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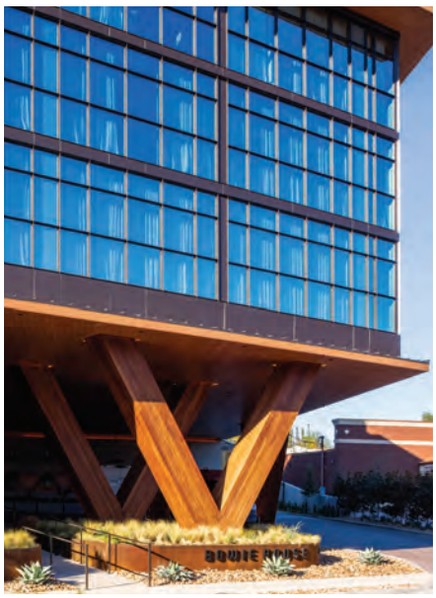
Texas Architect



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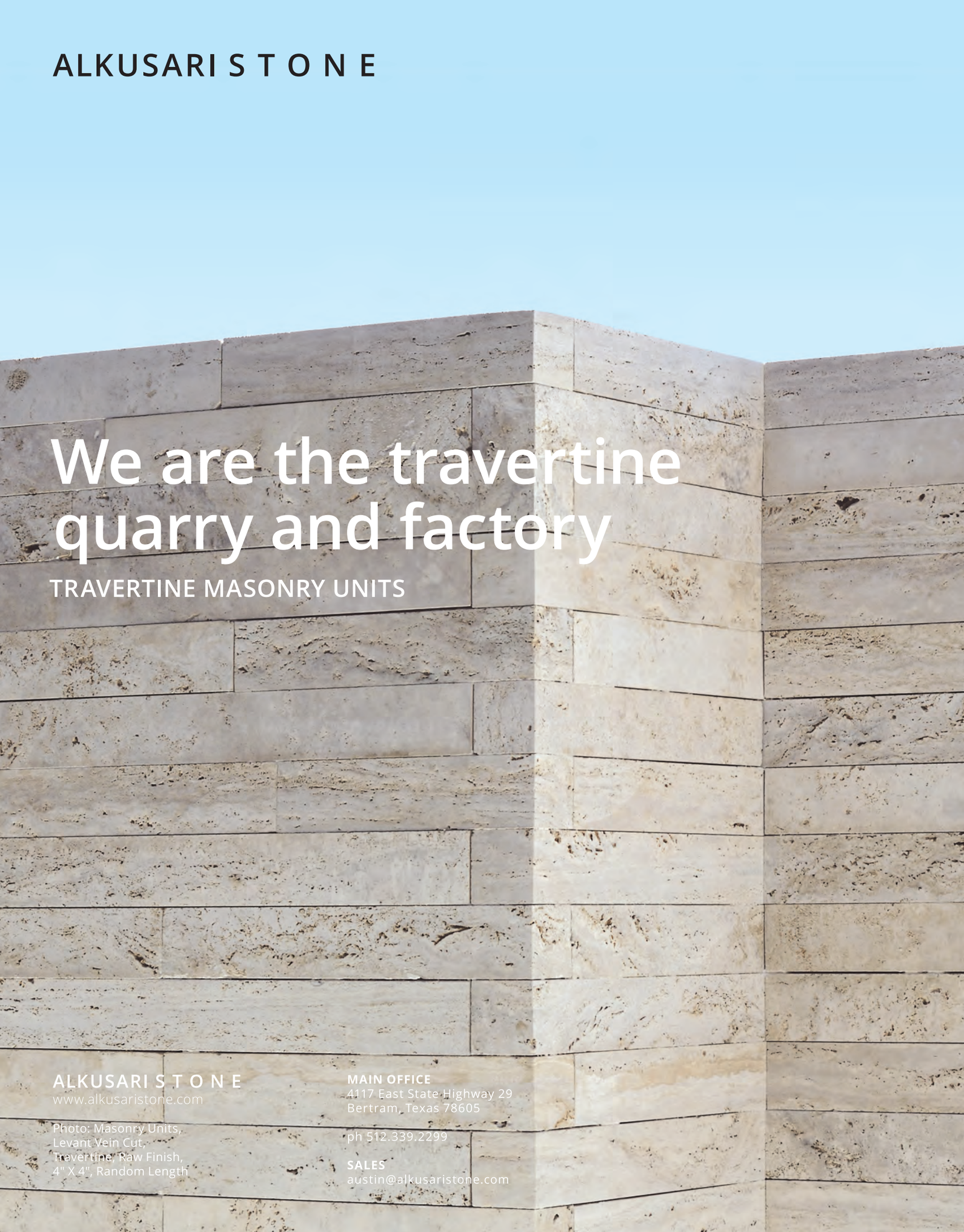

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DONALD JUDD, 100 UNTITLED WORKS IN MILL ALUMINUM, 1982–86. PERMANENT COLLECTION, THE CHINATI FOUNDATION, MARFA, TEXAS. PHOTO BY ALEX MARKS, COURTESY THE CHINATI FOUNDATION.

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STEPHEN "CHICK" RABOURN, AIA is an architect, builder, and writer in Marfa who recently chaired the TxA Publications Committee. In this issue, he writes about "tricks" and "exaggerations" employed in successful architecture and design projects. See page 36.

POOJA DESAI is an architectural designer, urban planner, landscape designer, writer, and film photographer based in Houston. She is currently a landscape designer at SWA. For this issue, she takes us on a tour of the delightful Haii Keii in Houston (p. 74)

CHRISTOPHER FERGUSON is an Austin-based architect, photographer, and writer who directs business development and key accounts for the New York ad agency Clickspring Design. His article on page 66 focuses on Cosmic Saltillo in East Austin and the rich complexity of this adaptive reuse project.

LAURA FOSTER, AIA of El Paso has worked in local government for more than a decade and currently serves as El Paso Water's first architect. She writes about the impact of Lisa Heschong's seminal book *Thermal Delight in Architecture* and her recent follow-up work focused on "visual delight" (p. 60).

NYX VALERDY MARQUEZ, AIA is an architect at the Houston studio of Perkins&Will and volunteers on TxA's Publications Committee. Her article "Delight is in the Details" explores the culture of collaboration driving today's approach to Total Design (p. 82).

ABIGAIL THOMAS graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and works as a designer at McKinney York Architects. She is also an editorial assistant for *Texas Architect* magazine. Her article about Nicole Blair Architect's The Perch appears on page 44.

CORRECTION

The cover image for the Spring 2026 "Adaptation" issue was from a project completed by students Anna Rohn, Valentina Tenorio Valera, and Hannah Patterson as part of Andy Bako's Fall 2025 UTSOA design studio Measure Twice. It was inadvertently attributed to Rohn alone.

LETTERS

The following comments were submitted to the editor or posted on *magazine.texasarchitects.org* in response to the articles listed.

If you have comments, send them to editor@texasarchitects.org.

KERCHUNK!: REFLECTIONS ON FOR AN ARCHITECTURE OF REALITY (FALL 2025)

I am happy to announce that *For An Architecture of Reality* is being reprinted by ORO editions for Fall 2026. Michael Benedikt, OBM, can now inspire another generation of architecture students. I am very grateful to Darwin Harrison for the insights in this essay, for his love for the book, and for his generous offer of support for the project. It was Darwin's joy for realness and his love for this book that helped me decide to have it reprinted without delay. For those who want to learn where the trajectory of Michael Benedikt's thought took him, his final book, *Architecture Beyond Experience*, is also being reprinted in Fall 2026.

Amelie Benedikt

THE COOTIE CATCHER (SPRING 2026)

Thank you so much for including the Cootie Catcher in the "Adaptation" issue. I'm routinely blown away by *Texas Architect* magazine—the relevant and progressive content, the graphic design, the quality of writing. I think it captures the zeitgeist and compels the industry to be a force of good. … I found the "Adaptation" issue hopeful (when hope is badly needed!) and am extremely honored to be a part of it. Thank you for your outstanding work and for the opportunity to contribute, Ana!

Warm regards,
Cotton Estes, AIA

RIFFING ON THE PAST (SPRING 2026)

Thank you all for putting together such a great issue, including the Camaraderie spreads. I am always so proud of the publication Texas puts together of our community's work. Ross's text is one of the best pieces of critical journalism on my work that I have read. Seriously. I learned so much from his take on the work.

Thank you all,
Troy Schaum, AIA

THE ARCHITECT OF THE FUTURE (SPRING 2026)

I like the way Michael Malone's evocative questions about the future orbit the gravitational pull of his four beautiful sketches: the article's words on white paper, the sketches on black paper. Also significant is the title's unusual typeface design: basic letterforms with portions of those forms flying wonderingly around. To me, both these graphic moves answer the author's musings about the future. That is, the essence of architecture will probably stand as it always has, while life's complications swirl ever around it.

Max Levy, FAIA

Q&A WITH UTSA'S MICHAELANGELO SABATINO (SPRING 2026)

What a wonderful article! We are all blessed to have Michelangelo in our great city pushing for all the same ideals and goals that attracted all of us to the rich history and texture of this beautiful place. … I know you will deepen that commitment to the school of architecture education, but also in the hearts and minds of each student while you guide them as dean. We are so happy you are here with us.

Tim Blonkvist, FAIA

ON THE COVER

Crux Pflugerville by Derrington Building Studio. Photo by Leonid Furmansky.

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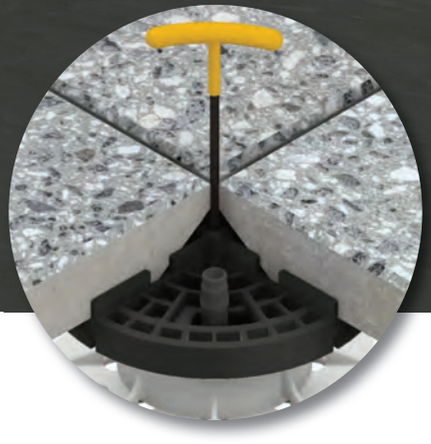

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SPACES FOR THE UNEXPECTED

by Krystyn Haecker, AIA

Delight often comes from the unexpected. I'm reminded of moments I've experienced in places like Siena, Italy, or San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, when a narrow street suddenly opens into a plaza alive with music, conversation, and people *gathered* together.

These places are rarely destinations you set out to find. Instead, they reveal themselves gradually, as though the city has quietly made room for life to unfold. A sculpture may anchor the center of the square, small groups linger in conversation, and the rhythms of daily life spill naturally into the space. The architecture feels as though it has grown organically over time, creating the conditions for people to come together in ways that feel both natural and joyful.

Moments like these reveal something essential about how architecture creates the conditions for delight. It often emerges in the spaces between buildings—in the pause at the edge of a plaza, in a quiet courtyard, or along a lively street where people *gather* without instruction.

Architecture has the power to shape how people come together. At its best, it creates spaces that invite connection, curiosity, and shared experience. And while architects carefully consider form, program, and material, we also know that the most meaningful moments in a place are often the ones we could never fully anticipate.

We cannot foresee every way the buildings and spaces we design will be used. Nor should we try to. Instead, we create frameworks that allow communities to shape places in ways that are authentic to them. In those moments—when life unfolds naturally, when people linger longer than expected, when a space begins to reflect the rhythms of those who use it—architecture becomes something more than the sum of its parts.

Communities complete the places we design. This is true across every scale. A park may become a shared living room for a city. A courtyard may invite neighbors to linger at the end of the day. A table at home provides a place for connection between family members and friends. It is in these instances that spaces move beyond design and become part of daily life—and where delight often takes hold.

That same sense of unexpected connection can emerge in the moments when we come together as a profession. Recently, our board came together at Prairie View A&M University School of Architecture. What began as a regular board meeting quickly became something more meaningful as we spent time listening to students share their experiences and aspirations for the profession.

There was an unmistakable energy in the room—a sense of curiosity, ambition, and possibility. The conversations were a reminder that delight can emerge in unexpected moments of connection. Hearing these students speak on the impact they hope to make left many of us energized and hopeful for the future of architecture.

Experiences like this reinforce why *gathering* matters. When we take the time to listen, share perspectives, and learn from one another, we deepen our understanding of the communities our profession serves and the responsibility we carry as designers. Through the work of the Texas Society of Architects, we have opportunities to foster more of these exchanges, which not only strengthen our profession but also shape the impact of the places we design.

As architects, we may not be able to predict every moment that will unfold in the places we design, but we can create environments that invite people in, welcome their presence, and leave room for discovery. And when communities *gather* in those spaces—when they make them their own—delight has a way of following. ☐

Krystyn Haecker, AIA, is a principal and partner at Mirador Group in Houston and the 2026 TxA president. The TxA26 Annual Conference, themed "Gather," will take place October 15-17 in San Antonio.

↑ TxA spring 2026 board meeting at Prairie View A&M University

COURTESY SHARNA PASCOLO

A NEW NORMAL FOR SXSW?

by Anastasia Calhoun, Assoc. AIA, NOMA

South by Southwest has long occupied a memorable and influential position in the cultural landscape of Austin. Since its founding in 1987, it has evolved from a modest music festival into a sprawling convergence of film, technology, design, and media—a place where indie bands might rub shoulders with startup founders, and where emerging ideas could still plausibly take center stage. For decades, under the steady stewardship of longtime leadership, the festival cultivated a reputation for discovery, even as it scaled into a global brand.

SXSW 2026, however, felt decidedly different—understandably so, given both changes in festival leadership and broader shifts in Austin's urban fabric. With the city's convention center demolished in preparation for a new one, the event became more decentralized, spreading across a wider array of downtown venues. This shift was not without its merits; it encouraged attendees to explore less familiar parts of the city. I, for one, found myself in buildings I had never entered in years of living in Austin. The festival was also shortened from 10 days to seven, a change that made it noticeably more manageable. At the same time, many international artists reportedly faced visa challenges, further thinning the cultural mix.

The event has clearly entered a new phase—at least for now—one that many experienced as less populated and curiously subdued. The absence of major corporate activations was particularly striking. In previous years, downtown Austin became a kind of urban showroom, with tech giants and media companies staging elaborate takeovers of hotels, parking lots, and entire blocks. This year, many of those spaces sat quiet; others felt like echoes of past iterations—such as the Paramount+ Lodge—or were scaled back into more provisional programming. Amazon's once-dominant presence at Hotel San José was notably absent. At the same time, corporate behemoths like Walmart maintained a strong presence within the Innovation Conference, and AI dominated the program, with more than 250 sessions devoted to the still-emerging technology.

Meanwhile, the non-tech design track was virtually nonexistent. This absence is especially disappointing given that SXSW Eco—once a robust platform for architecture, urbanism, and sustainability—was folded into the main conference after its final standalone run in 2016. What remains now feels less like a multidisciplinary exchange and more like a consolidated narrative about how big tech proposes to solve global problems, including climate change. The result is not a return to scrappy authenticity so much as a sense of a festival gradually withering on the vine.

Within this recalibrated landscape, however, smaller collateral gatherings took on heightened importance. One such event was Design House, an inaugural program that offered a more focused and substantive engagement with architecture and design culture. Organized by *Austin Home*, AIA Austin, and the UT Austin School of Architecture, the event also featured an exhibition of student work, grounding the conversations in both practice and pedagogy.

The opening panel, "The New Design Conversation: Media, Influence, and the Platforms Shaping Taste," set the tone. Moderated by Bill Hanley, editor-in-chief of *Dwell*, the discussion brought together Aaron Seward, managing editor at Perkins & Will and former editor of *Texas Architect*, and myself to examine how design discourse is evolving across platforms and audiences. Notably, all three participants represented institutions that operate across both print and digital media, and the conversation reflected on the shifting roles of each, as well as the growing influence of AI in both architectural production and publishing. My take is that we may be heading toward a bifurcation—where increasingly sophisticated digital tools coexist with a renewed interest in analogue media, from print to film-based photography, alongside a turn toward less staged, more photojournalistic approaches to documenting architecture.

Subsequent panels expanded the scope. "Design on Screen" explored filmmaking and spatial storytelling through the lens of production design. A fireside chat on workplace design addressed the shifting boundaries between office and home in a post-pandemic world, while "Upward Downtown" examined Austin's rapid verticalization and its implications for a city historically defined by its horizontality.

