organizers assembled papers, workshops, and projects addressing the theme of “Ubiquity and Autonomy” in computation. Contributors reflected on the state of architectural production — where digital tools and methodologies that had been developed a generation ago in boutique, specialized settings at the fringes of the profession have now become commonplace in architectural offices, while at the same time, new forms of specialist computational practices are emerging that may themselves soon become mainstream.

While each participant grappled to position themselves in the cyclical and ever-advancing framework of technological inheritance and transference, the most encouraging efforts can be relegated to three categories: expansions, subver-
sions, and wholesale disruptions of the computational status quo. The expansionists claimed new technological territories, enlisting emerging and peripheral technologies to suit their purposes. The subverters sampled the work and scrambled the workflows of their predecessors, configuring novel material applications in the process. Disruptors actively sought to break the techno-positivist cycle, questioning the assumptions, ethics, and values of previous generations to leverage computational design and digital processes to advance pressing and prescient political, economic, and ecological agendas.

Expansionists appropriated bleeding-edge technologies, or those newly introduced to the discipline, to stake new terrain in design and
construction. The conference was the first of its kind to host a session dedicated to the use of generative adversarial networks (GANs) in design. This machine-learning system pits two forms of artificial intelligence against each other: One AI acts as the creative “artist,” generating all the possible solutions to a given task, while the other acts as the “critic,” selectively editing and curating the most appropriate responses. After training the networks on archives of architectural imagery, panelists put the GANs to work on evaluative and generative design tasks, alternately generating passably authentic floor plans, building envelopes, and reconstructed streetscapes. The workshop sessions, hosted by a suite of computational research teams from architectural offices, demonstrated possibilities for adopting emerging technologies on top of familiar platforms, adopting and adapting tools like Fologram and HoloLens to more familiar software platforms and fabrication methods.

The subverters, familiar with the expected uses and applications of given tools, would offer intentionally contradictory alternatives, short-circuiting established workflows and celebrating the unintended consequences of digitally enhanced platforms. A project from MIT researchers Lavender Tessmer, Yijiang Huang, and Caitlin Mueller entitled “Additive Casting of Mass-Customizable Bricks” is a good example of the subverters’ approach to interrogating workflows, enlisting precision-equipment for low-fidelity effect. As the current state of the art in custom concrete formwork employs costly and time-consuming workflows to task CNC routers or robotic arms with milling, the MIT project is a critical alternative. Instead of shaping the mold, the project mobilizes the mold, achieving a wide variety of sculptural concrete “bricks” using standard cylindrical forms wielded by a robotic arm, while leveraging the ability of liquid concrete to self-level. The molds are shifted to preset positions while the concrete sets, allowing the sequential states of self-leveled concrete to intersect in complex geometries. The process is surprisingly delightful to watch, as the robot controls seven molds simultaneously like a drummer with a drumkit. The unexpected combination of high- and low-tech recalibrates possibilities for robotic craft.

Other researchers are swapping out expected materials to produce unexpected results. Vasily Sinikov (KTH) and Peter Eigenraam (TU Delft) teamed with Buro Happold Engineering to produce “Ice Formwork,” a project that uses milled blocks of ice as the unlikely forms for casting high-performance fiber-reinforced concrete. Ice, the team argued, is a preferred, environmentally neutral alternative to industry-standard EPS foam molds, which produce a vast amount of waste. Ice molds, the team demonstrated, are easy enough to make (with some help from a reliable water source and a repurposed refrigerated ISO container). Airborne particles suspended by the ice-milling process are harmless water vapor, unlike the dangerous foam dust requiring ventilation equipment and other protective measures. When it comes to de-molding, the ice can simply be left outside to melt.

While these investigations showcased new ways to hack the assembly process of cast building elements, their choice of concrete as a material
contradicted a growing consensus in the panels — that designers should actively seek alternatives to the glut of concrete in the building industry, given the high ecological cost and high carbon footprint of concrete manufacturing in the context of an accelerating global sand shortage. Daniela Mitterberger and Tiziano Derme (MAEID/University of Innsbruck) offered one of the more radical alternatives in their project entitled “Soil 3D Printing.” The team is using hydrogels — non-toxic, biodegradable adhesives — as binding agents injected into loose soil, forming alien landscapes of networked, earthen structures that portend a near-future where biocompatible, organic additive manufacturing processes restructure geotechnical landscapes and planetary geology.

The provocations of the disruptors — who radically project computational tools beyond perceived disciplinary constraints — raise profound questions about the potential for design technologies to enable and enact larger societal transformations, lining up global supply chains, material economies, and non-human constituencies squarely in their sights.

Jose Sanchez (Plethora Project/Bloom Games/USC), in his presentation accepting the Innovative Research Award, presented his work leveraging computation and game design to critically examine and transform economic and ecological realities. Sanchez has developed a series of game environments that force players to navigate wicked problems in contemporary cities — to confront the complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes of urbanization, logistics, and manufacturing. Sanchez described the continued focus in his work on efforts to “optimize for the many” — as opposed to the few — in a period of increased economic inequality, reassessing the predominant use of digital technologies over the past few decades to enable complex mass-customized assemblies. Sanchez, in his own work and in projects like “BLOOM,” with Alisa Andrasek (Biothing/Bloom Games/RMIT), has been exploring the potential of digital technologies to disrupt mass-production models, through high-volume production of serialized and standardized “discrete” architectural components.

In a similar vein, Gilles Retsin (UCL Bartlett) argued for a reconsideration of the labor practices and digital economies enmeshed in — and implicitly supported by — a building industry that has not yet come to terms with automation. By focusing on the ability of digital tools to combat material waste, Retsin argued, a generation of digitally savvy architects has ignored the potential of automation to address wasted labor. Through speculative research and small projects, Retsin is hoping to disrupt the building industry, increasing the capacity of architects to design and implement new platforms for project delivery, which can combat exploitative practices.

As expansionists pointed out where to look for the next big advancement, subverters demonstrated how existing tools could be used differently. Disruptors were some of the few to ask — and answer — why.

Stephen Mueller is a founding partner of AGENCY and a research assistant professor at Texas Tech University College of Architecture in El Paso.
This roundup of the latest hardware products includes handles, knobs, levers, and access control systems.

**Blumcraft PA-300 Panic Device**  
C.R. Laurence  
crlaurence.com

The Blumcraft PA-300 Panic Device is a new type of emergency exit system for glass doors as thin as 1-in. It features an ultra-narrow crash bar that easily and securely attaches to a vertical door handle, simplifying alignment and allowing for one-person installation. The unique two-piece system lets architects specify a tubular-style panic device with back-to-back ladder pull aesthetics. The device is ideal for projects that require high-performance thermal doors with all-glass visuals.

**Latch**  
Latch  
latch.com

With the Latch smart access system, residents can use a smartphone, keycard, or code to unlock their door. For property managers, a single web-based platform makes it easy to let the right people in, handle lockouts, and oversee staff from off site. From apartment doors to garage gates, the R, M, and C Series cover a variety of access needs. The Latch intercom features a fiber composite shell, impact-resistant glass, and tactile buttons to accommodate visitors in all weather conditions.

**PD97**  
INOX  
unisonhardware.com

INOX sliding door locks provide locking and passage functions for sliding doors while allowing emergency egress for improved safety and security. The new PD97 is the industry's first motor-driven, electromechanical mortise lock for sliding doors with a built-in emergency egress function. Featuring an advanced Zephyr motor, PD97 locking and unlocking can be matched with most existing entrance keypads, card swipe, and fingerprint machines for easy yet secure access without keys.

**Strelitzia Door Pull**  
PullCast Jewelry Hardware  
pullcast.eu

The Strelitzia door pull was inspired by the flamboyant bird of paradise flower that represents faithfulness, love, and thoughtfulness. Measuring approximately 21-in. high by 6-in. wide (across the top) by 4-in. deep, the large polished brass handle makes an elegant statement piece. The door pull is also available in aged and brushed brass.