If SXSW 2026 signaled a moment of uncertainty—marked by corporate realignment, leadership transition, and a perceptible dip in momentum—events like Design House suggest a possible path forward. Smaller, more intentional gatherings may not replicate SXSW at its peak, but they offer something arguably more valuable: less spectacle, more exchange, and a vision of the future in which the human hand remains visible and valued. □

↑ [Left to right] Aaron Seward, Anastasia Calhoun, and Bill Hanley discuss the landscape of design media at Design House.

PHOTO BY CHRIS STOKES FOR AUSTIN HOME

Anastasia Calhoun, Assoc. AIA, NOMA, is the editor of *Texas Architect*.

OPINION

ANTITRUST LAW AND THE REMAKING OF THE PROFESSION

by Chris Gannon, AIA

In November 2025, the Department of Education proposed stripping the professional designation from architecture degrees. This reclassification would limit the amount of federally backed funding available to students, raising an already high barrier to entry. It comes at a moment when architects face declining fees, increased liability concerns, and a general erosion of project agency. For a profession that still requires licensure, still requires an accredited degree, and still bears legal responsibility for public safety, something is clearly amiss.

In truth, the profession has not been in a good place for some time. Practicing architecture is not easy and barely profitable. Our sleepless graduates earn less than a third of what doctors and lawyers make, and that gap narrows only slightly in the first years of their careers. The financial squeeze is felt by both employees and firms, with nearly half of firm leaders reporting in the March 2024 AIA Architecture Billings Index that fee negotiations have become more difficult over the past five years. Every architect has stories of unpaid work, chasing invoices, and the persistent sense that our fees are the most expendable part of a project. Even the way we calculate fees, whether as a percentage, a flat fee, or—worst case scenario—by the square foot, is convoluted and frequently leads to disputes and renegotiations.

At the same time that fees have declined, liability has increased. From industry threats of social inflation (rising insurance claim costs that exceed general inflation) and nuclear verdicts (jury awards typically exceeding $10 million) to annual increases in required insurance coverage and untenable construction defect liability, architects have never been strapped with such a broad and complex range of risk. This is especially true in Texas, which the AIA Trust has identified as one of the highest-stakes states in which to practice.

This pressure has led architects to narrow their scope—a rational response to lower fees and higher risk—often reducing practice to little more than code compliance and risk management. The shift is perhaps most acutely felt when graduates transition from school to the workforce. Architecture school presents the profession through its most expansive ambitions, but the reality today is far more constrained. The profession has been compressed between two poles: bespoke service for the wealthy on one end and anonymous production on the other. The civic middle—where architecture's transformative potential truly resides—has largely disappeared.

Architectural pedagogy has been under scrutiny for some time, and this article is not meant to add to that critique. That is a separate conversation. Here, the focus is on what happens after graduation. The point is that many of us feel we are working in the shadow of a diminished profession—that something of our civic relevance has been lost.

To understand how we got here, we must return to 1890 and the passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Two excellent resources have informed this article. The first, Peggy Deamer's "The Sherman Antitrust Act and the Profession of Architecture," provides an exhaustive analysis of how legislation and case law have reshaped the profession. The second, Nicolas Kemper's "Antitrust and Architecture: Coordination not Domination," traces this history through contemporary efforts to unionize. Both are well worth reading.

In brief, the Sherman Antitrust Act was enacted by Congress in the late 19th century to rein in the monopolists whose consolidated market power distorted both economic and political systems. Its intent was to encourage fair competition by limiting restraints on trade and ensuring economic rights. How architects—hardly robber barons—and the "learned professions" more broadly came to be included under its scope requires understanding both the evolution of antitrust law and the country's shifting relationship with capital. Initially, the law functioned as a tool to break up monopolies that threatened both consumer costs and democratic governance. The specter of European fascism in the 1930s, clearly backed by industrial capital, made concerns about concentrated political power even more urgent. In its early decades, antitrust enforcement was relatively successful in maintaining a more level economic playing field.

Certain exemptions from antitrust laws existed, with labor unions foremost among them, followed by a carveout for the learned professions, which were to be judged solely on merit rather than price competition. It was understood that some fields functioned best outside conventional market competition, as maintaining high professional standards served the public good. Within this framework, architects adhered to a strict code of ethics that, among other provisions, prohibited including a price of service in proposals. Instead, fees were based on standardized schedules tied to project type and complexity. This system allowed architects to be evaluated on merit while ensuring compensation sufficient to support high-quality design.

However, in the 1970s the directive of the law changed. U.S. Solicitor General Robert Bork argued that antitrust law should prioritize economic efficiency above all else

and that restricting the growth of firms could harm consumer welfare. In effect, antitrust enforcement shifted away from limiting the size and power of corporations, so long as goods and services could be delivered at an ever-lower cost. The consequences of this shift are evident all around us today in the dominance of mega-corporations and the near disappearance of smaller, independent mom-and-pop enterprises.

This new interpretation proved hostile to the learned professions exemption. In 1975, in *Goldfarb v. Virginia State Bar*, the Supreme Court ruled that fee schedules, in this case for lawyers, constituted price-fixing and violated antitrust principles. The Court also determined that the "learned professions" were not exempt from the Sherman Act, which applies broadly to all "trade or commerce."

Professional codes of ethics soon came under scrutiny as well. Deamer writes, "Professional codes of ethics were increasingly seen as the essence of collusional thinking and became the target of the DOJ." In 1978, in *National Society of Professional Engineers v. United States*, the Supreme Court held that prohibiting competitive bidding—an ethical standard for both engineers and architects—suppressed price competition and therefore violated antitrust law. The NSPE argued that competitive bidding would incentivize cutting corners and compromise public safety. The Court rejected this argument, and the result was the enforcement of open competition. This case is also significant because the professional organization did not at first accept the DOJ's consent decree, which would have negotiated new operational procedures without having to admit guilt, but instead opted to contest the allegations in court. The enormous legal cost to the NSPE established an effective deterrent for other professional organizations, who have all since accepted consent decrees when faced with antitrust compliance.

Two additional actions targeted the AIA directly. In 1972, the Department of Justice challenged the AIA's long-standing fee schedule, in place since the 1860s, along with other measures that limited competition among members. To avoid a costly trial, the AIA accepted a consent decree eliminating both the fee schedule and restrictions on competitive bidding, despite opposition from members. A second case in 1990 further restricted coordination: After the president of AIA Chicago circulated documents on fee-setting practices, the AIA agreed to another consent decree prohibiting architects from discussing fees with one another altogether.

Today, antitrust law can be understood as encouraging *vertical domination* while prohibiting *horizontal coordination*. The irony of the post-Bork interpretation of the Sherman Act is that it promotes the very consolidation the original law sought to prevent. This consolidation reduces market variation and flattens services, pushing the profession toward small boutique firms catering to the wealthy on one end and large corporate conglomerates optimized for efficiency on the other.

The result of forced competition is a race to the bottom. Lower fees mean less time to do the work, which in turn produces shallower, less rigorous architecture. The public realm suffers, and so does the profession's role within it. It becomes increasingly difficult to demonstrate value when fees are treated as negotiable and the product itself as interchangeable.

So what is to be done?

Other professions have found ways to operate within these constraints. The American Council of Engineering Companies, for example, has shown how implicit coordination can navigate antitrust limits through an anonymized peer benchmarking program, enabling firms to calibrate pricing against aggregated market data without direct coordination among competitors. This offers a compelling precedent for our own profession.

The legal framework supporting such mechanisms, however, has grown less stable. In 2016, the DOJ issued formal guidance establishing a safe harbor for neutral third-party compensation surveys; in 2023, it rescinded that guidance without replacement, leaving firms across industries to navigate antitrust exposure on a case-by-case basis. In 2024, the DOJ took action against the MLS, dismantling the commission-sharing structure that had long set implicit fee norms for realtors. Together, these developments reflect a broader pattern of systematically dismantling tools that might enable cooperation.

A more durable solution lies in legislation. The *Parker v. Brown* doctrine establishes that state-sanctioned activity is exempt from federal antitrust law, meaning state legislatures can create protected frameworks for professional fee guidance. This presents a clear opportunity for organizations like TxA to lead, and international precedents exist: Australia recently carved out exactly such an exception for small firms, while Germany has maintained its government-approved fee schedule, the HOAI, as a professional baseline for some time.

Additional avenues exist for collective action within current law, and some architects are already pursuing them. Unionization shifts workers into a different antitrust exemption. In April of this year, employees at New York's Sage and Coombe Architects became only the second firm in the country to join Architectural Workers United. Unionization exerts new pressure on firm leadership that may create tensions with existing clients and will need sustained support before becoming widely effective. Firms can also merge, forming entities large enough to set internal fee structures that would be illegal to coordinate externally. More broadly, legal scholars Sanjukta Paul and Tim Wu have argued that antitrust enforcement has drifted from its original purpose of protecting competition among equals toward protecting big business and disadvantaging the little guys.

We must embolden our professional organizations to face the realities of both past and present challenges. The foundations of the profession are not sound, but there is a path forward through collective action. It begins with an honest assessment of how architecture operates within broader systems of federal governance. We still have the power to shape the public realm, but doing so will require real policy work and sustained advocacy. ☐

Chris Gannon, AIA, is the principal at Shams Gannon Architecture, advancing missing middle housing in design and policy. He chairs AIA Austin's Housing Advocacy Committee, sits on Austin's Building and Fire Board of Appeals, and is active in local and statewide housing organizations.

TEXAS DEBUTS CIRCULAR ECONOMY SUMMIT

by Allison Peitz, AIA

↑ This past February at the inaugural Circular Economy Summit, Kelly Alvarez Doran (founder at Ha/f Climate Design) presents during the Day 1 plenary session on building resilience.

PHOTO BY CORY AMES

Last February, San Antonio became the epicenter of a growing global movement when experts in circular design and implementation gathered for the inaugural Circular Economy Summit—the first event of its kind in Texas. Organized through a partnership between local nonprofit Circular San Antonio and the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation, the conference brought together leaders from across industries to explore how circular strategies can dramatically reduce waste and to rethink how resources are used.

With the built environment responsible for nearly 40 percent of solid waste generated worldwide, the summit placed particular emphasis on construction and demolition practices, while also highlighting innovations in textile reuse, food recovery, and technology-driven solutions that minimize waste across daily life. Together, these conversations underscored a powerful idea: Waste is not inevitable—it is a design flaw.

A circular economy offers a compelling alternative to the traditional linear model of "take, make, waste," in which products are purchased, briefly used, and ultimately landfilled. Often described as the next generation of sustainability, circularity focuses on maximizing resource efficiency and extending product life cycles. More important, it addresses the root cause of waste: the overconsumption of virgin, nonrenewable materials in single-use applications.

Interest in circular economy principles has surged, with media coverage and industry discussion nearly tripling over the last five years. That momentum was clearly reflected at the summit. Tickets sold out, and attendees traveled hundreds—sometimes thousands—of miles to participate. Designers, educators, policymakers, contractors, researchers, business leaders, and nonprofit professionals filled the rooms, creating a rare crossdisciplinary exchange. "The high number of people attending from out of state was a testament to the quality and curation of our program as a multidisciplinary, action-oriented conference," said Stephanie Phillips, co-founder of Circular San Antonio.

The summit featured keynote presentations from Jo-Anne St. Godard, chief executive officer of Canada's Circular Innovation Council, and Amy Aussieker, executive director of the Envision Charlotte Innovation Barn, an organization widely regarded as a national model for municipal circularity initiatives. Sessions ranged from large-scale commercial deconstruction case studies to food waste diversion pilots, circular supply chain development, and emerging circular science research.

Christopher Moken, also co-founder of Circular San Antonio, shared, "I was blown away by the level of engagement—presentation rooms were packed, and there were so many questions following each presentation. There was such a clear hunger to learn and engage."

San Antonio's leadership in this space is no accident. In 2022, the city implemented a residential deconstruction ordinance requiring many older homes to be carefully dismantled rather than demolished, allowing valuable materials to be salvaged and reused. One of only a handful of cities nationwide with such a policy, San Antonio's ordinance is among the most stringent in the country. The Circular Economy Summit further solidified the city's role as a regional—and increasingly national—leader. "San Antonio has a deep-rooted culture of repairing, preserving, and stewarding assets," Phillips noted. "That cultural fabric makes circular thinking feel natural here—it's already embedded in many of our communities."

With plans to host future summits, Circular San Antonio is building a platform that invites the design community to lead. As material scarcity, climate pressure, and regulatory change accelerate, San Antonio's circular moment offers a clear invitation: to design buildings that endure, adapt, and give more than they take. □

Allison Peitz, AIA, is an architect at Lake Flato Architects in San Antonio.

ICC BRINGS FOCUS TO ACOUSTICS STANDARDS

by Richard Sternadori, Assoc. AIA

When people think about disabilities, the images are often those of people with mobility impairments—wheelchair users, scooters, walkers, and the like. Accordingly, the International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA) is the familiar blue stick figure in a wheelchair seen on signage. And while approximately 70 percent of Americans who qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have mobility challenges, that statistic reflects an incomplete—albeit understandable—perception of the act's scope. What other impairments, and what associated architectural responses embedded in the ADA and model codes, affect the remaining 30 percent of people with disabilities?

Professional designers understand that the ADA and model codes also include design considerations for people with a wide range of sensory and neurological disabilities—too many to list comprehensively here. Among these, deafness, being hard of hearing, tinnitus, hyperacusis, deaf-blindness, and related auditory conditions affect approximately 12 million people in the United States and 1.8 million in Canada. Yet the sociological awareness and architectural equity afforded to people with hearing impairments have historically been less prominent than those addressing mobility. Encouragingly, efforts are now underway to address these disparities in a more systematic way.

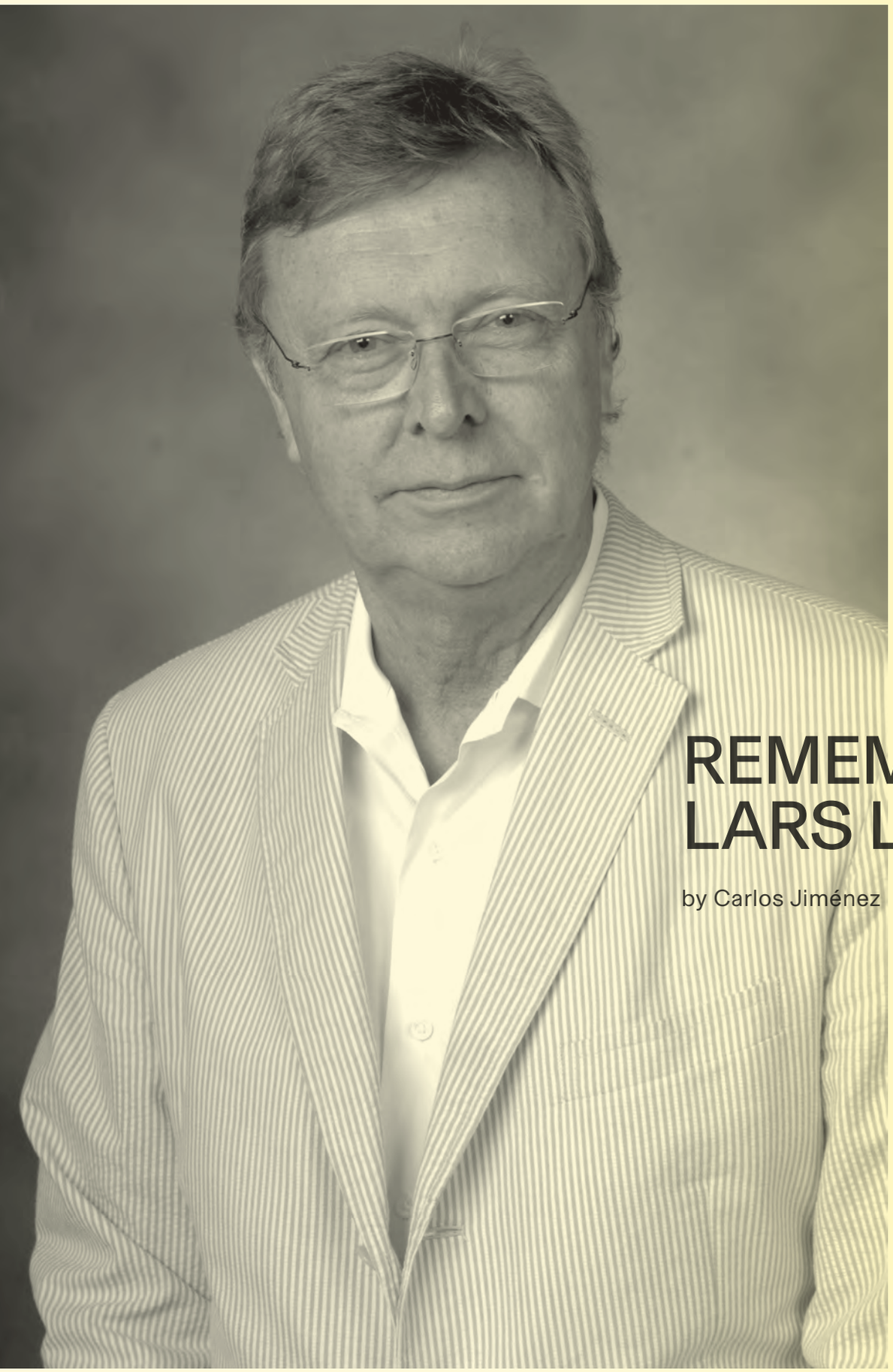
Enter the International Code Council (ICC) A118 Acoustics for the Built Environment Committee (IS-ABEC). Developed in partnership with Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC), this joint American and Canadian initiative represents the first in a broader suite of accessibility standards intended to harmonize requirements across North America. Although framed under the umbrella of acoustics, the committee's work is more precisely concerned with how the built environment supports—or hinders—people with hearing impairments.