**Roger Thomas Hardware Collection**  
Rocky Mountain Hardware  
rockymountainhardware.com

Roger Thomas of Wynn Design and Development has collaborated with Rocky Mountain Hardware on three new door and cabinetry collections: Barre, Zeppelin, and Chiseled. The Barre cabinet pulls, knob, and door lever were influenced by the look of ballet barre and vintage bar rails, while Zeppelin's draw their form from the melon-shaped legs that adorned 1920s furniture. Chiseled is a textured lever of hand-carved tree branch motifs often used in 18th-century French decorative arts.

**Bullet+Stone Hardware**  
Designer Doorware  
designerdoorware.com

The Bullet+Stone hardware collection of handles and knobs is handcrafted with metal and an artisanal concrete mixture specially formulated for durability, texture, and sustainability. Each concrete form is backed with solid brass fittings in a handful of finishes. The collection includes: the Concrete Club lever handle; the Concrete Quad lever handle featuring straight, squared edges; and the Concrete Niki, a perfectly round knob. The hardware’s concealed fixing is suitable for all door thicknesses.
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UT Tyler Stem Building

metal panels define modern architecture

The Shops at Clearfork
Monkey Business

Legal Monkeys, a legal service provider that collects medical records for personal injury firms, has a new headquarters in downtown Bryan. Designed by BBA, it comprises a converted mid-century bank building and mirroring addition whose open, bare-bones aesthetic is meant as a lure for a young workforce.

Architect BBA Architects
Client Daniel and Stark
General Contractor Keys & Walsh Construction
MEP Engineer Pax-Sun Engineering
Structural Engineer Dunaway Engineers
Civil Engineer Bleyl Engineering

by Elizabeth Price, AIA

In this case, the monkeys are not lawyers, but rather work on their behalf, collecting medical records and other data for law firms. Think CAD monkeys, for lawyers. The 10-year-old company, an outgrowth of a personal injury law firm, is located in downtown Bryan. The owners understand the value of historic structures and the importance of a vibrant downtown. Bursting at the seams on the top floor of a law office building across the street, they purchased a city block that included a surface parking lot and a 1950s bank building being used for storage. The minimalist design of the original structure — with a main entry portal on the west, casements on the south, railroad on the east, and a drive-through on the north — ensured that the substantial addition does not compete for street presence.

The building footprint was doubled in size, to the north. The new structure is transparent, open to the street and peering pedestrians. Light is allowed to penetrate into the original bank building. Darren Heine, AIA, president and senior
project architect for BBA, the firm that designed the project, credits the “simple parti of mirroring the existing building and using the same structural system” for the success of the plan.

The expansion joint that separates the existing structure from the new is articulated at the front facade as a wide stainless-steel reveal. It is playful, emphasizing the difference rather than trying to conceal it. The joint cover is backlit, allowing it to be prominent in the evening. The joint is expressed in the floors and walls at the interior, where it runs through the middle of conference rooms and offices. Inside it matches adjacent finishes and is visually quiet. However, the staff knows what it is and why it’s there. The transparency of the building includes allowing the story of the expansion of the building to be seen.

On the north facade, facing the driveway and employee parking, huge storefront windows fill two thirds of the wall area. The solid portions are a random pattern of standing-seam siding, custom installed on site. Smaller windows punched through office spaces and the gym drive the alignment of the verticals such that the well-executed seams are uninterrupted.

Wrapping to the east, the lot backs up to the railroad. The original building had only a service entrance on this side. The addition is relatively quiet on this facade as well. The metal siding wraps around and meets the brick at that important expansion joint. There’s a glass garage door at the gym that allows light and fresh air into what can be a stinky room, and for equipment to be moved outside. There are two charging stations for electric vehicles in the back. They were meant to be for employees only; however, the public has found and uses them.

The original two-story bank lobby became reception and workstations. New first-floor spaces include administrative offices, workstations, the gym, and restrooms. The employees believe that the workstations in the new north room have enough natural light that they don’t need to turn on the lights. They should. The space comes alive when the lights are on.

The existing L-shaped mezzanine was doubled and expanded to become an H. It includes...
conference spaces, offices, IT, a training room, and an employee kitchen and break room.

The offices and conference spaces are transparent. Glass walls open to both north and south, ensuring that natural light from the large glass windows on the new north facade can get to the core of the building. Corey Cormier, Legal Monkeys’ CEO, was looking for a “team-minded approach with no visual isolation.” This transparency serves the culture of the business and ensures there are virtually no private spaces. Restrooms even have frosted glass panels in the doors.

The new street facade, using the brick removed from the north side, has a wonderful articulated surface that allows the intense light to play on a linear brick texture. The partner offices are on the street and serve as storefront windows into the space. The building could easily become a vibrant retail destination. The geometry of the storefront at the addition is clean and contemporary, but the lines are very traditional and work within the downtown context. “Multiple schemes were provided for the West facade,” Heine says, “We felt the need to be open to the street to allow for potential retail use in the future and to create a scale with
Facing top A thick, single-story separation creates the reception area without hindering the company's culture of transparency.

Facing bottom A mezzanine of offices and conference rooms are positioned at the joint between the existing structure and its addition.
Facing top The break room serves as the family kitchen for staff meals and time away from screens and phones.

Facing bottom The dreary existing toilet room was treated with bright glass tile that is repeated on the storefront.

Right Light from multiple levels freely penetrates the space due to the vast open-plan and abundance of windows.
connection to the street, but also deal with intense late afternoon and early evening heat. A combination of shaded complete openness at ground level and inverted heaviness of the brick above was the result. Recycling the existing brick and using it over the glass created a textured surface that really articulates in the afternoon.”

The corporate culture of the young company was shaped deliberately and dramatically by its move from the third floor of the nearby law office to the new space. The company currently employs 60 but is growing as fast as they can hire and train new employees. The exposed structure and stripped detailing with an industrial feel pushes the super cool workplace culture for office jobs in Bryan but also reflects the tight budget of the project. In the end, the space has the opportunity to be more lively and vibrant than the employees seem to want. My tour on a Tuesday afternoon was very quiet. Lights were off and headphones were in. Management had the shades pulled on the street, their lights were out, and the offices were vacant.

“When we began,” Heine says, “the narrative we requested from the owner described the type of environment they wanted: a space that reinforces the culture of the company — one that was interactive, familial, and a true team environment — a place where people see each other throughout the day with openness and transparency, along with quiet pockets for the necessary small group meetings. The mezzanine solution helped create that type of space.”

Amenities were added that prioritize employee well-being. The break area includes a ping pong table that has a serious ongoing tournament leader board. They host a weekly waffle breakfast and holiday potlucks throughout the year. The employee spaces are comfortable but not fussy. They are already evolving with the company culture. Turnover is still an issue. A consistent problem in a college town, it’s compounded by rather mundane work and wages that are low for long-term commitments.

A large internal stair along the east wall of the workstation bay in the addition is backed up with a wall of motivational quotes. The stair acts as both a sculpture and a platform for speakers during the daily morning meeting, which is known as the “Monkey Huddle.” The quotes were selected by the owners to keep staff focused on their goals, work-related and otherwise.

Elizabeth Price, AIA, is vice president at Upchurch Architects in Brenham.
The room was large. He sat up. The room was empty, aside from a wide pink bedslab and two nylon bags, new and identical, that lay beside it. Blank walls, no windows, a single white-painted steel fire door. The walls were coated with countless layers of white latex paint. Factory space. He knew this kind of room, this kind of building; the tenants would operate in the interzone where art wasn't quite crime, crime not quite art. . . . Fads swept the youth of the Sprawl at the speed of light; entire subcultures could rise overnight, thrive for a dozen weeks, and then vanish utterly.