The committee is advancing a comprehensive approach that considers both site design and architectural features influencing acoustic performance, as well as how individuals navigate and occupy public and residential spaces. Its work targets persistent barriers in the acoustic environment, with an emphasis on improving wayfinding; managing noise and reverberation; and refining the design of specialized environments such as service counters, learning spaces, shared offices, and support areas. The effort also addresses the integration of audio amplification and transmission systems, assistive listening technologies, and public address systems—recognizing that these elements are critical to equitable access but have historically received uneven attention in codes and standards.

The recently empaneled IS-ABEC A118 Committee comprises 14 members, including builders, code officials, design professionals, government regulators, industry stakeholders, consumers with hearing disorders, and an ICC liaison. Since convening in January 2025, the committee has projected a timeline of two to two and a half years for completion. It has already developed draft code language addressing public address systems and is currently advancing related efforts across several areas. These include coordination with NFPA 72 on visible and audible alarms; UL 1628 on visible signaling devices for fire alarm and signaling systems; and UL 1971 on signaling devices for the hearing impaired. Additional areas of focus include balancing noise levels for both comfort and hearing-damage prevention; incorporating workplace considerations informed by OSHA and Alberta, Canada, provisions; addressing the potential for alarms to trigger PTSD or seizure disorders; and mitigating noise transmission from exterior sources and HVAC systems.

Interested parties are encouraged to participate in the process. The committee meets virtually on the second Wednesday of each month from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. EST. To receive meeting notices, access minutes, and join the conversation, contact the ICC via its committee application portal and indicate your interest in the IS-ABEC A118 Committee. You may also contact ICC committee liaison Kim Paarlberg directly at kpaarlberg@iccsafe.org. For additional information, visit the ICC website at *www.iccsafe.org/committees/is-abec/*. ☐

Richard Sternadori, Assoc. AIA, M.A. ARCH, M. ED, CBO, CRC, ACTCP, retired in 2025 as the senior program coordinator, adjunct faculty, and research principal investigator with the University of Missouri Department of Architectural Studies, Great Plains ADA Center. He holds a Master of Arts/Architecture and a Master of Education in psychology with a focus on disability rehabilitation.



REMEMBERING LARS LERUP

by Carlos Jiménez

← Lars Lerup served as dean at Rice Architecture from 1993 to 2009.
PHOTO COURTESY RICE ARCHITECTURE

"Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!
Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly.
You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be."
—Tomas Tranströmer, *For the Living and the Dead* (1989)

Lars Lerup died on November 5, 2025. It has been difficult for me to grapple with this loss. Lars seemed to go on forever, his quick mind and restless spirit always in motion, drawn to explore any subject that provoked him. I write these lines with a deep sense of gratitude for the loyalty and support that he gave me and many other colleagues.

I first met Lars in 1993. In the mid 1980s Lars occasionally traveled to Houston as a visiting critic at Rice from Berkeley, where he lived and taught. I came close to meeting the elusive and dynamic Lerup in the fall of 1987 when we taught separate halves of a visiting design studio at Texas A&M University. I finally met Lars when he moved to Houston in 1993 to become the dean of the Rice School of Architecture. He came to my studio, and we soon engaged in animated conversation. I felt an instant kinship, as if I had known him for a long time. At that first meeting we talked about literature, particularly about the works of Jorge Luis Borges, a writer we both loved and admired. I mentioned to Lars that I had designed a house for Borges in one of my undergraduate design studios. His interest piqued, he wanted to see the drawings, but I couldn't find them, so I promised that I would show them to him another time. Just as Lars was about to leave, he stopped, turned, and, on an impulse, asked me to give a talk at the school and teach a visiting studio the next academic year. I recall responding with a hesitant "Well, maybe, perhaps," as at the time I was quite busy with projects under construction and commitments to teach at two other schools. Sensing my trepidation, Lars admonished me, in his gruff and charming way, noting that I should not be intimidated by his Scandinavian demeanor, for deep inside him dwelled the heart of a Latin. I would learn many times over what he meant by this.

As I think of Lars, I am reminded of a passage from Borges's short story "The Aleph." It goes like this: "A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his own face."

Like the protagonist of Borges's story, Lars set out to draw the many worlds of Houston with all their perplexing contradictions, terrifying beauty, and visceral willfulness. From his apartment tower along Hermann Drive, where he lived during his deanship, Lars patiently observed the endless horizons, the turbulent and at times toxic clouds, the nurturing trees, the insatiable freeways, the resilient bayous, and the carpet of house after house unrolling across the indomitable Texas plains. Lars would chronicle and name every nuance of what appeared to most people to be an incomprehensible territory whose vastness was not only disorienting but ultimately wasteful. A keen observer of the phenomena that befall our peculiar, ever expansive metropolis, Lars took enormous pleasure in drawing and writing about them all. Gifted with the skills of a poet-engineer who drew like an artist, he could not contain his enthusiasm whenever he discovered something new, unforeseen, or obvious about the city that engulfed him, just as he could not wait to share these findings with his colleagues and students alike.

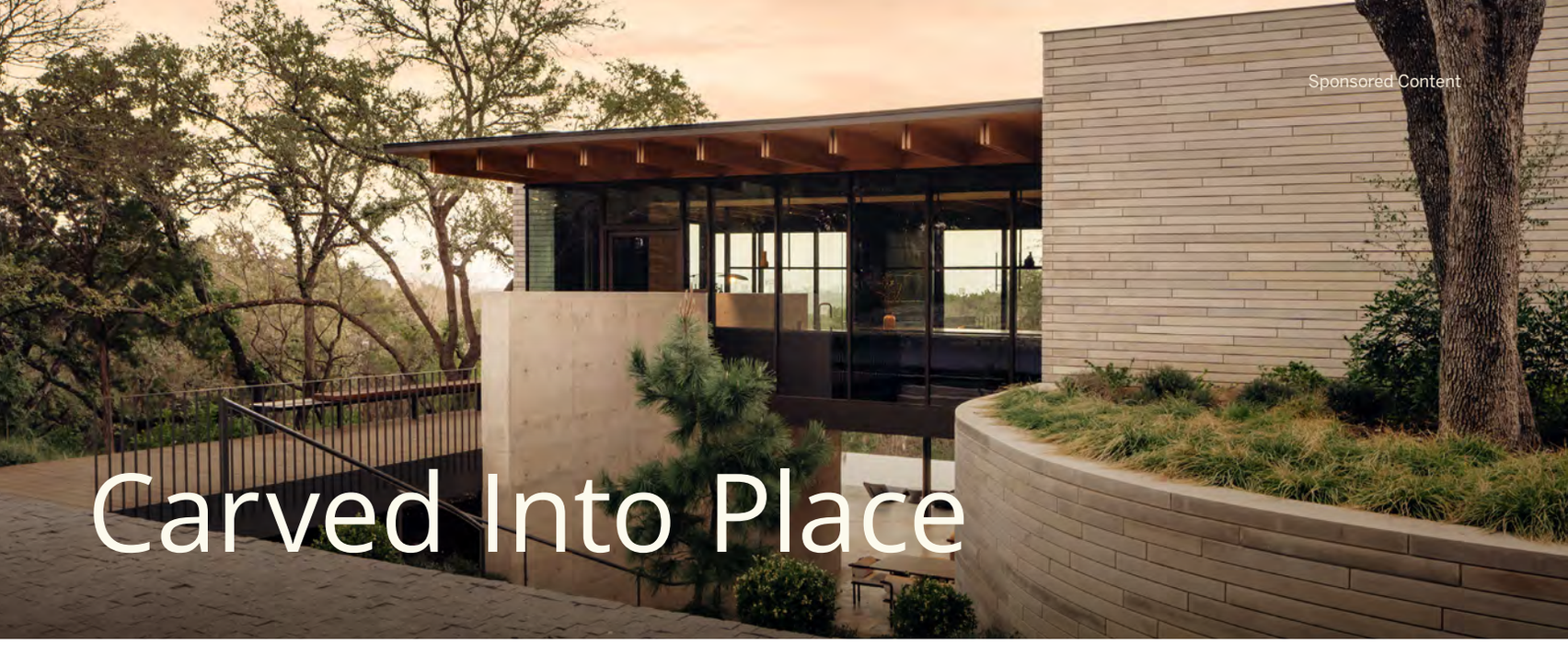
Recalling Lars's tenure as dean, I am reminded of so many shared, enriching adventures in academia and life—too many to summarize. Lars was not only essential to my academic upbringing but also to those of many other colleagues. He was a vigilant guardian of the academy's central mission: Always question the condition of things. Lars loved to live well and fully. Yet he also felt ethically compelled not to sacrifice his skepticism. He yearned for the truths of knowledge and friendship. His appetite for observation was a search for truth itself, as his curiosity was boundless. Fueling his inclination to provoke was the passion that drove Lars to celebrate his own achievements and shortcomings as well as those of others.

Throughout a long productive life, Lars wrote many books and essays, vivid chronicles of the interests that he found in the places that shaped his life, from Sweden and Berkeley to New York and Houston, from San Juan to Miami. Of all his writings, I appreciate most *The Life and Death of Objects*, which I reviewed when it was published in 2022. The book's engaging narrative takes the form of an autobiographical travelogue that leaves one wanting more. Concise and anecdotal, the storyline delights the reader with its absorbing and contagious inquisitiveness. Lars interrogates the objects that he appreciates or designs with an honesty and empathy seldom seen in works of recollection. Lars wanted his objects to be the opposite of the countless ignored or discarded products churned out by our volatile consumerist culture. As I wrote in my review, it is quite moving to read Lars's poignant reflections on his own designs. These insights allowed him to come full circle in understanding how the objects of his life became an all-encompassing mirror—a cherished mirror that, along with his drawings and writings, is the true trace of his life. As he writes: "For those of us still paranoid and critical, there is no redemption in sight, yet there is in the life and death of things a line of thought that outweighs doom. Here, in and around the small, I have found a cohort whose manifestations espouse no evil, bear no harm. They just want us to see them."

Lars revels in provoking us to look again. His objects might bestow a redeeming and forgiving dispensation on our lives, the opposite of those useless contraptions that weight us down with their monolithic authority. Lars Lerup's objects deserve our respect, our inquiry, our love, and, ultimately, our shared desire for freedom. How else to pause from, or break away from, a world determined to turn us all into profligate, uncritical consumers?

I treasure Lars's intrepid, leaping mind and the gentleness of his spirit, just as I will dearly miss our conversations on so many things, from the multifarious cities stretching across the Americas to the insoluble candor of Chavela Vargas's voice, from the eternal season that lingers in Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* to the pendular allegories of Aldo Rossi. To paraphrase the closing monologue in *The Great Beauty* by Jep Gambardella: "This is how it always ends, with death, but first there was life…silence and sentiment, emotion and fear…the haggard, inconstant flashes of beauty." □

Carlos Jiménez is a professor at Rice School of Architecture and principal of Carlos Jiménez Studio.



Carved Into Place

Perched in the hills of West Austin, 201 Terrace Mountain Drive is defined by the quiet elegance of Alkusari Stone Mezzo Taupe limestone. Its soft, layered tones and precise detailing shape a residence that feels both timeless and deeply rooted in place.

The limestone is quarried locally in Abilene, Texas and features a refined blend of light grey and warm beige undertones. The stone strikes a balance that feels both modern and timeless and complements wood, steel, and glass with effortless ease.

"We are the quarry and the factory, therefore our masonry units (wall cladding) aren't limited to standard formats; we offer custom sizes and finishes across six different stones," said Noah Alkusari, of Alkusari Stone. "That means the architect can carry the same stone seamlessly from exterior to interior flooring to cladding, cobblestone, flagstone, and hardscaping - allowing for seamless design continuity throughout the space."

Used throughout the project, from 4" x 3" x 48" diamond-finished masonry units on the walls to the flooring, pool decking, and step stones, the material creates a seamless visual language across interior and exterior spaces.

"At Terrace Mountain, the Alkusari stonework operates seamlessly at both the scale of mass and detail, giving the limestone volumes a sense of weight and permanence while maintaining a level of precision that holds up in close view," said Ryan Burke, AIA, Principal of A Parallel, the architect on the project.

This precision is the result of close collaboration.

"Working closely with Alkusari from initial selection through shop drawings allows us to shape the stonework at every stage, resulting in a truly bespoke expression aligned with the architecture," he said.

Built by Arrowhead Construction, the project demonstrates how a thoughtfully selected, locally sourced material can unify design, delivering both durability and a refined, contemporary character.

"Working closely with Alkusari allows us to shape the stonework at every stage, resulting in a truly bespoke expression aligned with the architecture."