— "Neuromancer," William Gibson

Architecture is slow, conservative; its fastest, most liberal component: the interior. Throughout the life of a building, the interior may be refreshed many times. Each rejuvenation says something about the people who carried it out and the times in which it was completed. As such, interiors offer access to a reading of an era's discourse and culture not necessarily represented by the bones that encase them, a reading in which it is possible to discern what was considered hot, and what not.

In this issue of Texas Architect, we gaze upon three fashions in contemporary interior design. We see how an Austin food chain is exporting the city's culinary and design culture beyond the borders of the state, consider how the Internet is feeding into built space design in the office of a digital company, and give the hairy eyeball to the now-ubiquitous bare-bones aesthetic.
Devil Details

From its beginnings in a trailer, Austin taco chain Torchy’s has sought to embody and amplify its hometown’s vibe. To do so, it has teamed with local architects and designers, turning out one unique location after another. Now the brand is expanding beyond the borders of Texas, exporting Austin design culture along with its cuisine.

by Anastasia Calhoun, Assoc. AIA

In 2006, a taco trailer in a dusty South Austin parking lot opened for business, establishing one of the most iconic venues of the food trailer movement: Torchy’s Tacos. The restaurant has since expanded its elevated taco experience and grand empire of Austin cool outside Texas borders into Colorado, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and beyond. Much of Torchy’s brand identity is rooted in the quirky culture of Austin — in its early days, Torchy’s founder Mike Rypka would ride through the city on his red Vespa dressed as a devil wearing an adult diaper to deliver chips and salsa to the hungry masses. Shortly after, Farrell Kubena, an entrepreneur from West Texas who also owned a modern home building business, joined as a partner to help expand the company and, in the process, established the eye for design that has become synonymous with the brand.

“Early on, the mandate was to do things right, but make a statement with the building design, and do something different every time,” says Jeremy Smith, Torchy’s vice president of design, construction, and facilities. “At the end of the day, we wanted to create a really good experience with our facilities that complemented the food. My number one job was to cultivate a team of really talented people of outside firms to help us design...
these restaurants — firms that got us, that understood the concept. We are an Austin brand. We are funky. We are hip. We are edgy."

As a result, Torchy’s began the search for designers who got their vibe and whose values and interests aligned with their own. “You’ve got to look at it kind of like a relationship,” Smith says. “If our values and interests are not aligned, then it’s probably not going to work. We tried to get really good at developing those relationships with designers. I think we’ve done a good job. If you look at our portfolio, we’ve done some pretty cool stuff. Of course, I’m hugely biased, but it’s a lot different than a lot of other restaurant concepts.”

Torchy’s opened its first brick-and-mortar restaurant in 2008 on the corner of South First and El Paso streets in Austin. Today, there are 67 Torchy’s restaurants in operation, and eight more under construction, with plans to establish an additional 100 stores over the next five years. A combination of in-house and outsourced design support allows Torchy’s to clip along at a hasty pace, leveraging the fresh perspectives of external designers and architects during concept design to ensure that each store is unique, while in-house designers develop construction documents and oversee construction administration to keep the process nimble. This allows the company to maintain tight control on MEP while quickly making changes in the field during construction.

Never comfortable with the status quo, Torchy’s has tested the boundaries of its own brand identity again and again over the last decade. Early on, their aesthetic revolved around a standard material palette of highway road reflectors, Douglas fir plywood, polished concrete floors, reclaimed wood, and powder-coated steel details. But as Torchy’s expanded into the Colorado market, they discovered another restaurant concept had co-opted much of their visual identity. It was at this point they decided to change things up. The Torchy’s team toured Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Chicago to do reconnaissance on cutting-edge trends in restaurant design and subsequently let their designers loose to experiment with new trends while staying true to Torchy’s essence. Their Tulsa location, for example, is a more sophisticated take on the brand, featuring crystal chandeliers, dark wood, and brass.

“Experimented’ is a good word,” laughs Kim Lewis, owner of Kim Lewis Designs and former lead designer for ABC’s “Extreme Makeover:
Home Edition,” who designed Torchy’s Tulsa location, among others. “They’re not afraid to make a statement with their spaces, which I appreciate. Highlands Ranch [Colorado] is probably the one that I’m most proud of. We really wanted a more refined feeling, a little more elevated, but still classy, quirky, and cool.” Notable features include an artfully executed cedar ceiling trellis, black and white tiles in the queue line, and an oval-shaped communal bar with brass fixtures. “Normally we might use something like a plywood, a maple, a birch, something a little more casual and outdoorsy, for an Austin Torchy’s,” Lewis says. “But for Highlands Ranch, we went with a deeper walnut-stained cedar for the ceiling trellis because we wanted to embrace a little more of Colorado.”

MF Architecture recently completed a new Colorado outpost in Boulder. Founder and principal Matt Fajkus, AIA, says: “One thing that’s interesting about Torchy’s in general is that they’re expanding so rapidly that there’s a certain bit of spontaneity to the way they have to operate. There isn’t the sort of corporate model that you might expect for a very large chain. We found, for all the locations, regardless of the city or state, they want to maintain some of that character, but then they also want to dial it to fit a little bit of that local context as well. In the case of the location in Boulder, it made sense to do something that wasn’t too sleek or high-end, but not exactly rustic — a cozier scheme.”

Much of MF Architecture’s proposal for retrofitting the existing shell involved visually opening the space by peeling back the dropped ceiling to reveal the raw structure beneath. Exposed steel trusses and warm wood finishes lend a refined but outdoorsy atmosphere to the restaurant. “It’s been a great project and client for us,” says principal Sarah Johnson, AIA. “It provides us an opportunity that a lot of other projects don’t. Of course, as an architect, when you’re not in the construction drawing and construction administration phase, you lose some control over details and some of the specifics. But it’s a great way to think on a larger scale and make big design moves, and have those tested quickly over and over again.”

After completing several projects outside of Texas, Torchy’s saw a need to step back and reassess which of the new branding elements they wanted to keep and which would be left behind. “We did seven or eight projects that were just way out there,” Smith says. “We thought, ‘Let’s take a deep breath and look at what we really love out of those. Let’s use...
Facing MF Architecture aimed to create a cozy interior for the Boulder, Colorado, location.

Left Retrofitting the space involved peeling back the existing drop ceiling to reveal substantial steel trusses.
Faofirg Michael Hsu
Office of Architecture
designed one of the few
ground-up construction
locations, in Fayette-
ville, Arkansas. The
wood-frame structure is
reminiscent of the Ozark's
spiking hills.
Above Heavy concrete
and steel elements contrast
with the warm, timber-
framed roof structure.

that and then bring some more of the traditional back in.' That's where
we're at today."

"One of the elements that Torchy's was interested in building on
was Vespa culture, since their original store had delivered tacos on a
scooter," says Chris McCray, whose firm McCray and Co. has completed
seven of Torchy's recent locations. "It was fun for us to put our own lens
to the space. From there, we started developing and designing wallpa-
per and came up with the idea of using old motorcycle helmets as local
points within the space."

"The Austin design aesthetic is something Liz Lambert, in her hotels,
has helped to define, Torchy's has helped to define, P. Terry's has helped
to define — there are so many great local brands here," McCray says.
"It's the idea of sharing that vibe with smaller, potentially underserved
markets like Abilene, Lubbock, Corpus Christi. We get to layer up a little
Austin cool with a new taco joint in town." Principal Grace Hall says: "I
think it's interesting because when you get to store number 68 with a lot
of similar concepts, each store is more or less being stamped out. That's
not what Torchy’s is doing. They really want each to be unique and dif-
ferent and compelling in its own way.”