Ryan Burke, AIA
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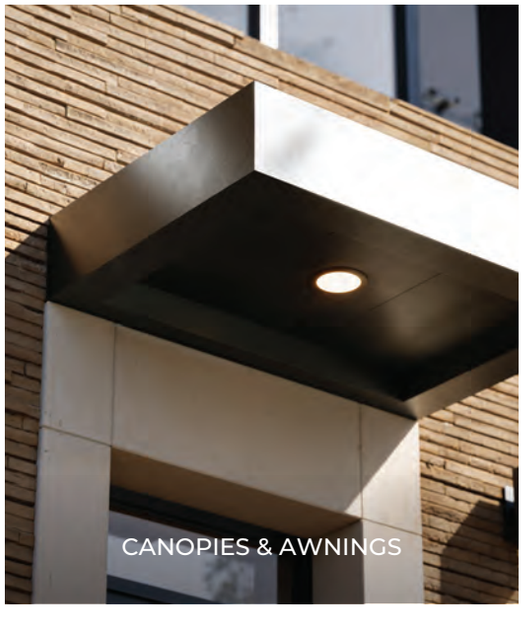
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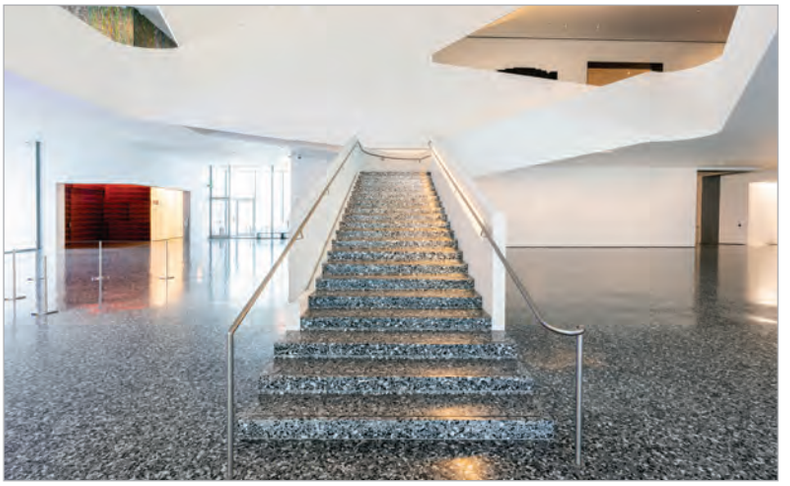

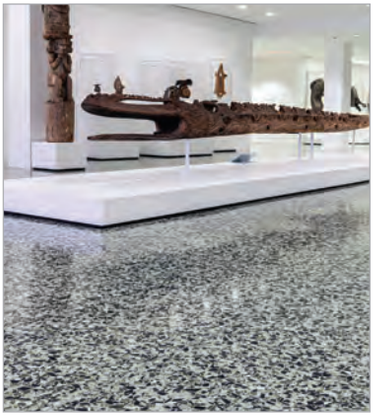

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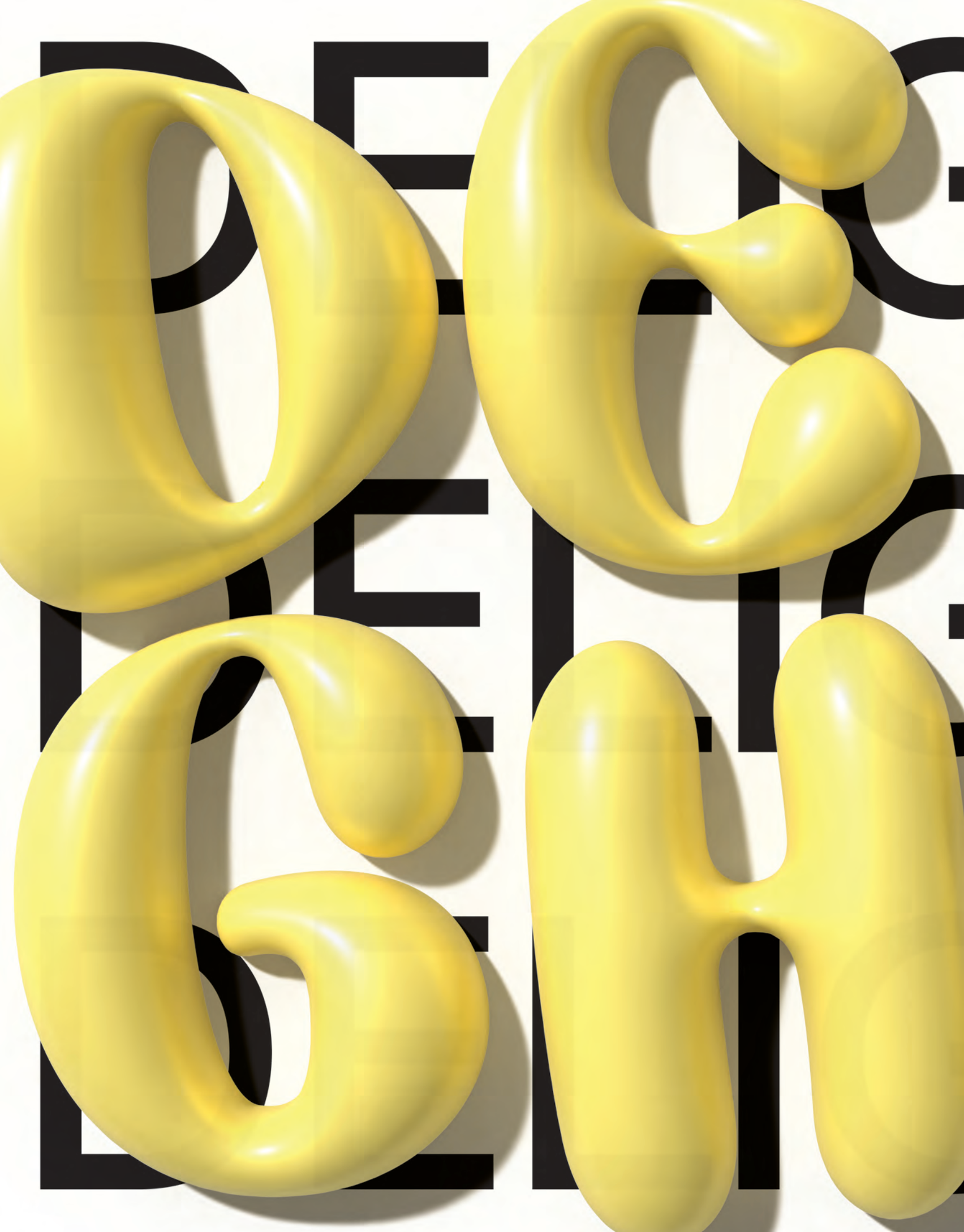
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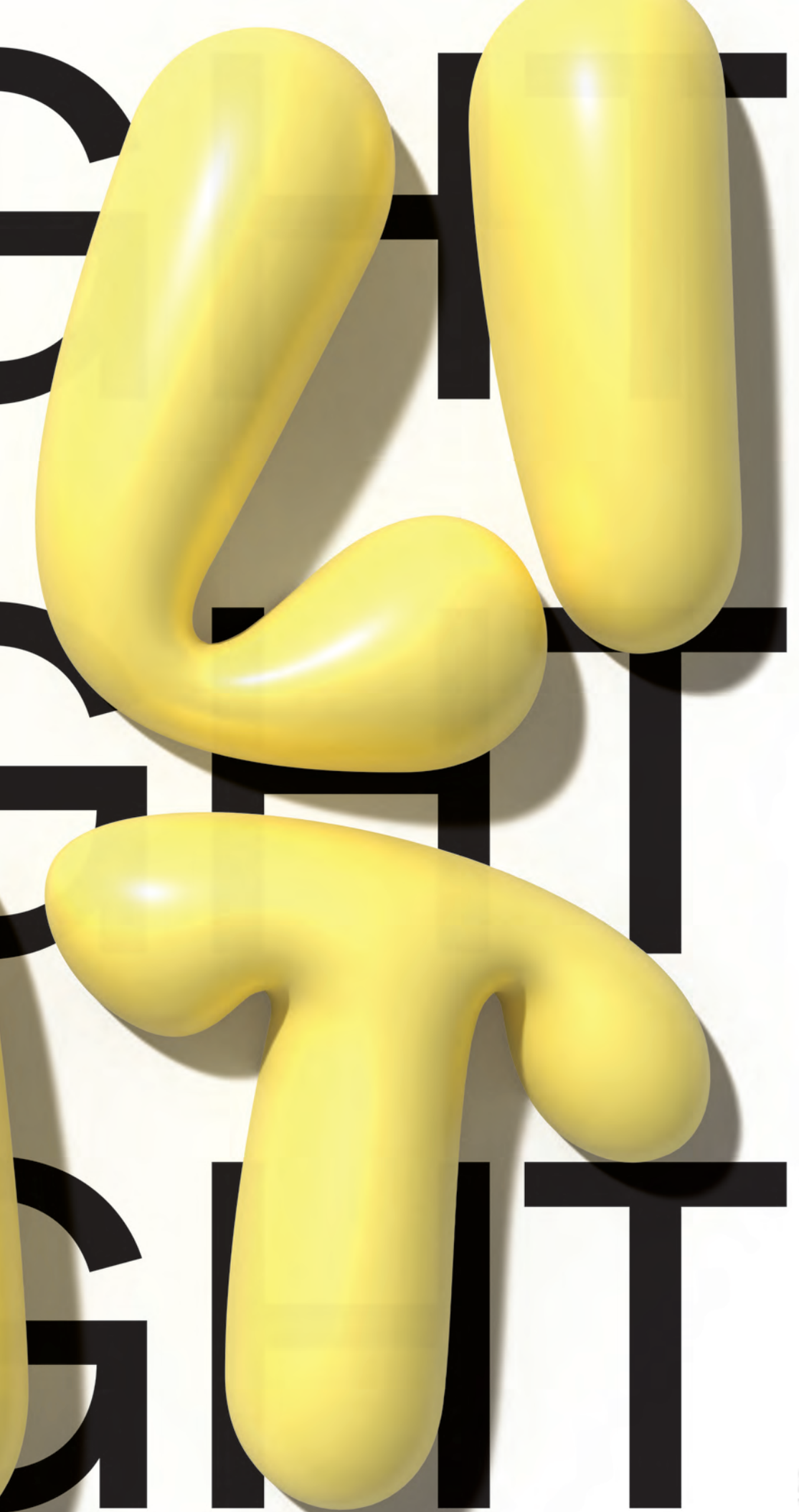


Delight in architecture is often perceived as something that arrives once the serious work is done. Once budgets are reconciled and codes satisfied, perhaps then there is a bit of room for delight. But this issue proposes something more fundamental: that delight is not an accessory to architecture but one of its quiet engines, operating at every scale. Vitruvius, in his enduring triad of firmness, commodity, and delight, positioned delight not as surplus but as an essential counterpart to stability and utility. If firmness ensures that a building stands, and commodity that it is useful, delight is what allows it to resonate.

This resonance is not merely aesthetic; it is a form of emotional durability. Buildings that delight are more likely to be remembered, revisited, and cared for. They foster attachment, cultivating a sense of belonging that extends their relevance beyond functional need alone. In this way, delight contributes to longevity—not only through physical endurance, but through the sustained investment of those who inhabit and maintain architecture over time.

Delight is also deeply embodied. It is thermal and visual, tactile and temporal. It lives in the warmth of a sunlit surface, the coolness of shade, the rhythm of structure, and the unexpected color that catches the eye. It is not only perceived but felt, often before it is understood. In this sense, delight completes the Vitruvian triad not by ornament alone, but by shaping how architecture is sensed and remembered.

Importantly, delight is rarely the product of a single authorial gesture. It accumulates through the contributions of many—designers, fabricators, craftspeople—whose attention to detail inflects the built environment with care and specificity. These moments of precision and craft are where architecture often becomes most intimate, inviting close looking and sustained engagement.

The projects and essays gathered here suggest that delight is not a singular quality but a spectrum of effects—playful, immersive, surprising, and sometimes even disorienting. Taken together, they ask us to reconsider delight not as a luxury, but as an essential dimension of architectural thinking: inseparable from firmness and commodity, and vital to how buildings endure, not only in time, but in memory.

Anastasia Calhoun

TRICKS AND EXAGGERATIONS

Words by STEPHEN "CHICK" RABOURN, AIA

Last year I had the privilege of speaking with an architect whose work is both mesmerizing in its complexity and humbling in its simplicity. I encountered a personality as receptive as it is fierce, notably devoid of clichés and platitudes. While discussing one of their projects that I highly respect, I was introduced to certain "tricks" and "exaggerations" employed in its development and execution. These terms intrigued me, pointing to a kind of ingenuity and narrative drive that broadened my understanding of how strong architectural projects are realized.

One goal of this essay is to acknowledge the myriad strategies and calibrations that facilitate projects but do not appear as visible features of the architecture. Considerations like funding, clients, program, building codes, and public relations must be craftily navigated for an exceptional project to take shape. Often consuming more time and energy than the design itself, these factors remain largely invisible to the public—and often to critics and colleagues as well. But they are owed their rightful due, and for the purposes of this essay, I will refer to them as tricks.

On the other hand, there are aspects of a project that are visible to everyone, and these are the narrative aspects of architecture. Scale, form, structure, and materials convey stories of culture and place. A second aim of this essay is to approach architecture explicitly as a storytelling device, one necessary for a culture to recognize itself and its dreams. Because storytelling is an art, and art is an intentional distortion of reality, I will refer to architectural narratives as exaggerations.

TRICKS

Architecture, like art, must grapple in order to exist. The world—at least the parts of it that finance the realms of art and architecture—tends to be either too resistant to change or too eager for it and is often slow to recognize the essential qualities of a given time and place. And yet, it always depends on the creative force of others to color its environment. For the purposes of this essay, I will conflate the roles of artist and architect, as both contend with similar challenges of creative expression within a cultural context.

The true skill of an artist is twofold. The first is craft: the ability to communicate in a particular medium. The second is craftiness: everything required, both within and beyond the medium, that allows the work to exist—what I respectfully refer to as tricks.

In this context, tricks rely on critical analysis, creative problem-solving, and persuasion; they are not shortcuts or gimmicks. They require an ever-expanding understanding of how things work at a fundamental level—culture, ecology, history, finance, planning, and production—along with the ability to understand other people's needs and perspectives.

Tricks concern the alignment of desire and opportunity. They depend on an expanded awareness and influence across all phases of a project. In bridging the gap between ambition and limitation, tricks uncover opportunities within constraints.

Tricks make architecture possible, and our role models—whoever they may be—were and are very good at them.

EXAGGERATIONS

Whether we like it or not, architects are responsible for constructing public narratives around resources, culture, and technology through aesthetic expression. This responsibility requires architects to work symbolically and to engage in the craft of storytelling. Telling stories, it turns out, is a complicated business.

"Tell it by the fireside or in a marketplace or in a movie, almost any story is almost certainly some kind of lie," said filmmaker Orson Welles, one of the preeminent storytellers of his medium. Artist Pablo Picasso also had a fixation on the ambiguities of truth: "We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies. If he only shows in his work that he has searched, and re-searched, for the way to put over his lies, he would never accomplish anything."

Today, we are inundated with misinformation, and lies are driving our cultural and political spheres as never before. But this only underscores the point: Facts yield to the arc of narrative, and narrative drives action.

Let us first establish the good faith that Welles and Picasso, as well as our architectural colleagues, generally possess. Those who enter the arts or architecture do not usually do so to deceive or mislead, or to become fabulously wealthy or famous (though Picasso and Welles are notable exceptions). Most of us are drawn in by a revelatory experience that lures us—against all reason—toward its source, instilling both gratitude and a desire to contribute something of our own.

Filmmaker Werner Herzog has spent his career chasing such experiences. "There is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth," he wrote. "It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization."

Again, we run into words—fabrication, stylization—that challenge our perception of honesty, particularly when honesty—in construction, materials, and form—stands as a central tenet of modernism. What are we to make of this?

Committed to poetic and ecstatic truths, Herzog famously staged scenes in documentaries to expose the "truths" he sought to convey, occasionally turning his real subjects into willing actors. For Herzog, facts alone do not amount to truth. As he explains, "If you want to know the facts, ask an accountant. If you want to know the truth, ask a poet."

If we think of the built environment as primarily a collection of facts, then architects are responsible for the poetry. As "poets," we must engage with fabrication, imagination, and stylization—in other words, exaggerations.

Exaggerations are the elements of the architectural narrative that make it not only legible but also illuminating. Just as a good story is not simply a recitation of events, architecture is never merely a rational assemblage of elements. It is a rhetorical composition that must engage both the reality and imagination of its audience.

WORDS BY STEPHEN "CHICK" RABOURN

Many forms of exaggeration are derided for one reason or another, yet they all serve the same purpose: to communicate a feeling or idea. Exaggerations are how stories and art are created. There is no architecture without them. Whether crude or sublime, strident or restrained, every decision is intended to produce an effect, to tell a story. If that story amounts only to an exhibition of taste or brash confrontation, what is in it for the public other than to admire or revile?

Architecture should aspire to tell culturally relevant stories that can be shared with the general public, to aspire toward a realization of truth. The best artists are not threatened by the fabrications of their crafts. "I can paint fake Picassos as well as anybody else," Picasso is reported to have once said, and that story has been told many times, including by Welles in his quasi-documentary *F for Fake*. Did Picasso actually say it? Does it matter? It is the insight and audacity of the idea that really matter, not its authenticity.

If this discussion seems to be moving too far afield, let's bring it back to someone who might agree.

Mies van der Rohe spoke passionately and eloquently about his commitment to modern design: "The long path from material through function to creative work has only a single goal: to create order out of the desperate confusion of our time." He wrote with conviction about integrity of form, structure, the honest use of materials, and the exclusion of ornament: "Form by itself does not exist—form as an aim is formalism; and that we reject!"

But Mies also understood something about tricks and exaggerations. While working on the Seagram Building in 1954, he found New York City's 1916 Zoning Resolution to be limiting. In response, he introduced a plaza—ostensibly for public use—to accommodate a high-rise slab building with no setbacks, a form he had been dreaming about for decades. "A building with no setbacks, but all set back," as described in *Architectural Forum* at the time. This maneuver allowed him to achieve the "form" he truly wanted. Judging by the level of development within the plaza, it is evident that Mies placed little emphasis on it as a public gesture. It was a trick—a means of realizing the form he had been dreaming about for decades.