While most of the restaurants are interior finish-outs, a handful are
ground-up construction, including Chioco Design’s iconic South Con-
gress location in Austin, its new restaurant in Odessa, and two flagship
locations in Arkansas designed by Michael Hsu Office of Architecture
(MHOA). MHOA worked with Torchy’s to expand into the Fayette-
ville, Arkansas, market, designing a new building that would establish
a significant architectural presence in the region and set the tone for
subsequent smaller projects.

Wanting to maintain the playful aspects of the Torchy’s brand while
remaining reverent to the community and region, MHOA first under-
took an analysis of historical Fayetteville architecture and the character
of the Ozarks. “There is a wonderful landscape in Arkansas that’s full
of large, jagged rocks along rolling, spiking hills,” says MHOA’s partner
in charge, Micah Land. “These natural forms intrigued us. If you look
at architecture in Arkansas, you’ll find amazing wood-framed build-
ings, like those by Fay Jones. We were inspired by that dynamic, modern
architecture that is also very natural. The soul of the project was build-
ing on an exposed wood structure and creating a warm, friendly restau-
rant interior — something that is comfortable and very organic.”

When considering the Fayetteville project, Smith makes it clear that
responding to the context of far-flung locations is not all that’s on the
menu. “We wanted to make a nod to the local architectural community,
but then again, we’re an Austin brand. We feel like that’s integral to the
presence and experience that we bring to any community, so that’s kind
of what’s driving it,” he says. “One thing that the ownership group has
allowed us to do in the design department is to really take risks with the
design. We’re OK trying things and trying to make a statement. And so,
it’s a little bold. And it’s tenacious. And that is in line with Austin. You
know, it’s OK to take a risk and be yourself and really show your person-
ality. Through design, we really try to do that.”

Anastasia Calhoun, Assoc. AIA, works for Overland Partners in San Antonio.
User Experience

The digital revolution has changed nearly every aspect of life, including the design of built space. For an extreme example, look no further than the Eastside Tech Hub on Austin’s East 6th Street, a tech HQ in a former recycling center that gives cyber workers a sense of place not unlike the cyber realm in which they work.

by Aaron Seward

Brands in junkspace perform the same role as blackholes in the universe: They are essences through which meaning disappears.
— Rem Koolhaas, “Junkspace

The tech industry has been pumping terabytes of ones and zeros into Austin. This input — a literal stream of people, information, and money — is applying a consistent pressure to the city, pushing the downtown skyline to greater heights and density, while inflating to an alarming turgidity select corridors of development that radiate out from the core like the tentacles of a giant octopus. Old residents carp and moan about the rapid pace of growth, the snarled traffic, the increasing cost of living, and the general change of vibe — from a never-ending float down a cool summer river, to the heat and cacophony of milk being steamed for your latte — but even newcomers can see trouble brewing in this town’s peculiar mix of business acceleration and rearguard action against further urbanization: “Why are all the buildings so cheap and ugly here?” “Why does the public transportation suck so much?” “Where are all the good museums?” Austin seems to have been trying hard to confirm one of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s observations about American cities, that they “live
feverishly in the grip of a chronic disease; they are perpetually young, yet never healthy.”

Zooming in on one of the city’s rapidly developing tentacles brings into high resolution the exact nature of the ailment. East 6th Street, from I-35 near downtown to where it peters out 13 blocks later at a poultry plant and an H-E-B grocery store, is typical of the sad state of development — more so in that it has promise and contains a few diamonds in the rough. Previously a thinly populated mix of storefronts, loading docks, empty lots, frame houses, shacks, and industrial installations organized within Austin’s 19th-century grid, the corridor has been utterly transformed in the span of five years into a canyon of mid-rise office, hospitality, and residential mixed-use buildings, not to mention the structured parking that serves them. While 901 East 6th Street (formerly the Car2Go headquarters), designed by Thoughtbarn/Delineate Studio, and Baldridge Architects’ ARRIVE hotel at the corner of Chicon Street are notable recent exceptions — buildings that show good intentions and exemplify the traditional architectural values of firmness, commodity, and delight — the vast majority of the new construction is at best banal and at worst flimsy, chintzy, and unpleasant to behold.

In urban terms, this part of East 6th Street is a tease — a move in the right direction that doesn’t go all the way. It is walkable, and young trees have been planted along the streets (their shade will be quite an asset in the summer, when they mature, sometime after most of the new buildings they currently front have ended their life cycles and been demolished), but the sidewalks along most of the new developments aren’t wide enough even for the current level of pedestrian usage, never mind for the electric scooters that now share them (scooter urbanism, in fact, might be a good way to think about Austin’s current state of evolution). Strange grade changes, security barrier-like planters, and other incongruencies (one corporate HQ even has a BBQ grill and patch of AstroTurf out front, enclosed behind a high steel fence) further disrupt both passage and enjoyment.

The choice of a tech buzzword was intentional. The industry, through incessant marketing, has made us all think of “disruption” as something to welcome into society and our individual lives. Sadly, the disruptions of tech don’t always overturn stodgy ways of doing things and replace them with efficient, synergistic solutions. Sometimes, they make a bad situation worse. This appears to be the case, by and large, with tech’s influence on the built environment. For all that cities tout their use of Big Data, tech is primarily
Right Concept sketch showing how the architects divided the space into quadrants, each representing a different part of Texas.

Below The living room on the east side of the building has kind-of antique-looking street lamps and an abstracted wooden framework meant to evoke a Galveston Victorian house and the Gulf Coast.

Facing The central spine is daylit with continuous clerestory windows that make this circulation area bright and airy.
a suburban phenomenon (ever been to Silicon Valley?) what it enables are decentralization, atomization, isolation. The demotion of public space that started with television has reached a new zenith with the Internet and the profusion of devices that deliver it. TV made it possible to worship and be entertained from your living room, as opposed to going to the church or theater. Now, the Internet has made even work and socializing things that can be done from the seclusion of home, which, if you live in a new apartment on East 6th Street, is a gypsum box whose walls are so thin you can hear your neighbor button-mashing their way through Fortnite. This redistribution of time and consciousness away from the topological, three-dimensional world in which our bodies live and breathe, to cyberspace with its protean audio/visual phantasms emanating from points unknown to screens we hold close to our faces, is changing how we relate to, and what we ask from, our architecture and cities.

Tech, being a solutions-oriented enterprise, tends to come up with antidotes for its own negative side effects. The Gig Economy, which bloomed with the advent of the iPhone (2007) and Great Recession (2008), also gave rise to an escape from the solitary work it made possible: the coworking space. As Brad Neuberg (the programmer who, in 2003, founded the first official coworking space in San Francisco) wrote on his blog, Coding in Paradise, “I couldn’t seem to combine all the things I wanted at the same time: the freedom and independence of working for myself along with the structure and community of working with others.” Tech companies have also led the way in turning the workplace into an environment the workforce won’t be so apt to leave (or able to escape), by making them a mix of office, home, gym, coffee bar, drinks lounge, and play palace.

But the tech-born solution to this downgrading of physical space very much resembles the source of the downgrading: It’s a fighting-fire-with-fire scenario. The typical tech office’s promiscuous blend of modalities can be viewed as a physical corollary of the Internet’s virtual world, where seemingly anything, from sex to the latest exchange rates on the NASDAQ can be accessed instantaneously with minimal effort. But far from being liberating, tech offices and the internet are highly choreographed and surveilled environments, which is why they make such an effort to explain that their real purpose is catering to individuals’ choices. Another point of insecurity is authenticity, or realness. This can be seen in the digital realm’s ongoing attempts to make itself look and act more like the real world, à la virtual reality, as opposed to reveling in and accentuating its synthetic, binary nature. It can also be seen in the designs of many tech offices, which work overtime to signal their connections to place and tradition, as opposed to signifying their reliance on electrons.