The Seagram facade is famously "ornamented" with vertical bronze mullions extruded in the form of structural I-beams, an exaggeration first developed a few years earlier at Mies's first high-rise towers at the 860–880 Lake Shore Drive apartments in Chicago. When fire codes prevented the expression of structural steel elements in the residential twin towers, a decision had to be made. Mies understood that the expression of his formal ideals was more important than their reality, so he applied decorative I-beams to the facade to simulate the sense of structural order and purity he believed was so important for society to apprehend. Does anyone consider this a mistake? I doubt it, and most architects today likely accept the Miesian compromise far more readily than he ever did.

This exaggeration was worthwhile, however, because Mies had the poetic sensibility and artistic conviction to tell a story the world was ready to receive—one of an ascendent modernity, technology, clarity, and rationality. When a compelling idea is translated into a persuasive expression, reality recedes into a banal litany of facts. "The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies," Picasso reminds us.

Artist and self-identified architect Donald Judd was also adept in both tricks and exaggerations. After establishing a successful career in the art world, Judd grew dissatisfied with the transitory manner in which modern art was exhibited and the speculative way it was collected. In 1978, with the support of the Dia Art Foundation, he secured an abandoned military base in Marfa and created the Chinati Foundation, a museum of site-specific and permanently installed artworks that remain outside an art market that would undoubtedly pay dearly for them today.

How does an individual artist establish an independent museum far removed from the culture and economy of the art world? With ideas that knew no limits, paired with tactics that understood them intimately. In other words, through the use of tricks that enabled him to accomplish what few, if any, artists have achieved.

Building an entire museum from scratch would have been out of the question. The answer? Buy a large assemblage of disused buildings on nearly worthless land. Then, fix them up minimally one at a time and install works by yourself and your friends, who also happen to be defining artists of their era. There is an impossible combination of ambition and practicality to this scheme. Yet, it all feels so seamlessly brilliant and obvious today.

Judd's masterwork, *100 untitled works in mill aluminum*, is installed at the Chinati Foundation in two former artillery sheds. It is also a master class in tricks and exaggerations. The sheds—large concrete and brick structures with repetitive openings on either side originally designed as doors for military equipment—are long, cavernous shells. Judd replaced the doors with storefront glass, flooding the interiors with light and opening views to the surrounding landscape in the most inexpensive way possible.

Judd's art objects (don't call them sculpture), are modest in scale, ranging from small rectangular boxes mounted in series on walls to kitchen-island-sized forms placed individually or in groups on the floor. They express the materiality of their construction, such as plywood, steel, colored acrylic, or aluminum. At first glance, they appear as straightforward industrial fabrications, requiring precision and care but little in the way of technology or engineering.

How can these relatively small objects be satisfyingly matched with a large industrial space? Through extensive repetition, which fills the volume while reinforcing the significance of the single form—if only through its inclusion in a larger whole. For *100 untitled works in mill aluminum* Judd fabricated 100 aluminum boxes of identical dimensions—41x51x72 inches—with varying internal configurations. This strategy occupies the

Mies van der Rohe's 860-880 Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago (1952). Tricks: Steel forms used for the concrete-encased corner structure are incoporated into the facade to create the illusion of an expressed structural system. Exaggerations: Repeated ornamental I-beams on the facade imply structural purity, elevating technology and rationality into an aesthetic ideal. PHOTO BY MILLER TAYLOR

Donald Judd, *100 untitled works in mill aluminum*, 1982–86. Permanent collection, The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. Tricks: Converting a decommissioned military base into an international art destination with someone else's money; practical approaches to impossibly ambitious plans. Exaggerations: Serial repetition of fabricated and adopted elements, creating an aesthetic dream world where empty industrial spaces become cathedrals dedicated to art. PHOTO BY ALEX MARKS, COURTESY THE CHINATI FOUNDATION. DONALD JUDD ART © 2026 JUDD FOUNDATION / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK

Biblioteca Vasconcelos in Mexico City (2008), by Taller de Arquitectura X, led by Alberto Kalach. Tricks: Expanding the competition program to include a botanical garden as a "library" of plants. Exaggerations: Graphically articulated book stacks, suspended over sunken atria, monumentalize human knowledge while situating it within a broader system—one that extends into the surrounding gardens and the expressive intelligence of the natural world. PHOTO BY NAN PALMERO

floor plane while maintaining generous space around each unit, allowing for an ever-changing sequence of perspectives as one moves through the gaps. The low height of the boxes creates a sense of expansion of the space above them and, more importantly, preserves views to the surrounding landscape and sky.

The work is sublime in every respect. The rigorously repeated grid of the concrete beams and columns, receding in perspective, forms a dense composition overhead. Daylight—so often blocked or carefully moderated in gallery settings—cascades throughout the space, reflecting off the aluminum surfaces and the floor, colored by the progression of the solar cycle and shifting atmospheric conditions. Every element is exaggerated to remarkable effect: the immaculate austerity of the industrial space, the serial repetition of the aluminum boxes, the rhythm of the glazed openings, and the visual release toward the landscape beyond.

The piece tells a story of aesthetic dream logic, in which the beauty of machine finishes, daylight, and landscape are harmonized within industrial spaces co-opted as cathedrals for aesthetic worship and ritual. It unfolds like a fever dream that feels like an archetypal truth.

100 untitled works in mill aluminum so seamlessly integrates the constraints and advantages of its elements, both found and fabricated, that it defies expectation and becomes universally coherent. Brazenly ambitious and highly stylized, yet decidedly pragmatic in its execution, the work resonates with irrepressible ingenuity and a timeless reality. Tricks and exaggerations indeed.

That architects are fascinated by Judd is no surprise. What is surprising is when they can match his purity of aesthetic vision while also accommodating a public program. Biblioteca Vasconcelos, in the Buenavista neighborhood of Mexico City, is full of such surprises—combining conceptual rigor with expressive clarity within an articulated structure of concrete, steel, and glass set amid a lush sequence of botanical gardens.

The design team, led by Mexico City-based architect Alberto Kalach of Taller de Arquitectura X, distinguished its proposal from nearly 600 other entries by expanding and elevating the concept of a public library from a repository of books to something more akin to an ark of human knowledge. Recognizing that the jury would be wading through hundreds of schemes concerned primarily with housing books, the team introduced a counterpoint: a conventional interior library paired with an exterior "library" of plants. Multiple levels of botanical gardens and green spaces surround the ship-like building, creating an urban oasis defined by native species of the region.

Instead of relying on the brief to define their proposal, the team created a concept that improved and expanded on the original program with a narrative far more powerful and engaging.

Inside, five stories of book stacks are suspended from the roof structure in a shifting matrix of modular shelving units, with glass catwalks floating above a sunken linear atrium that serves as the primary circulation spine for the 250-meter-long megastructure. The effect is nearly hallucinatory in its dense articulation and spacious verticality. One cannot help but recognize the significant extent of fabrication and stylization of what is otherwise a common program, one whose technical requirements are quite modest and could be satisfied with little more than ample floor space and book stacks. Here, it becomes an exaggeration not just conceptually, but in the most literal sense as well.

Rationality—here akin to facts—is not the primary force at play. Of course, there are more rational (and more affordable) ways to make books accessible to the public. But would anyone notice? Architecture emerges only when it transcends rational planning and distorts reality in a poetic way that is legible as an aesthetic language. This narrative elevates knowledge while suspending it overhead like precious cargo, accessible to all. The articulated stacks display, tease, and lure visitors into a three-dimensional matrix of platforms and reading spaces, where seeing and being seen evokes the logic of Adolf Loos's Raumplan at an institutional scale.

The industrial language of the structure is juxtaposed with elevated gardens and green spaces beyond, establishing a balance between human ingenuity and the bountiful offerings of nature—a simulacrum of the larger urban ecosystem.

This is a narrative for which fabrication, imagination, and stylization are necessary in the creation of a heightened atmosphere where knowledge is preserved for public consumption. Facts alone can't get us there. We need exaggerations because they are the insights that alert us to the deeper truths of our culture and place.

Our aesthetic world has always been shaped by tricks and exaggerations, architecture being no exception. Most of us engage with them on a daily basis without naming or acknowledging them. Tricks tend to go uncredited because they fall through the cracks of disciplinary boundaries and often feel like a distraction from the valid work of a project. But they are needed at every turn with all available creative force.

As architects, we are taught early on to distrust exaggerations in favor of rationality, honesty, and restraint. While Judd is often described as a minimalist—a term he resisted—any critical engagement with his work tells us a different story. We find, instead, environments that are anything but minimal or restrained, aspiring instead to ecstatic aesthetic refinement at every opportunity. This is true for Mies, as well, even if by reputation we are led to believe otherwise.

If the narrative of modernism persuaded us that honesty and rationality could produce architecture, then it was an effective trick. Postmodernism, deconstructivism, and even classicism demonstrate that gimmicks make for poor tricks, and that exaggerations must be grounded in storytelling that resonates with its time and place. Today, architects must tell relevant stories if they want to exert influence within a fractured culture and what Mies might still call the "desperate confusion of our time." □

Stephen "Chick" Rabourn, AIA, is an architect in Marfa.

PERFECT FIT

An East Austin studio rises above the rest.

Words by ABIGAIL THOMAS

↵ The Perch looks out over East Austin through thoughtfully positioned windows that maximize views and privacy in equal measure.

↑ Structural components of The Perch are concealed within the walls and floor of the blue bungalow below.

→ The industrial exterior stair moves underfoot as a reminder of the forces constantly acting upon the elevated building.

Like slotting a puzzle piece perfectly into place, this accessory structure hugs its setback tent to hover just two feet above a classic East Austin home. Fittingly named "The Perch," the studio lifts itself over the roofline of a blue bungalow that serves as a workspace for one of the owners, who is a landscape architect. On an adjacent lot, a matching pink house serves as the couple's primary residence. The houses are conjoined by an expansive backyard—designed by the resident landscape architect, of course.

Searching for a way to add flexible studio space to these properties without disrupting their carefully crafted outdoor area, the owners sought out local architect Nicole Blair, AIA, to design and construct an addition that achieved the impossible. Constrained in two dimensions, Blair instead looked upward for a solution, settling her 660-sf structure atop four steel columns. Despite its close proximity to the original houses, The Perch protects the owners' privacy by angling views outward to the city skyline and surrounding East Austin neighborhood. This design makes it well-suited to its current role as an Airbnb.

To minimize the impact of construction on the site, the steel structure was fabricated off-site in three parts then craned in and welded into place in a single day. A large window in the bungalow was removed to function as the primary access point during construction, and water, electrical, and gas systems were carried up into studio from a preexisting mechanical closet. The addition touches the ground lightly on its columns, which are secured by enormous footings poured underneath the bungalow floor. The structural framing is concealed behind the house's walls, making The Perch appear supernaturally suspended. It is clad in corrugated metal wrapping smoothly around its angled forms and mirroring the rounded teardrop siding of the house beneath.

Interconnected by materiality and structure, The Perch contains a delightful series of vignettes that coalesce into a symphony of tactile and visual experiences. Its floating form is grounded by materials that are of the earth, like metal, wood, and stucco. Working with the owners to repurpose items they already possessed, Blair viewed The Perch as an exercise in compromise. A willingness to prioritize affordability—while saving enough space and funds for a few special moments—is what made this fantastical project a reality. Blair is passionate about the attainability of well-designed buildings at all scales: "To me, the best architecture can happen at any scale or budget. There are opportunities within projects of any type or size to make something feel special."

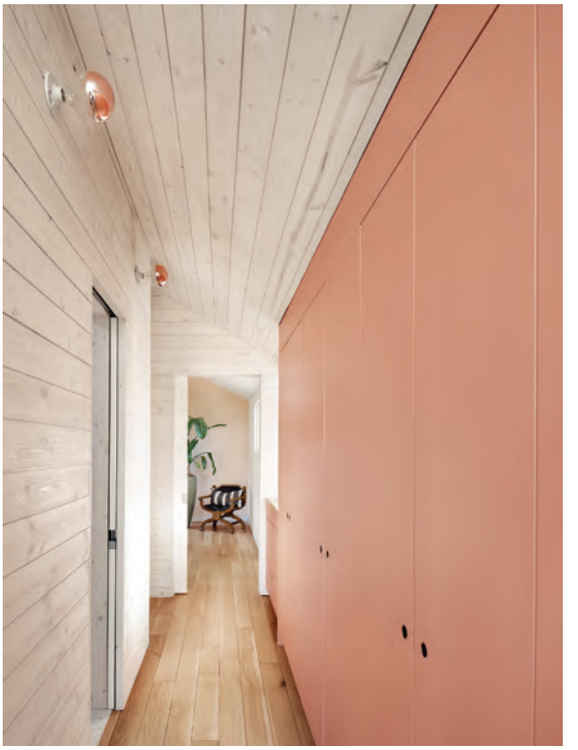
The Perch is approached via a cantilevered exterior stair. Designed to be as pervious as possible, the steps are made from bar grating topped with expanded metal decking—safe for bare feet and porous for water drainage. The material combination, inspired by an existing structure in the backyard, also allows light to permeate into the bungalow below. The stair was carefully engineered to resist lateral forces but shifts underfoot to reinforce awareness of the forces acting on the building. The industrial railing, reminiscent of rebar, is bent to temper any sharp edges and complement The Perch's corrugated siding.

WORDS BY ABIGAIL THOMAS

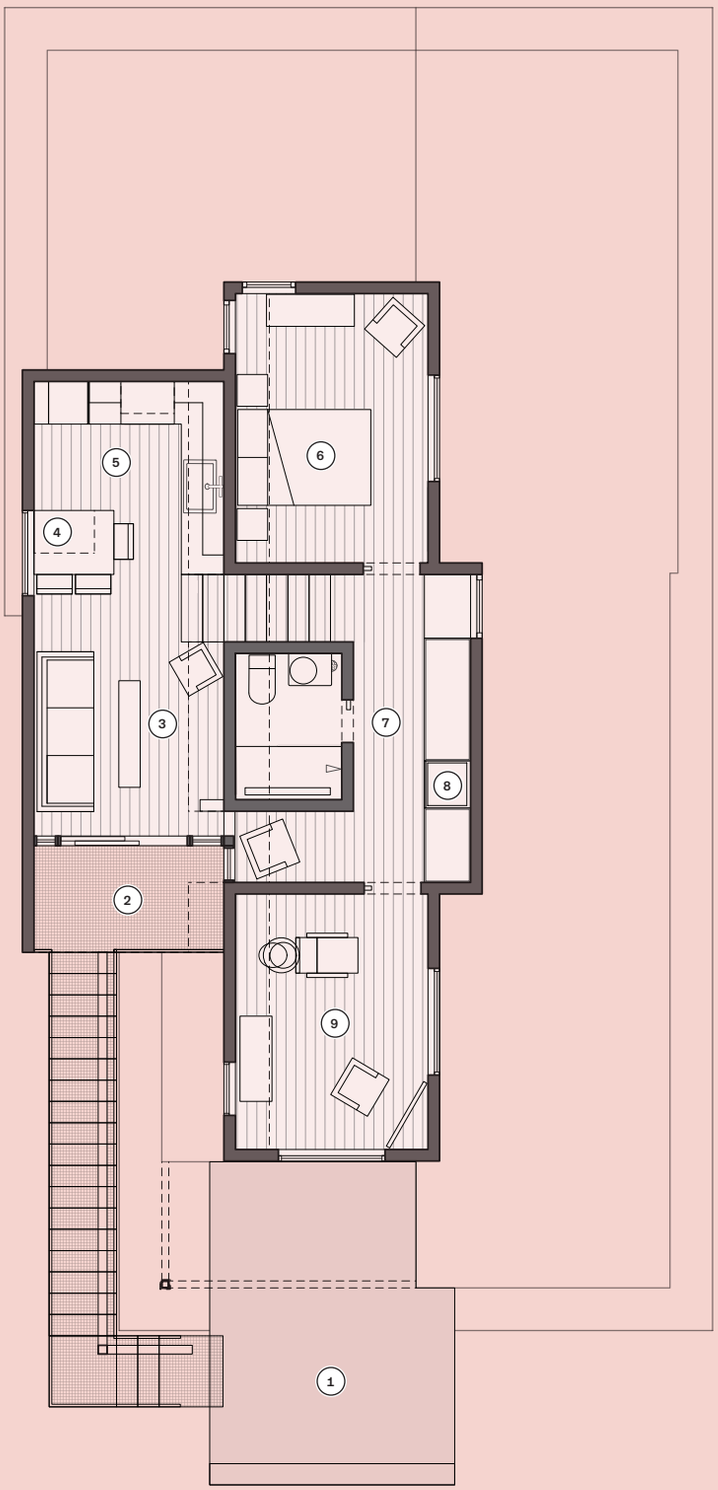
← Planks of whitewashed pine link the front porch with the primary living space, creating a seamless transition between exterior and interior.

↙ The curved handrail leading upstairs is one of the “special moments” that Blair prioritized to unify her design.

↓ Custom fronts on IKEA base cabinets create an upscale and highly flexible hallway storage system.

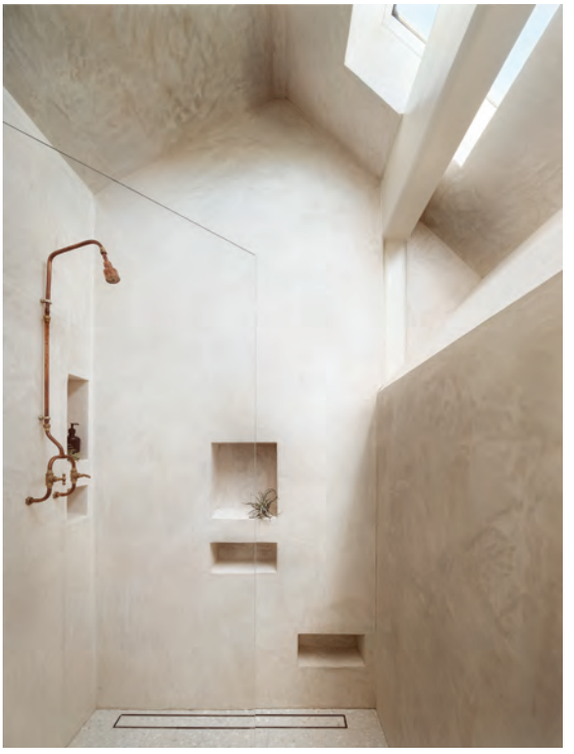


WORDS BY ABIGAIL THOMAS



FLOOR PLAN

1 EXISTING SHARED PORCH
2 NEW COVERED PORCH
3 LIVING/RECEPTION
4 DINING
5 KITCHEN
6 BEDROOM/OFFICE 1
7 HALL
8 LAUNDRY
9 BEDROOM/OFFICE 2



← A structural beam cuts across the bathroom skylight, which illuminates the stucco shower below.

↙ Blair's "hardworking beam" supports open shelving and allows the countertop to extend behind the sink.

↓ The kitchen is defined by strong, playful geometric shapes in the vent hood, cabinetry, and ceiling.

WORDS BY ABIGAIL THOMAS

The striking geometric profile of The Perch is carried into the kitchen, where a custom vent hood mimics and inverts its cantilevered form. As a budgetary strategy, the base cabinets are from IKEA but sport custom fronts painted a playful shade of dusty pink. Every possible inch is used for efficient storage: A trapezoidal cabinet in the back corner fits perfectly against the angle of the steeply sloped ceiling. Behind the sink, what Blair refers to as a "hardworking beam" has been left exposed, with a shelf attached to provide additional open storage and the space below and behind opened up to extend the countertop and conceal task lighting. "A simple move like this can make a tight space feel significantly bigger," explains Blair.

The kitchen and living room walls are clad in planks of whitewashed pine. This off-the-shelf, prefinished product was selected to reduce cost while adding texture and life to the interior. The hardwood flooring, a mix left over from one of the supplier's previous projects, was chosen for a similar reason and maintains a scale that harmonizes with that of the corrugated exterior. The glass front door is surrounded by a wood-framed wall that simulates the look of an expensive picture window at a fraction of the cost. Another exposed beam crests up from the floor near the living room's built-in storage wall. Its presence, caused by an onsite decision to drop the height of the finished floor, is embraced and accentuated with the addition of a metal coat rack. Like the stair outside, the welded pole sways in response to the lateral and gravitational forces at work on the building.

A curved white handrail referencing the railing of the exterior stair leads up from the kitchen to the second story. A window strategically placed at the top of the staircase is another way Blair makes The Perch feel larger than it truly is. The upstairs hallway is lined with flexible storage, finished in the same pink paint used in the kitchen. A tiny desk nook offers a study in scale, providing both privacy and visibility through its split view to the living room and front porch. By creating an even smaller space within the tight floor plan, Blair applies a counterintuitive spatial principle, making the main area feel roomy in comparison.

In the bathroom, attention is drawn once again to the structure. The room's location at the center of the studio did not permit a window, so Blair added a skylight. Although a beam cuts across the skylight's profile, exposing the structure was a worthwhile trade-off to allow more natural light to enter the space. The bathroom is home to strong geometric shapes paired with soft, natural forms; the polygonal mirror over the sink alludes to the building's overall shape, while hand-crafted niches in the stucco of the shower walls add an organic touch.

The Perch contains two bedrooms, both of which briefly housed the hair salon run by one of the owners during the pandemic. Here, the beams overhead are integrated into the walls to read as natural parts of the space. Full-length mirrors and ceramic light fixtures—vestiges of their time as a salon—adorn both rooms. The offset gable feels cozy and emphasizes a thematic link with the older bungalow below. Artfully placed windows in the rear bedroom tactfully avoid views of the owners' backyard and next-door neighbors. In the front bedroom, occupants can feel the building shift as someone mounts the stairs outside—another constant reminder of the forces at work on The Perch.

The front bedroom has retained its full-length mirror as a reminder of its previous life as a hair salon.

The Perch is an amalgamation of tiny details that add up to create a joyful and relaxing space. Blair held a unique role as both the architect and contractor for the project, enabling her to be involved in its minutiae at every stage. This lends The Perch an artful quality; it is evident that each piece was selected by hand. Blair describes the impact of being able to tweak small bits of the design along the way to match the picture in her head: "The design process means constantly thinking about all the options—and being open to changing them." By honoring the existing structure in a clever manipulation of shape and materiality, The Perch evokes familiar feelings using unfamiliar elements, offering an experience that feels at once timeless and unprecedented. ☐

Abigail Thomas works at McKinney York Architects in Austin.

PROJECT	The Perch
LOCATION	Austin
CLIENT	Annie Cobb and Dylan Robertson
ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR	Nicole Blair
DESIGN TEAM	Nicole Blair, AIA
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER	Structures
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT	D-Crain
PHOTOGRAPHER	Casey Dunn

AT THE CRUX

Words by LAUREN JONES

Redefining Suburban Recreational Architecture

WORDS BY LAUREN JONES

↵ Custom climbing wall builder Vertical Solutions designed the towering walls that welcome climbers of all ages.

↑ As the first ground-up Crux location, the project defines a new typology with a striking form clad in insulated metal paneling.

→ The central courtyard, featuring a coffee shop and food truck, has become a gathering space for pre- and post-climb visitors.

Tim Derrington wouldn't call himself a climber, but as the architect behind all three of Crux Climbing Center's Austin locations, it's fair to say he's learned a thing or two on and off the walls. "If you go a few times a week, you start to understand if your assumptions on architecture and usage were right," he says. Crux Pflugerville—his first ground-up design for the community-driven gym—was a chance to push the envelope right up to the city's height allowances, setting the framework for a new type of recreational architecture, one defined by how people navigate and dwell within it.

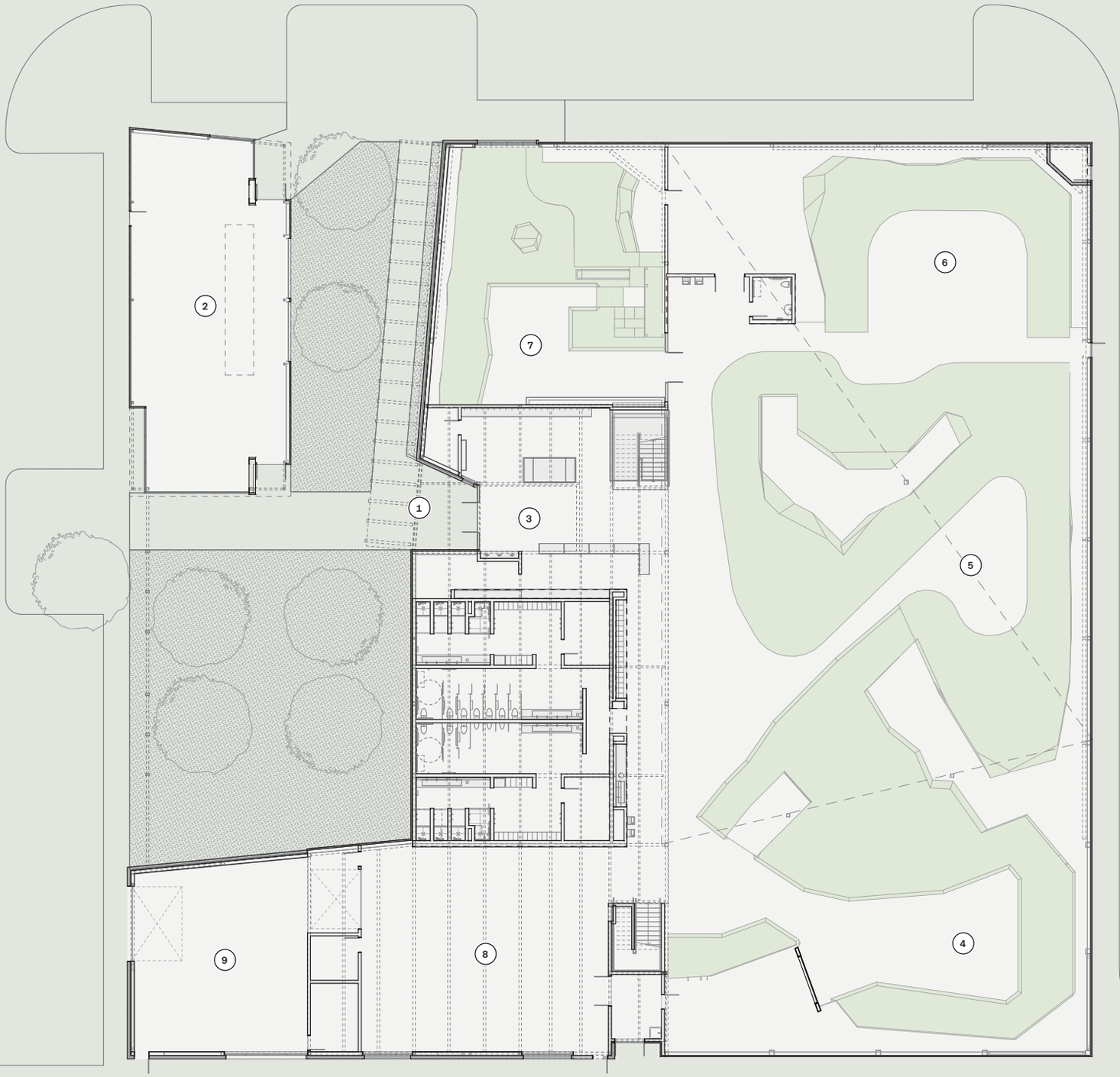
At the corner of Kingston Lacy Boulevard and North Heatherwilde Boulevard, the 60-foot-tall, nearly 36,000-sf complex rises as an unlikely landmark amid a sea of suburban tract homes, its reflective sheathing an ode to Texas countryside vernacular. The conventional big-box approach of a large rectangle surrounded by a sea of parking spaces was never an option. "Climbing culture isn't about parking and then walking into an unimaginative space," says Derrington. "It should unfold and build anticipation." Instead, the architect aimed for a welcoming space for all ages, one that invites lingering and conversation long past the ache of lactic acid-laden forearms and chalk-marked palms.

For Crux COO and CMO Grace Nicholas, the suburban move came with its own set of questions. She recalls going out into the suburbs of Austin and wondering, "If we build it, will they come?" Since opening in December 2024, the answer has been a resounding yes.

Unlike Crux South Austin—the now-shuttered Pickle Road location that Derrington describes as a "down and dirty" renovation of an auto-body shop—the Pflugerville project offered the chance to rethink the model entirely. "If you aren't limited to the box you're renovating, what do you turn this into?" he asks. "It's an opportunity for a new typology."

That new typology begins with movement, with architecture that responds to rhythmic cycles of exertion and rest, congregation and spectatorship. "When you enter, it's important to orient quickly—whether you're there to climb, do yoga, or attend a kid's party," says Derrington. Retail sits to the left, while a birch plywood–paneled check-in desk anchors the entry below a skylit void carved through the mezzanine. Above, yoga, coworking, and lounge spaces unfold along the upper level, drawing light down into what might otherwise be a dim lobby. Adjacencies are carefully calibrated to feel intuitive but "not so obvious that spaces feel flat and one-dimensional," he says.

That sense of flow extends outward with one of the project's defining features: a boardwalk-esque, shaded courtyard, home to Spokesman Coffee and a Spicy Boys Fried Chicken food truck. After reclaiming significant impervious cover upon learning a planned fire lane was not required, Derrington was able to pull the coffee shop away from the climbing volume to introduce a more urban experience into an otherwise suburban context. He says, "People love going out there and spending time, and time is the way to build culture."



FLOOR PLAN

1 ENTRY
2 COFFEE SHOP
3 LOBBY
4 TALL CLIMBING
5 CLIMBING HALL
6 BOULDERING
7 KIDS CLIMBING
8 GYM
9 STUDIO

→ Light from a skylight fills the lobby, while staff have clear sightlines to the climbing walls beyond.

↓ Polygal windows and 60-foot-ceilings bring a sense of airiness and presence to the gym floor.

← The overhanging routes offer an exciting challenge with their multicolored climbing holds.

↓ Smaller-scale walls for bouldering line the outer edges for younger climbers or those testing out new skills.

↓↓ Located on the mezzanine level, the yoga room is surprisingly quiet—a respite for vinyasa, flow, and restorative classes.

Inside, the climbing walls—wave-like rainbow-hued monoliths—drive both form and function, with surrounding programming arranged in response to their scale and sculptural qualities. "You almost have to design around the climbing walls first," says Derrington. The rise of Olympic speed climbing further intensified those requirements, calling for 55-foot competition walls within a zoning envelope capped at 60 feet; the structure shifted accordingly with open-web trusses and I-beams near the walls. "If you're building 55 feet above the finished slab, you run out of space pretty fast," he says. "We clear the top of the Speed Wall by two inches."

The exterior reflects that same sense of purpose. Without a recognizable architectural language for climbing gyms, Derrington created his own, refusing to default to a neutral, anonymous warehouse. "Pieces of personality—a big splice from the top corner of the roof, angled walls that move more than your average building—indicate what's inside," he says. Material efficiency also played a role in charting a more dynamic typology, with the architects employing a three-in-one metal panel system from Metl-Span. "Once it's installed, your building is insulated, sided, and waterproofed," he says. "There was no need to hide things behind drywall."

Light, too, is treated as a companion rather than a technical necessity, softly illuminating footholds and routes instead of blinding climbers with glare. Clerestory windows bring in daylight, while polycarbonate panel systems on the southern and western facades provide a diffused glow. Large-scale air filtration systems—so-called chalk eaters—work in tandem with industrial fans to manage stagnant air and the continuous billow of chalk dust.

What unfolds inside isn't purely technical—it's deeply physical, and the language of the gym reflects this philosophy while resisting hierarchy. Routes are named and scaled to favor play over performance, with Sloth being the most beginner-friendly climb and Dyno the most challenging.

There's a grit to climbing that resists polish. Dust hits the air, the sharp click of the belay cuts through the ambient hum, and at the top, there's a moment of stillness, followed by sweaty and accomplished release. "I was drawn to climbing because it didn't have that competitiveness forced onto you by other people," says Nicholas. "It's about pushing yourself. It tests my mental strength."

That spirit has always been there. Long before Crux Pflugerville took hold, the ideas behind it emerged from dinner parties, drinks, and conversations that lasted long into the night. Architecture was debated, climbing dissected, and a shared interest grew into something more intentional. The result is a climbing center built through relationships, iterations, and fortitude. ☐

Lauren Jones is an architecture journalist and consultant based in Austin.