For an example, one need only step off East 6th Street’s middling sidewalk into the recently completed H-E-B Digital and Favor Eastside Tech Hub. This corporate headquarters of the digital arm of venerable Texas grocery chain H-E-B and the food-delivery start-up it recently acquired, Favor, occupies two connected metal shed buildings that originally housed the Balcones recycling center. After the recycling center vacated, the empty structure was used as a venue for pop-up cultural events and became a regular canvas for graffiti artists. In 2017, it was acquired by Denver-based EverWest Real Estate Investors, which hired Gensler to renovate the core and shell as multi-tenant space with an eye toward attracting creatives, start-ups, and tech businesses. Gensler refurbished and stabilized the structure, added insulation and air conditioning, inserted a 16,000-sf mezzanine to increase leasable floor area, opened up the perimeter with windows, and installed a long clerestory across the center of the roof to admit daylight into the center of the 65,000-sf floor plate. The architects also hired graffiti artists to paint murals on the steel columns, put in a coffee bar, and even bought an old railroad boxcar from North Carolina and parked it out back.

Dubbed “Upcycle,” the paint was barely dry on the rehabbed facility when, kit and kaboodle, it was bought by H-E-B and Favor, then still in the honeymoon phase of their merger and looking for a place big enough to accommodate their combined families. They hired the Austin office of national firm IA Interior Architects to re-upcycle Upcycle into a cohesive workplace where the agglomerated companies could work together while maintaining their distinct brand identities. While H-E-B was keen on representing its deep Texas roots, Favor wanted to maintain the scrappy start-up culture it had fostered in its former location, an old industrial space a few blocks away on East Cesar Chavez Street.

IA’s design uses the bifurcated nature of the building to separate the two companies — H-E-B to the east, Favor to the west — and ties them together by basing the plan on the geography of Texas. The large floor area is divided into quadrants. The southwest evokes the mountains and canyons of the Trans-Pecos with a social stair. The northwest emulates the Panhandle’s silos and Quonset huts with a D’Hanis brick arch leading to a
The northeast is meant to represent the East Texas pines and evinces the lack of inspiration this aroused in the designers by mostly containing open plan banks of desks. The southeast attempts the Gulf Coast with vaguely 19th-century-looking street lighting and a white-painted lattice work that may be meant as an abstraction of a Victorian house in Galveston.

Throughout this basic geographical organizing principal, an Ur-Texas-ness is pantomimed with local art, materials, and other signifiers of specific places or cultural artifacts — though it must be said that the countrypolitan, boho-cowperson aesthetic that has fermented between Austin and Marfa over the last decade or so is the dominant theme. The entrance/security checkpoint has a hickory and pecan ceiling, while the reception desk resembles a gabion wall — a bull wire cage filled with limestone chunks and glass cullet. There is a lot of Garza Marfa furniture, and picnic tables designed by Marfa-based sculptor Cody Barber. A large mural by Austin artist Will Bryant wraps three walls, its nursery school shapes lampooning features of the Trans-Pecos landscape. Two handwoven screens — one east, one west — by fiber artist Ellen Bruxvoort recall nothing so much as the tassels or raccoon tail on a festival girl’s purse. There is a cow skull on the floor. Cacti and succulents sprout from ceramic pots. The bathrooms reference Wes Anderson films. The snack bars are named after H-E-B stores. Meeting rooms have Texas place names, from Corpus Christi to Cadillac Ranch. Wayfinding signage made from bent rebar points the way to places like the kitchen, town hall, living room & bar, and Kerrville — the board room on the mezzanine level, laid out with the same square footage as the first H-E-B store, which, as it happens, was located in Kerrville. Push on a certain bank of shelves behind the bar and it gives way to reveal a secret chamber done up to look like this original location, complete with an olde-tyme cash register and antiqued cans of green beans.

All of these Texas clichés swim beneath the beefy ductwork of the air conditioning system, within the indifferent enclosure of the former recycling center, whose pre-engineered metal structure possesses all the charm, subtlety, and specificity of place of a server housing. To build upon the Internet-as-built-space analogy, inside the Eastside Tech Hub one moves from one zone of Texana to another with no more effort than it takes to click a link to the next website. Each zone could be ripped out and replaced overnight, much in the way the Internet is a constantly morphing environment where sites appear, change, and vanish without disturbing the overall structure. It’s Meow Wolf as workplace. Disney World as corporate interior. Koolhaas’ Junkspace specially tuned for the tech worker — a “thicket of cuteness” designed to detain employees in the lounge, plugging away, long after the whistle has blown.

Aaron Seward is editor of Texas Architect.
Facing The entrance to the climbing gym is made from local D’Hanis brick, whose arched form recalls the geometry of Quonset huts — the architects’ signifier for the Panhandle.

Right and below One shelf behind the bar gives way to reveal a secret room done up to resemble the original H-E-B store in Kerrville, complete with an old-time cash register and ersatz period groceries.
About the Bones

One of the leading trends in contemporary interior design is the exposure of structural and mechanical systems. Far from the elevation of a building's guts to decoration through intense detailing, as seen in the high-tech movement, the current style appears raw, unconsidered, and possibly like an abdication of the architect's role as a maker of space.

by Michael Malone, FAIA

Eat in a restaurant, drink coffee in a cafe, shop for jeans in a boutique, change your oil at Jiffy Lube, and the spaces all share the same design aesthetic: exposed concrete floors, exposed structure, exposed building systems set off by horizontal wood slats cladding everything else. The hipness, if that's what it is, can be suffocating, sort of a grunge version of the blandest white drywall, lay-in ceilings, and wall-to-wall carpet. Does the zeitgeist require this? Do all interior projects need to look the same? Is it the work of lazy designers? Architects ignoring the making of space for simply in-filling it with functions? Is this the natural progression of the move to inhabit industrial lofts in the 1970s?

Doing an interior within an existing space used to be an opportunity for designing something without the constraints of waterproofing: no leaking roofs. You could make something special happen in those spaces that allowed for the exploration of ideas and materials without pesky flashing details. Alas, something has changed. Architects are content (complacent?) to just accept the spaces they are given. Ignoring any obligation to shape or form these volumes seems to be a repetitive pattern in current design thinking. Considering spaces like these, often the architect's work seems to be a small number of highly resolved and articulated interventions:
the overwrought barista bar; the expressive light fixtures; an elaborate
Mondrianesque window wall that slides or pivots, its dirty, ungrounded welds
obscuring the view. These are placed like jewelry among so much
spatial and material dross, reminding anyone who looks at them that the
space was not so much taken over as strategically intervened with, and here
please pay attention! are the good bits. See? We are clever and talented
and understand how to detail and build things! We just couldn't be both-
ered with considering the entire space.

High modernism strove for a highly crafted and finished look, taking
cues from the machine aesthetic but not the machines themselves. Inspi-
ration was found in automobiles, ocean liners, airplanes, all objects that
expressed their functions but covered up all the messy parts. The engine
was under the hood, the turbines concealed in the decks below; the juicer
didn't show you the electrical motor and wires. Everything exposed was
studied and shaped for the impression of airflow, containment, and speed.
Modernity equaled streamlining.

High-tech, the precursor of this current idiom (let's not be coy; "aes-
thetic" is too thoughtful a word for this complacent bastardization), took a
mannerist view toward systems, à la Centre Pompidou. That architecture
was all about the bones too, but the bones were expressed and fused over
in a loving way, their forms explored and shaped with an eye toward their
contribution to the expression of not only their function but also the space
within. Architects studiously organized structure and systems, frequently
altering their scale and form to create an impression of the systems' func-
tions, though often they were really not that functional at all.

All of this would be fine if it didn’t beg the question, what happened
to space? You may remember that’s what we architects do at our most
fundamental level. Making space is what sets us apart from engineers and
contractors. It’s our raison d'être. Remember those beautiful volumes we
were all shown in History of Architecture class? Iconic modern projects
that expanded when filled with light, found life, and reflected it back on
us? These spaces evoked clarity and goodness, all pristine and crystalline,
aspirational and lucid. Have we moved on from the spatial examples of Le
Corbusier? Of Aalto? Of Wright? Of Mies?

If I make a list of the great monuments of high modernism created by the
likes of those listed above, none expresses its guts or bones in a way that is
casual or without great study and care. Mies made an entire architecture out
of them bones. What gorgeous bones they were, too! All that precision-crafted
steel, finished to the smoothness of a baby's butt, every weld ground to perfection, every inch of it lustrously painted. The early villas of Le Corbusier were light-filled containers, the spaces informed and animated by light—an obsession, really, and constantly remarked on in his writings. His later, more brutalist buildings were rougher and raw in the expression of their forms, but all of it was shaped in support of the spaces and how they filled with, and came to life in, the light. Picture the well of the Guggenheim. Would it be better if insulated ducts were exposed under the ramps?

Is the idea of luminous space, container of light, expander of the soul passe? Would the Pantheon be better with black bar joists and the oculus a raggedly cut circular opening in metal deck? I am spending a lot of time considering this look (because it is ubiquitous and I can't get away from it) and wondering, is it a response to rising construction costs, or is it a deliberate visual choice (can we use the word “style”? of the present time? It's not that I'm opposed to it. There's something fresh and original at first when formerly open commercial space is inhabited in this manner and minimalist interventions allow the volumes to achieve a kind of grandeur. But now that it has become the default way to design and execute every project type—stores, restaurants, hair salons, mechanic shops—one wonders, is every bar joist shopping strip a turn-of-the-century manufacturing building waiting to be exploited? The answer is no.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, pop culture influences began to find their way into architectural design and discourse. This married the then-nascent critique of modern architecture and the now popular view that it was elitist, unresponsive to human needs, and overly formal. Many practitioners were exploring ways to adapt the program of modernism (open spaces, abundant natural light, breaking down of spatial hierarchy) and “soften” and adapt it for a broader audience. This paralleled the move toward high-tech design, the so-called celebration (some would say fetishization) of structure, building systems, and the view of a building as somehow being an organism—some Japanese even called it Metabolism. Projects completed at this time had a very specific look and feel, and indeed the “bones” (and sinews and ligaments and organs) were all on display, the purview of architects and designers. Many of the projects completed in this era were astonishing in their freshness and originality, and many endure now as stunning examples of the movement and its stylistic influence.

The Ur building of this time period was probably Centre Pompidou, the Parisian art museum and cultural center completed in 1977. The diagram of the 1971 international-competition-winning-design—created by a very young Richard Rogers (age 38) and an even younger Renzo Piano (34)—suggested an endlessly flexible
frame into which functions could be inserted and arranged to suit changes in program and patterns of use. It reimagined the idea of a museum from that of a repository for the contemplation of culture and ushered in the museum as a participatory experience (can I rent you a set of headphones so you don’t have to be bothered to read the labels on the paintings?). The building and its iconic presence far outweighed the offerings inside. In pursuit of this conceptual idea, Piano and Rogers designed a structure of widespan steel trusses that created open, loft-like floors that could be subdivided and arranged as best suited their uses. Exposed building systems gleefully (some would say willfully) expressed as separate from the frame, ductwork and electrical buses were color-coded, highlighted in their layouts, and carefully organized to provide the “decoration” of the building. It was all visually dazzling and fun to visit, not least because of the famous glass-enclosed exterior escalators that snaked up the exterior to a roof terrace for wonderful views over Paris.

In actuality, the promised flexibility was a chimera. The building proved to be extravagantly expensive to operate and maintain, and subsequent renovations and updates have proven significantly more expensive than the construction of the original building. As an idea, it’s still compelling, and it certainly has a presence.

Closer to home, firms were adapting these ideas, but in the vastly more commercial world of American architecture and construction, they were pursued thematically but not with the wit, rigor, or discipline of Centre Pompidou. Think Houston’s George R. Brown Convention Center. Architects were willing to settle for the systems being exposed, but were not willing to design them in the architectural sense (and certainly not willing to incur the costs). Some firms did it well, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates being the exemplar in this regard. Their 1974 Columbus Occupational Health Center in Columbus, Indiana, is an exceptional example. Of the project, New York Times critic Paul Goldberger opined, “The firm’s work is rather brash, often irreverent, more a collage of interesting elements than a pure statement.” But it was eminently humane, accessible, and fun. The exposed elements made you look, expressed and enhanced the spatial qualities of the buildings, and were often just delightful to consider and comprehend.

These sentiments cannot as easily be ascribed to contemporary “bare bones” projects. One wonders if the architects creating these spaces know the origins of exposing the structure and systems, or if their work is just a second-hand, unconsidered application of an erstwhile aesthetic.

Michael Malone, FAIA, is a principal at Malone Maxwell Borson Architects in Dallas.
La Haine est un ivrogne au fond d’une taverne,  
Qui sent toujours la sauf naître de la liqueur  
Et se multiplier comme l’hydre de Lerne.

—Mais les buveurs heureux connaissent leur vainqueur  
Et la Haine est vouée à ce sort lamentable  
De ne pouvoir jamais s’endormir sous la table  
— Charles Baudelaire, “Le Tonneau De La Haine”

While “condo” (short for condominium) can refer to any privately owned residence in a multi-unit building, the word has become synonymous with a particular kind of luxury-postured high-rise living. In the 1980s, condos came to be seen and mocked as the lairs of choice for yuppies. Today, they are more commonly associated with oligarchs and trustafarians, who use them as pied-à-terres, or, worse, as investments — frozen capital in the sky, unoccupied and inaccessible even to the young working professionals who used to enjoy their status, just as the French poetry quoted here is inaccessible to most Texas Architect readers.

In this issue of TA, we walk into a world shuttered to most and see two very different versions of empyrean living: one an airy, Apollonian Austin accommodation for a downsizing grownup; the other a dark, Dionysian Dallas dwelling for a budding family.
Where does a grown-up live? It’s a question both poetic and practical, as this condo at the W Residences tower in downtown Austin illustrates, and one with implications beyond one set of walls.

As a starting point for a philosophical inquiry into “grown-up-ness,” a condo on the 29th floor of a downtown tower (designed, in this case, by Andersson/Wise) is an excellent place to start. A condo has an abstract quality that lends itself to big questions: As a legal construct and a physical enclosure, the condo can present both owner and architect with the challenge of taking a product and turning it into a place.

The client was downsizing from a house in West Austin. One of his children was gone to college, another in high school, and his work often took him out of town. A move to a condo with concierge services made sense, but the open floor plans of many of the units he saw did not. He turned to Furman + Keil Architects, who had designed his previous residence, and Wendy Dunnam Tita, FAIA, director of interior architecture at Page, for help.

Philip Keil, AIA, describes the experience of designing a condo interior as literally ungrounded: “Taking away the focus of land connection and site refocuses your efforts on a much more subtle scale.” Says Dunnam Tita, “We were thinking about what a common architectural language for a grown-up might be — not just an elegant interior, but one with a level of detail and sophistication and refinement.”

The design team began by looking at precedents and landed on Carlo Scarpa, whose...
Faofmg Chis Honea of Fitch built the custom cabinetry, which was designed by Furman + Keil. “We saw a lot of units,” say the current residents, “but this one felt like home.”

Left Plasterwork by Sloan Montgomery Hauser. Carlo Scarpa’s Canova Museum at Possagno set the tone for the project, says Keil, with soft-toned materials and objects outlined in fine steel edges.
inspiration is strongly in evidence here: rich materiality; rigorous geometry; floating planes. The first order of business, says Dunnam Tita, was to "thwart the pancake" — that is, to take the space determined by the concrete ceiling and floor and reshape it to define discrete areas without breaking up the flow. For example, the entryway is lined with steel and plaster panels that give way to a floating screen dividing the dining and living areas. Suspended plaster ceilings shelter each area; in the kitchen, this ceiling also conceals the range hood and ductwork, allowing the room to fade into the background. A neutral color palette, which Dunnam Tita describes as "salt, pepper, and butter," focuses attention on materials and intersections, carefully overseen by the team at Pilgrim Construction: troweled plaster, by turns rough and burnished, held in waxed steel; a mirror floating in front of a travertine wall; even a stereo speaker fitted into the wood and steel wall panels.