PROJECT	Crux Pflugerville
LOCATION	Pflugerville
CLIENT	Crux Climbing Center
ARCHITECT	Derrington Building Studio
DESIGN TEAM	Tim Derrington, Minta Stohrer, Michael Rahmatoulin
GENERAL CONTRACTOR	Aday & Associates
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER	Structures
MEP ENGINEER	APTUS
WATERPROOFING	Ericka Bonfanti Acton Partners
REGISTERED ACCESSIBILITY SPECIALIST	Contour Collective
LIGHTING REP	Spectrum Lighting - Austin
PHOTOGRAPHER	Leonid Furmansky

Thermal Delight in Architecture and the Continued Work of Lisa Heschong

DAME OF DELIGHT

Words by LAURA FOSTER, AIA

The irony: that architect and author Lisa Heschong's MIT thesis deadline hit at the same time a catastrophic blizzard piled so much snow on the Northeast, she had no choice but to bundle up and deliver her message about thermal delight by ski. And the coincidence: that the same master's thesis was sealed on Valentine's Day 1978, the receipt date for what would become a beloved architecture book, in print continuously for almost half a century and selling thousands of copies a year.

Almost 10 years after Heschong's commanding ski trip, I read *Thermal Delight in Architecture*, having borrowed my roommate's copy one day in Austin in 1987 to bring for break time at my beige and bleak mall job. At 78 pages, it promised a quick read, and I liked that it was culty. Its cover, picturing a sun hat aloft on a black background, was iconic, and the book seemed to be in the hands of every architecture student on the University of Texas campus. I was intrigued by the word "Delight" in the title, to the point where I hardly noticed the modifier "Thermal." Delight was something I wanted more of. The word stood out to me as it did in Vitruvius's famous maxim, where "delight" hung back, behind "firmness" and "commodity"—like the two were delight's wingmen.

Before reading Heschong, I understood delight in architecture to be more of a one-liner, like Charles Moore's "ironic columns" or "Duck" architecture. While I was expecting to read a lofty manifesto, *Thermal Delight* was a Practical Grammar—a contrast to the abstract, post-structuralist material which otherwise guided me. Heschong's writing drew me out of my cerebral positions at the time. In the book's introduction, Heschong refers modestly to the work as her "musings." But as the text builds, so does her imminent ownership of the topic of delight in architecture. In the pages that follow, Heschong shares history, literature, art, sociology, physics, and biology to argue that delight is a building system as legitimate as the others, and it lives in the A-sheets of our drawings—provided for by the architectural discipline. Without delight there is no firmness or commodity.

Thermal Delight gave me my first satisfying understanding of sustainability before the word emerged as an architectural term. Up until then, I was familiar with the calls for radical change in *Silent Spring* and *A Blueprint for Survival* and thought Buckminster Fuller was cool but considered this material part of a subculture not topical to architecture. Reading *Thermal Delight* alerted me to the connection between a building and its environment—this at a time when pedagogy, and therefore I, focused on object buildings standing apart from their surroundings. Heschong's characterization of buildings as "a way to modify a landscape to create more favorable microclimates" freed me to be straightforward and practical about design and its connection to life.

Delight is operative when sensations of warmth and coolness become meaningful and memorable, but it is not about constant and static physical comfort. Delight is synesthetic, and Heschong was perhaps the first architect to write about this multisensory imperative of architecture. That which composes pleasant experiences for multiple senses becomes an object of affection, whether it's an everyday cultural ritual like a hot coffee or a religious object in the form of the sun. Heschong showed that these experiences are valued because we do not live in a "thermally neutral world," as she calls it—a world which never did and never should exist. Heschong elaborates on this saying: "Since our thermal sensors are not distance receptors, that is, they cannot warn us that a place will be cold before it starts to chill our body, we have to rely on other senses to give us advance clues."

Why don't we feel a wistful fondness for HVAC equipment in the office plenum space and the rumbling it makes before it blows air? Why is a wall register not a beloved harbinger of thermal delight? Because these are no substitutes for real microclimates and their signifiers. We do, however, feel affection on a hot day for the beauty and scent of honeysuckle and mountain laurel, and some of us have an unlikely fondness for drinking water from a green vinyl garden hose. The scent of flowers is brought to us by the cooling breeze, and the taste of the water signifies a break from the heat as well. These are the "advance clues," synesthetic microclimate constituents for which we feel affection because they allude to the relief that's en route.

Heschong teaches in detail how we are never *not* processing sensory information. In *Thermal Delight*, she notes how the English idiom "I see" means "I understand," an idea she would elaborate on 43 years later in *Visual Delight in Architecture: Daylight, Vision, and View*, a book about our visual experience of architecture from the inside out. Delight is still the heroine, this time on a 397-page journey, with glossary and index in hand.

In *Thermal Delight*, our skin is always looking for a particular microclimate to tell our brain about, and in *Visual Delight*, our eyes are always looking for signs of sunrise and sunset. "Ninety percent of our brain is involved in visual processing," Heschong exclaims, regarding the importance of getting the visual experience right. Delight arises from this rich visual experience well beyond aesthetics or "momentary spectacle"—it is created from ongoing and attuned use of daylight and views that engage our senses in ways that support health, memory, and emotional connection to place. Buildings do not just shelter us and create microclimates; their fenestration entrains us.

WORDS BY LAURA FOSTER

PHOTO BY REALFISH VIA UNSPLASH.COM

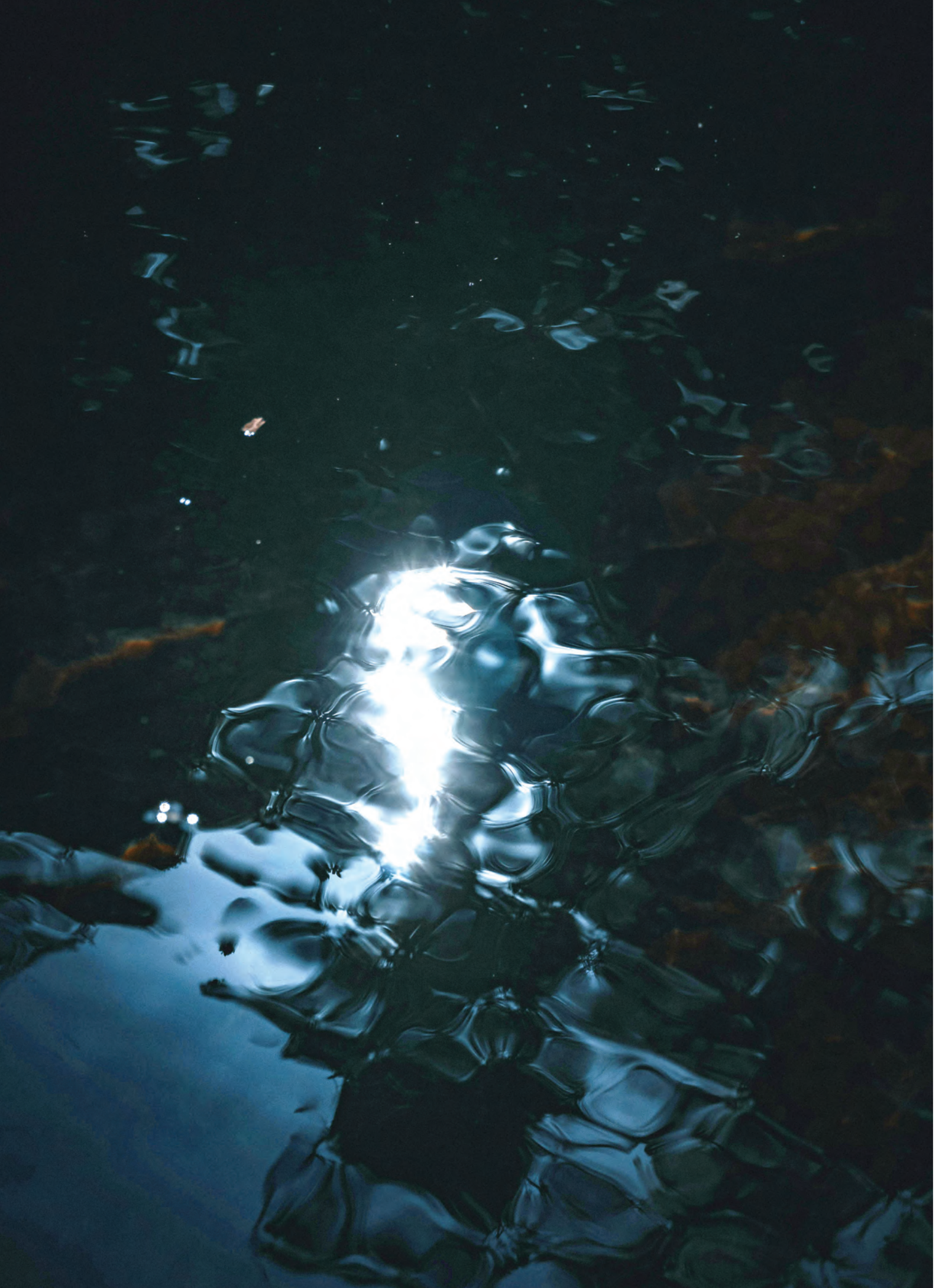


PHOTO BY HECTOR FORTELEZA VIA PEXELS.COM

In *Thermal Delight*, Heschong allows that a window seat can replace the feeling of a hearth, but in her decades of research, she finds that nothing can replace a window. Now a Fellow of the Illuminating Engineering Society, she came to this conclusion unplanned. While conducting post-occupancy surveys about lighting and daylight, she noted building occupants would ultimately talk about the views and how good these made them feel. The importance of views was underscored when Heschong asked her students at UC Santa Cruz to describe their favorite place on campus. The consensus surprised her: 28 of the 30 students chose the same spot—a seat near a particular library window. Intrigued, Heschong investigated further and discovered the library's architect had made close-up views of the existing trees "a driving idea behind every design decision." Views led the design brief and determined all other building systems.

That same window that Heschong's students described also inspired a donor to gift millions of dollars toward the library's renovation on the condition that the window never be changed. We know a view can multiply the asking price for a private property, yet we rarely carry this insight into our public work. Instead, we treat thoughtful microclimates and views as luxuries reserved for only a few lucky buildings—or the lucky people inside them. Though the value of views in public buildings may not show up in their resale price, Heschong points out that "the return on investment is that people care about your buildings, love them, and therefore take care of them," yielding life cycle and environmental benefits. Following this line of reasoning, architects have the simple, ethical responsibility to avoid creating places that are sensory neutral and static so our buildings are valued, enjoyed, and kept in play—the very definition of firmness and commodity.

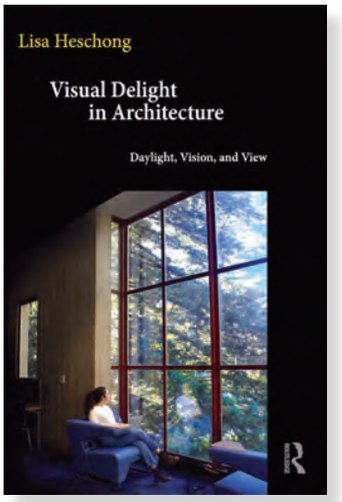
That our buildings should rightly have real daylight and views seems like no revelation, but so far we have only been able to argue about it in rhetorical terms. Who did not feel triumphant over the cancellation of Munger Hall, UC Santa Barbara's windowless dorm? Its design met code, but the injustice for those who would have ended up in the 1.7 million-sf labyrinth, where virtual screens subbed for windows, offended everyone except the non-architect who designed it. The project should never have left the visioning phase, but no one had strong enough data to change its early course. Standards and benchmarking systems prescribe and incentivize natural light and views to an extent, but more so as bonuses than as design determinants. They struggle against the current of our tendency toward ever-brighter electrical lighting. We have spent a century illuminating space as if we cannot trust ourselves with natural light, and in doing so have helped create the "environmental generational amnesia" described by the psychologist Peter Kahn, a social ill where expectations about our experiences in a building are progressively downregulated. The consequence of forgetting how to design with natural light has grown from the occasional creation of a loathsome building into a full-blown health crisis.

Heschong has confirmed in her decades of research and practice that buildings ignoring the natural properties of daylight and views affect us in ways that are harmful to our health at all scales. She discusses in *Visual Delight* how, if we had maintained our capability to design well with daylight and sell it to our clients, we could have averted public health crises such as myopia, an irreversible condition skyrocketing in children. Because of these findings, Heschong now centers her work in the realm of public health and social justice, lecturing on emerging science about daylight and views, and what happens to occupants' health when the two are eschewed.

"It's a long way from delight to molecular mechanisms," Heschong tells me in a phone call, but as I see it, she continues to dedicate herself to delight in architecture as she pursues "what is known and what is becoming known" of our visual experience from within a building. Heschong perseveres as she always has with her message, publishing papers and lecturing on discoveries related to vision, circadian rhythms, and neurobiology, with the intent that we will translate these findings into codes and Basis of Design documents. This is the work which will continue to give delight the credit it's due—as a building system firmly within architects' purview and directly tied to our well-being. Vitruvius included the word for a reason; he just didn't have the data yet. ☐

Laura Foster, AIA, has been a public sector architect for 15 years and currently practices in El Paso, where she lives in and is restoring the historic midcentury Hilles House.

Thermal Delight in Architecture
Lisa Heschong
The MIT Press, 1979



Visual Delight in Architecture: Daylight, Vision, and View
Lisa Heschong
The MIT Press, 2021

LAYERED HISTORIES

Words by CHRISTOPHER FERGUSON

A Watering Hole for the Ages

WORDS BY CHRISTOPHER FERGUSON

In a part of Austin increasingly defined by density, branding, and the careful construction of identity, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between places that are made and those that have emerged. Cosmic Saltillo, a lush watering hole designed by Clayton Korte with Ten Eyck Landscape Architects, occupies that tension directly.

Set within a rapidly redeveloped stretch of East Austin, the project avoids the familiar gestures of curated "authenticity" and instead presents a space that feels contingent, assembled, and at times unresolved. Its success lies not only in its atmosphere, but in its refusal to simplify the site it inhabits.

The ground that the project occupies does not belong to a single, stable identity. The two warehouse buildings were constructed in the early 1900s for the Texas Company, or Texaco. Petroleum products delivered by rail were stored there and later distributed by truck throughout Austin. As rail infrastructure declined and the surrounding industrial corridor receded, the site fell into disuse, accumulating layers of graffiti, weathering, and informal occupation.

Even before the present redevelopment, the surrounding district had begun to shift, recast through transit-oriented planning and the pressures of growth reshaping much of East Austin. What remains is not a clear narrative but a set of overlapping conditions, only partially legible and never fully resolved. This underlying complexity is what the project inherits and, more importantly, chooses not to simplify.

Projects occupying sites like this can often lean on the language of preservation while quietly imposing a new order, smoothing over irregularities in favor of a legible identity. At worst, this takes the form of spaces that virtue-signal "authenticity" through material cues or curated references while mostly remaining detached from the culture or community they claim to evoke.

Cosmic Saltillo avoids this ditch. Rather than resolving the site into a single narrative, the project embraces inconsistencies, allowing fragments of what existed before to remain visible without arranging them into something overly deliberate or complete. It exists as it is, though its seeming effortlessness belies a meticulousness.

↖ Screens and plantings create intimate spaces that unfurl to yield deep visual connections across the courtyard and beyond.

↗ A lush, narrow outdoor passage beneath a custom steel trellis defines the southern entrance.

→ A covered walkway connecting the structures is adorned with murals by Miles Starkey and others.

↵ The reconfigurable outdoor courtyard becomes the project's center of gravity.

↑ Climbing vines provide dappled shade during the day and warm, tea-lit ambiance after dark.