Overall, the space feels generous, allowing for solitude, a crowd, or something in between (a sliding wooden partition leads to a bedroom wing for children or guests). That this grown-up space is now making room for a baby — the new owners, who bought the condo from the original owner, furniture and all, are expecting — adds a delightful layer of irony. The area once occupied by a turntable and chair for listening to music is temporarily taken over by a crib, and rubber corners are finding their way onto the travertine. Fortunately, the craftsmanship and materials,
though selected with a different phase of aging in mind, should both welcome and withstand detailed exploration.

Architectural historian Kurt W. Forster describes Scarpa's work as an effort to “achieve in the flesh and blood of buildings ... a culture of building that springs from the way we imagine the meaning of our lives.” This is as good a definition as any for grown-up architecture: a built environment that reflects back to us some sense of self. It's also a useful framework for considering the culture of condos, a culture that is literally on the rise in Austin, with five new towers — at least — adding over 1,000 units to downtown between 2018 and 2020.

Facing A steel, wood, and plaster screen divides the dining and living areas, allowing the space to feel open while creating distinct rooms.
Left Wendy Dunnam Fina, FAIA, points to some thoughtful moves by Andersson/Wise, who designed the W Hotel and Residence towers: “They also have roots in residential architecture, so they considered things like window treatments.” Floor-to-ceiling curtains slide into slots between window and wall.

Facing top The composition of materials in the master bath recalls Scarpa’s Querini Stampalia Foundation, with what Keil describes as Scarpa’s “quirky composed detailing of materials.” The travertine was installed by Thomas Kozitsch of Arcon Architectural Construction.

Facing bottom The mirror in the master bathroom reflects complex visual composition. Mirrors, risers, and dropped ceilings are more than visual: They also incorporate lighting, plumbing, and venting.
Perhaps this is an opportunity to reimagine a culture of building in a city designed around low-density, single-family housing. The sales office of one new downtown high-rise shows opportunities both taken and missed: trading residential sprawl for efficient floor plans, shared spaces for congregating, and connection to city life and the outdoors all seem like good strategies for inhabiting an urban center. But a showroom wall designed to introduce future residents to “Austin culture” is shocking in its banality: The collection of a yoga mat, some dumbbells, a dog, a leash, and a bottle of Tito’s vodka manages to convey that Austin, rather than being the garrulous, twangy, contentious, sweaty, crooning, star-gazing, hustling mess of a city we live in, is at its best an outdoor gym with a drinking problem.

“Elevated” is a word that appears often in condo marketing materials, suggesting that the units are connected less to the street than to the view. But as elevated as they are, condos — both as products and as places — are very much a part of the city they hover above. As more and more of Austin grows up, it’s worth asking, again and again, what grown-up architecture could mean.

Jessie Temple is an architect and writer in Austin.
Redemption Song

A new condo in Dallas’ Museum Tower is helping revise the building’s reputation as an embodiment of high-design refinement.

Architect Olson Kundig
Interior Design Emily Summers Design Associates
General Contractor Constructional Zone International
Lighting Design Studio Lumina
Acoustic Engineer Stantec
Gizmo Design KB Architectural Services

by Michael Friebele, Assoc. AIA

It has been six years since the completion of Museum Tower, yet the building still remains attached to one of Dallas’ most contentious development and architectural controversies. Here we are in 2020, and the reflected glare cast by the building upon the nearby Nasher Sculpture Center and its surroundings has yet to be remedied. However, with continued development around the site and along the Klyde Warren strip, the tower’s sensuous form is becoming integral to the fabric of the city. Glare aside, Museum Tower seems to have finally found its sense of belonging. And so, too, its residents.

After a long period of minimal occupancy rates, Museum Tower now proudly boasts that “fewer than 15 units remain.” While Dallas’ continuous growth and the public’s short memory have helped the building overcome its initially tainted reputation and start moving units, these considerations have distracted from an assessment of the tower’s design qualities and interior spatial features. But one of the building’s units, a third of the way up the 42-story elevation, serves as a prime example of its potential. Designed by Olson Kundig, the condo is clearly evocative of the Seattle-based firm’s approach, yet it is also an outgrowth of the Museum Tower’s core and shell. The unit also gives a glimpse into the demographic of the building and its surroundings, one that is quickly becoming an enclave for professionals and families alike. “You have a core that basically bifurcates the floor plate, so we had to be strategic about the layering of space and how we divided the space,” says Tom Kundig, FAIA.

At 8,870 sf, the unit is large enough to dwarf the average Highland Park home, its size visually expanded further by ample views on all sides. Using the spine of the tower as a driver, spaces are woven through a central, linear set of circulation...
Facing  The uniform charcoal aesthetic blends away the exposed MEP systems and highlights a number of unique light fixtures, including adjustable spoon lights.

Left and below  Operable walls throughout the unit’s circulation corridors add exciting points of entry from the elevator cores.
paths and a central service core. Radiating from this path, functions splay outward to welcome and frame views of the city. The larger, more public of rooms occupy three corners of the floor plan for ample connection to views and the terraces at each end of the plan’s slimmer points. Bedrooms occupy the deeper portions of the plan to accommodate the necessary supportive elements such as bathrooms and closet space. “We had to think about all the different ways pieces of a home work — public and private, intimate and gathering, plus all of the interstitial spaces and connections between those,” Kundig says. “Then we had to consider the different configurations of people who would be using the space — adults, children, guests — now and in the future. There was a lot of programmatic layering to figure out how to break up this large floor plate into different districts within the apartment, which I think worked pretty well here.”

The conversation between volume and articulation of finishes and fabrication is what gives the space its innate sense of balance and experience. Kundig refers to this as a “yin and yang” between the experience of the apartment and the city itself. From either of the two elevator bay approaches, entry into the unit is through a custom door, with one end conceived as a two-part interlocking puzzle. From the core, 12-ft-high spaces are unified throughout with a dark, charcoal tone; MEP systems therefore blend into the composition. Overhead, corrugated
Facing top Warm walnut wood, recessed strip lighting, and a few colorful elements create a cozy master suite that maintains the condominium's sleek aesthetic.

Facing bottom Uniquely fabricated elements, like this sink and mirror, frame views of downtown Dallas.

Right: A hand-cranked wheel raises a steel wall to the ceiling to reveal a cherry red bar.
The most playful colors of the design are found within the children’s rooms, which are further brightened by 12-ft-high floor-to-ceiling windows. The sink inside this half bathroom cleverly appears to grow from the wall, as its unrolled form is indicated through cutouts in the glossy siding. Partial-height partitions allow natural light to penetrate the more central master closet.

metal “clouds” define larger spaces within the home as well as five custom-designed, adjustable blackened steel “spoon lights.” Within this darker environment, the walnut casework serves as a visual thread, working together with black terrazzo floors and dark bronze window mullions to create what Kundig describes as “an interior refuge against the exposure of full-surround window walls.”

As a hallmark of Olson Kundig’s work, the unit comes to life in its ability to enhance and identify the unique experiential qualities of the space through active fabricated elements. “Materiality and fabrication are a big part of the work I’ve been doing for many years,” Kundig says. “Those components are really important to me on every project.” The “quiet room” is a noted example: Within the composition of this intimate gathering space, a blackened steel wall can be raised into the ceiling by means of a hand-cranked wheel, revealing a jewel-box bar. Red accents within the bar carry over to other discovered spaces within the home.

What Olson Kundig has been able to do with this home is translate Museum Tower’s bold sculptural form into the human-scaled realm. It’s refreshing to finally see something come of Museum Tower aside from the controversy it initially generated.

Michael Friebele, Assoc. AIA, is an associate at CallisonRTKL.
Resources

**Legal Monkeys Office Building, Bryan**

Contractor: Walsh & Kesich Construction

Consultants: MEP: Pexam Engineering; STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Dunaway Engineers; CIVIL ENGINEER: Beyer Engineering

**Resources Masonry:** Salvaged Existing Brick and Repurposed For Use on Front Facade; STRUCTURAL STEEL: Vulcraft Group (Texas Steel Fabricators); MILLWORK: Keystone Millwork; WATERPROOFING: Henry.; TPO ROOFING: Versico Roofing Systems; WALL PANELS: McEneyMetal; INSULATION: Owens Corning; ALUMINUM STOREFRONT: Old Castle BuildingEnvelope; INTERIOR ALUMINUM FRAME DOORS: Special Lite; INTERIOR ALUMINUM FRAMING: Omega Omega Interior Aluminum Framing; ALUMINUM WINDOWS: Ram Industries; DOOR HARDWARE: Sargent; SECTIONAL OVERHEAD DOOR: Wayne Dalton; GLASS TILES: Daltile.

**Atlanta, Dallas**

Contractor: Construction Zone International

**Consultants SHELL/ CORE ARCHITECT: QTA Architects; STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: L.A. Fussers Partners; MEP ENGINEER: Blum Consulting Engineers; LIGHTING DESIGN: Studio Lumina; INTERIOR DESIGN: Emily Summers Design Associates; MILLWORK AND CASEWORK: Circle C Millwork; WATERPROOFING:**

**Torchy’s, Highland Ranch, CO**

Contractor: Epic Construction

**Resources ALL STRASS AND BRASS ACCENTS: Makehaus; WOOD TRELLIS BUILDOUT: Prestige Iron; WALLPAPER: Erica Wakerly; Fan in Black and White/Spiral White Line/Black (Supply Showroom); TILE: Architecta; QUE LINDE SCONCES: Cedar and Moss - Aimee Sconce; TRELLES CHANDELIERS: Restoration Hardware - Viti Mirrored 3-Tier; "DAMN GOOD" SIGN: Al Ross Sign Group; CUSTOM BANQUETTES: Concept Services

**Torchy’s, Fayetteville, AR**

Consultants: STRUCURAL ENGINEER: DCI Engineers; MEP ENGINEER: MPW Engineering; ARCHITECT OF RECORD: Cornell Morgan, AIA; CUSTOM LIGHTING: Warbach Lighting and Design

**Eastside Tech Hub | H-E-B Digital and Favor Delivery Headquarters, Austin**

Contractor: Harvey Cleary Builders

Consultants: MEP: Bay & Associates; ONLVL: Big Red Dog; ACOUSTICIAN: Waveguide; SIGNAGE FABRICATOR: Building Image Group; BASE BUILDING ARCHITECT: Gensler; CUSTOM BRONZE HARDWARE, STEEL DETAILING: ONE DESIGN

**Army**

Consultants: INTERIOR DESIGN: Page; MEP ENGINEER: Positive Energy; CASERWORTH FABRICATION: Honea Works/Wiltch; CASERWORTH FABRICATION: KWA (Elegant Additions); DURAN 4121 SOLID SURFACE COUNTERTOPS: Caesarstone; GRAINITE COUNTERTOPS: Absolut Black, Brushed/Leathered:

**Contractor Pillgrim Building Company**

Consultants: INTERIOR DESIGN: Page; MEP ENGINEER: Positive Energy; CASERWORTH FABRICATION: Honea Works/Wiltch; CASERWORTH FABRICATION: KWA (Elegant Additions); DURAN 4121 SOLID SURFACE COUNTERTOPS: Caesarstone; GRAINITE COUNTERTOPS: Absolut Black, Brushed/Leathered:

**Resources**

**ANCILLARY FURNITURE:** Coalesse, West Elm, Viccarbe, Blu Dot, Grand Rapids Chair, Garza Marfa, Cody Barber (Texas Wilson); **CLIMBING WALL:** El Dorado Walls; **FAUCET:** Moen; **MOXIE:** Moen; **BRIDG EDGE LOCKS:** Adu (Bathroom); **KITCHEN MIXER:** Kohler; **DOUBLE-EQUAL KITCHEN SINK:** DEERFIELD UNDERMOUNT; **BATHTUB:** Kohler (Construction Zone); **KITCHEN MIXER WITH SWIVEL SPOUT AND PULL-OUT SPRAY:** KWC America (Elegant Additions); **RETRACTABLE WALL.**

**Dallas, Austin**

Contractor: Construction Zone International

Consultants: SHELL/ CORE ARCHITECT: QTA Architects; STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: L.A. Fussers Partners; MEP ENGINEER: Blum Consulting Engineers; LIGHTING DESIGN: Studio Lumina; INTERIOR DESIGN: Emily Summers Design Associates; MILLWORK AND CASEWORK: Circle C Millwork; WATERPROOFING:**

**Torchy’s, Highland Ranch, CO**

Contractor: Epic Construction

**Resources ALL STRASS AND BRASS ACCENTS: Makehaus; WOOD TRELLIS BUILDOUT: Prestige Iron; WALLPAPER: Erica Wakerly; Fan in Black and White/Spiral White Line/Black (Supply Showroom); TILE: Architecta; QUE LINDE SCONCES: Cedar and Moss - Aimee Sconce; TRELLES CHANDELIERS: Restoration Hardware - Viti Mirrored 3-Tier; "DAMN GOOD" SIGN: Al Ross Sign Group; CUSTOM BANQUETTES: Concept Services

**Torchy’s, Fayetteville, AR**

Consultants: STRUCURAL ENGINEER: DCI Engineers; MEP ENGINEER: MPW Engineering; ARCHITECT OF RECORD: Cornell Morgan, AIA; CUSTOM LIGHTING: Warbach Lighting and Design

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Encountering “Zephyr,” a recent Texas Tech University Public Art commission by Mark Fornes, is like approaching an otherworldly object tentatively touching down. It’s a visual aberration, something forged more from computer screen than from earth. Or like a giant treat, plucked and dropped from a box of colorful candies. As art, it appears to share formal cues with the Robert Bruno sculpture outside the College of Architecture. Yet, shape grammar comparisons limit more generative readings of art, architecture, and site. Deeper stories always exist.

Lubbock is a place that collects curious appearances, or witnesses of such appearances. We can chart deep timelines through megafauna remains of Columbian mammoths hunted while they visited water sources. We can register the expansive impact of the nomadic equestrian skills of the Comanche Nation occupying the Llano Estacado from the 1600s through the 1800s. And, we can track terraforming that followed the introduction of cotton cultivation in the early 1900s and subsequent cattle feedlot development. Bill Brown’s 1997 16mm essay film, “Hub City,” presents three weather reports from Lubbock linking invisible lines in the sky across the direct tornado strike that decimated downtown in 1970, the day the music died with the crash of the plane carrying Buddy Holly in 1959, and the sighting of the unidentified Lubbock Lights in 1951. The film stands as an operational portrait of place and time. Like another recently completed public artwork, “Oblique Intersection,” by Lead Pencil Studio, it activates genuine connections and narrative possibilities. Near the film’s end, Brown states: “I like to think Buddy could read the writing in the sky, the way people born on the Plains can read the sky better than almost anyone else. But, maybe he couldn’t. Maybe in the end, when he looked up at the sky, that’s all he saw. Just the sky.” This prompts one to ponder how “Zephyr” may be more than just a wind-blown uniform flying object.

Chris Taylor is director of Land Arts of the American West at Texas Tech University and an associate professor of architecture.