WORDS BY CHRISTOPHER FERGUSON

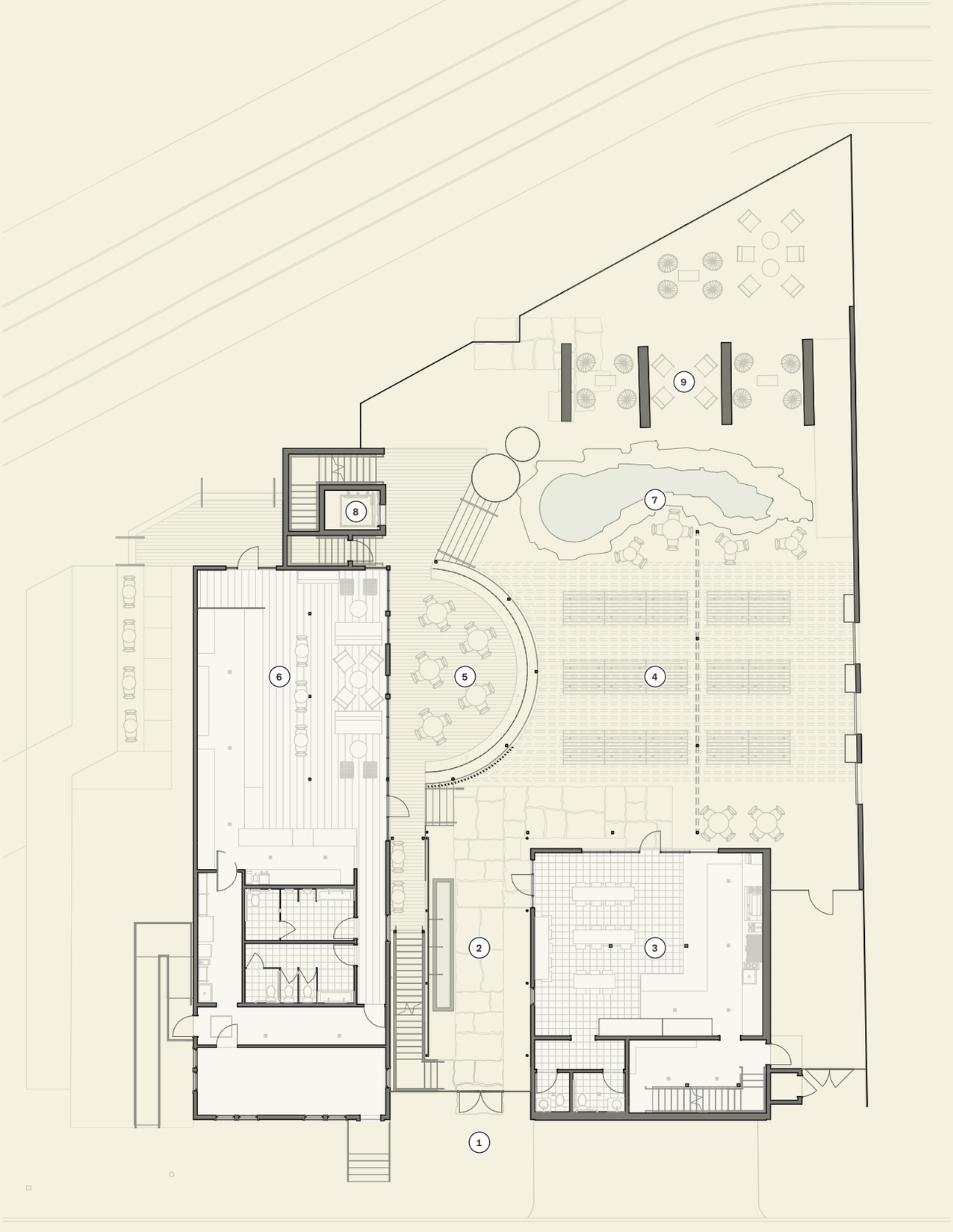
"We wanted to respect the architecture and the site's history in a way that also added a chapter that was fundamentally about the east side and the Austin spirit," says Sky Currie, AIA, a project manager at Clayton Korte. "Texturally at least, the floor is the same, the roof is the same, all of the old wood is there, the nails sticking through are there. As much character as we could lean into and preserve so people could feel that sense of time, we did."

The organization of the site is legible, but never from a single vantage point. The entry from East 4th Street compresses into a narrow outdoor corridor, where water spills into a concrete trough and an overhead steel trellis bearing Cosmic's name casts shifting shadows between the two preserved tin warehouse structures. The space is immediately defined by sound, with the soft, continuous movement of water echoing against corrugated metal and blending with conversation and the occasional passing train beyond the site.

To the west, the former Texaco building remains largely intact as a bar, its weathered shell still bearing the faded insignia of its original use and layered with graffiti accumulated over decades. Opposite it sits a smaller structure that was once a pole barn where delivery trucks would back in to receive fuel. Now offering tacos, it was carefully dismantled, stabilized, and reassembled by the architects, its original cladding and graffiti patina retained at considerable effort. The ground between the two buildings is similarly reworked, with salvaged concrete slabs broken and reset as pavers.

"In all the materials we added, we wanted them to have a sense of memory," says Currie. "We didn't want anything to appear shiny and new. We wanted everything to acclimate and balance with what was already here—concrete, metal, rust, water, and vegetation."

The corridor releases into a generous dappled courtyard, the primary space of occupation and the project's center of gravity. Here, the acoustic field expands and



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

1	ENTRY	**6**	BEVERAGE SERVICE
2	COURTYARD	**7**	LANDSCAPE FEATURE
3	FOOD SERVICE	**8**	ELEVATOR
4	EXTERIOR SEATING	**9**	EXTERIOR LOUNGE
5	TERRACE		

↖ A patchwork of murals, meandering paths, and fountains imbues the space with a sense of motion.

← Water features created by salvaged infrastructure shape a varied and subtle acoustic landscape.

→ A permeable, muraled tower at the project's northern entrance lifts guests to an upper deck and glows at night.

WORDS BY CHRISTOPHER FERGUSON

softens. Water runs laterally across the site, its low murmur mixing with the rustling breeze and voices that rise and dissipate unevenly across the landscape. Brick stanchions that once supported a massive kerosene tank now frame smaller, carrel-like pockets of seating, each accommodating a single table and partially enclosed by vines and murals.

A large, open-air covered structure anchors one edge of the courtyard, its curved vertical steel lattice supporting climbing vegetation and extending upward to a roof deck above. Circulation continues vertically through two points: A stair near the southern entry leads to a concealed upper bar, while a soaring, permeable steel tower adjacent to the rail trail provides a more prominent ascent and serves as both lookout and beacon, particularly as the site begins to glow at night.

Movement through the site unfolds as a series of shifting conditions. Changes in elevation are subtle but persistent, producing moments of compression and release shaped by planting and meandering paths. Sightlines extend diagonally and vertically, offering glimpses deep into the courtyard through layers of foliage, across firelight, and toward elevated terraces and the roof deck. No vantage point resolves the whole. Instead, the project rewards movement, revealing itself in fragments that accrue over time.

The vegetation, developed by Ten Eyck Landscape Architects, plays an active role in shaping these conditions. Meyer lemon and fig trees anchor the space alongside native elms, while crossvine and jasmine climb steel trellises to form overhead canopies that filter light into shifting patterns. Grasses and understory plantings spill into circulation paths, softening edges and blurring the distinction between planted and occupied ground. The environment feels in motion, responsive to light and use.

Alongside the sound of water, these elements contribute to a space that resists a singular reading. It begins to feel less like a composition and more like something that has been gradually occupied, its boundaries negotiated over time.

The presence of graffiti and murals further complicates any attempt to read the site as a singular work. Layers of markings, some preserved from years of abandonment, register a form of occupation that predates and now coexists with the project. Combined with newly introduced murals by Miles Starkey and others that extend across the tower, the courtyard walls, and outdoor canopies, they form a varied patchwork with the plantings that feels delightfully quilted.

Delight, in architecture, is often mistaken for things like beauty or comfort, yet it depends on something more specific: the recognition that a moment or place averts expectation. At Cosmic Saltillo, that recognition is tied to the sense that the space has accrued over time rather than being produced all at once. Its delight lies in the legibility of that time, layered and expressed without overt spectacle.

In a context where redevelopment often seeks immediate, hyper-branded legibility, this project offers a quiet and durable architecture that resonates with the place it occupies, not as a constructed identity, but as something in transit, still in the process of becoming. ☐

Christopher Ferguson is an architect, photographer, and writer who has lived and worked in Austin since 2008.

PROJECT	Cosmic Saltillo
LOCATION	Austin
CLIENT	Cosmic Hospitality Group
ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGNER	Clayton Korte
DESIGN TEAM	Paul Clayton, AIA, George Wilcox, AIA, Sky Currie, AIA, Verónica Lloveras
CONTRACTOR	Solutions GC
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT	Ten Eyck Landscape Architects
PHOTOGRAPHERS	Clay Grier, Caitlin Atkinson

HIGH KEY

Words by POOJA DESAI

Cinematic drama meets fine cuisine.


HAN KEN

Inspired by the futuristic worlds of *Blade Runner* and *Kill Bill*, Haii Keii in Houston's River Oaks neighborhood translates science fiction and cinematic drama into a surreal dining experience. The 2,800-sf steakhouse and sushi restaurant exists in a hazy glow of neon and immerses occupants in the luxury of a Japanese *ryokan*, a traditional inn focused on hospitality. Gin design group blurs reality through layered lighting, choreographed spatial sequences, and a mastery of illusion.

Red acrylic doors act as translucent portals into the restaurant and drown out the fast-paced world outside. Once past the threshold into the narrow entry vestibule, guests "immediately get immersed into the environment without seeing too much of it," says Gin Braverman, principal of gin design group. Curving metallic hand-plaster walls by local artist Carissa Marx reflect the glow of the red lanterns on the host stand and the blue light washing the walls from the ceiling edge. Stepping into the hallway to the left, guests enter a space hovering between reality and imagination. Illuminated acrylic fins act as both partitions and guides toward the main restaurant space. Their frosted edges and etched patterns cast a diffuse glow on surrounding surfaces by refracting light while concealing the source. At the hallway's end, guests find themselves transported into a moody, contemporary performance.

Braverman explains the context behind the project's approach: "All of our projects have a fair amount of drama. I have a film and production background, so the theatrical element is present at different levels in all of our projects. This one is definitely at the pinnacle of drama." The design team worked with a theatrical color palette, playing with bright reds and blues against the interior's evocative darkness. Colorful lighting throughout the space commands attention against the textured black river rock behind the bar and wood paneling treated with the *shou sugi ban* technique—a traditional Japanese method to extend wood's lifespan by charring the surface.

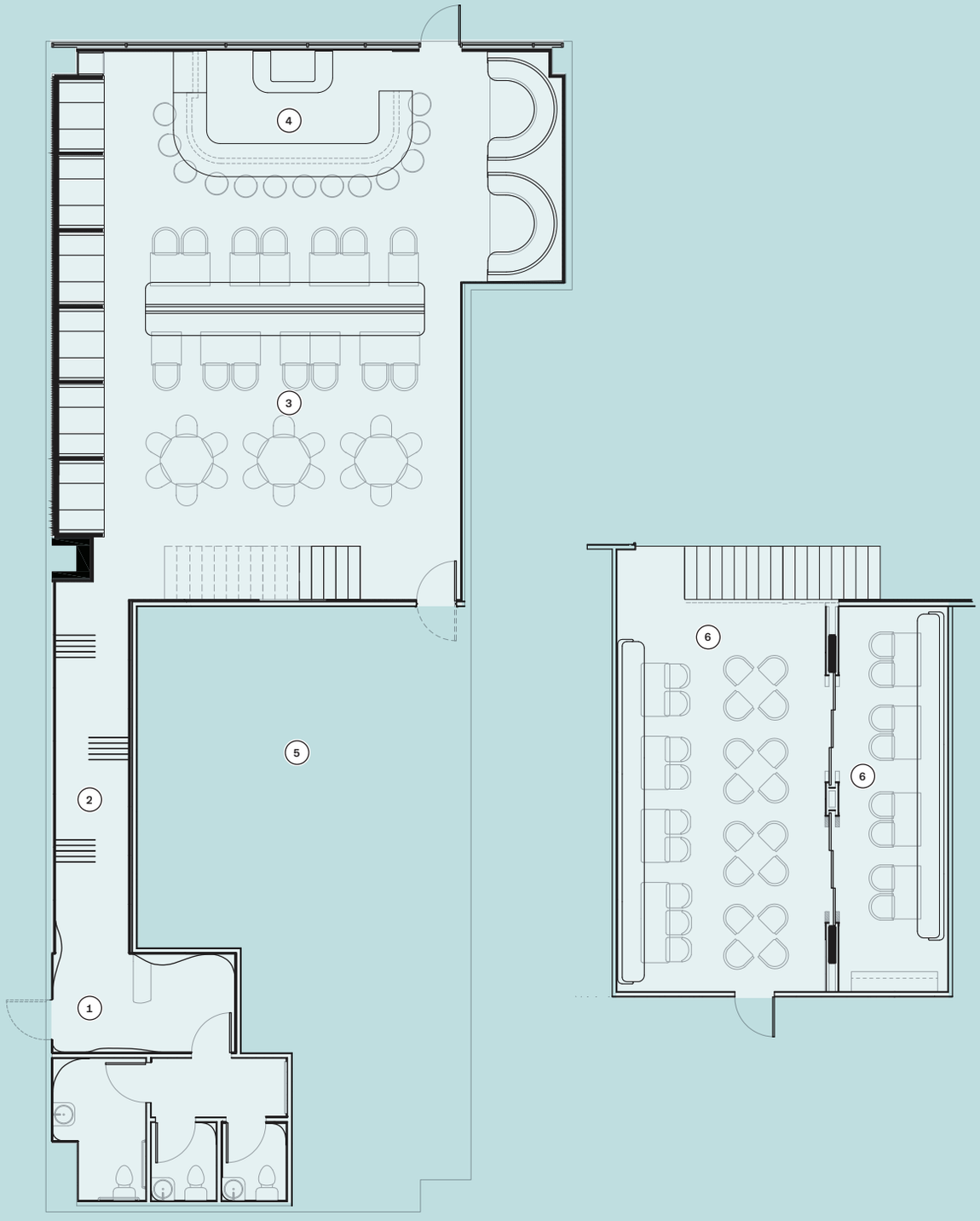
↗ Red acrylic doors act as translucent portals into the restaurant, keeping light out and ambience in.

↑ The entry vestibule immediately immerses you with its curving metallic hand-plaster walls reflecting the glow of the red lanterns on the host stand and the blue light from the ceiling edge.

→ On their way to the main restaurant space, guests circulate through a hallway of glowing acrylic fins. Their frosted edges refract light while concealing the source, casting a diffuse glow on surrounding surfaces.

WORDS BY POOJA DESAI

HAIR
BEAUTY



FLOOR PLAN: ↑ LEVEL 1 ↗ LEVEL 2

1 ENTRY/HOST

2 ENTRY CORRIDOR

3 MAIN DINING

4 BAR

5 BACK OF HOUSE/KITCHEN

6 MEZZANINE

The seating is intentionally dense, evoking what Braverman describes as an "inner city" condition—tables placed in close proximity to foster energy and intimacy rather than distance and separation. Over 4,000 feet of red rope hangs in the space, forming canopies and partitions among the downstairs seating. The grid and placement of the rope was refined throughout the process by Austin-based FIBROUS. As Braverman notes, masking the lighting and sprinkler systems, as well as arranging the rope to align consistently across the space, demanded a high level of detailing to maintain consistency of texture and ceiling conditions. Objektfab owner and designer Eric Rosprim contributed extensively, fabricating much of the bar, furniture, and stairs, and portions of the rope installation. Working within a tight space, gin design group tucked service stations seamlessly into the walls and concealed a storage closet under the stairs with the black *shou sugi ban* wood paneling. They even placed the downstairs restroom at the entry, distanced from the main dining area, to enforce the continuity of the experience.

The shoji screens—traditionally made solely of paper—are laminated with a plastic resin to create a durable yet lightweight system that lines the double-height volume above the main dining area. LED panels behind the screens provide an even glow and projectors on the ceiling animate silhouettes walking across intermittently, simulating an occupied upper level. The system can also display custom messages, creating an opportunity for an interactive feature for events and celebrations. Geometrically arranged acoustic felt panels hide mechanical systems, diffusers, and lighting within the ceiling.

The centerpiece of the dining area is an eight-foot inverted bonsai tree hanging precariously over the bar, a feat by art collective Moon Papas. Though seemingly dense, the trunk of the tree is surprisingly lightweight. The reflective circles above and behind the tree amplify the glow of its luminous cloud-shaped leaves, made by heat-forming acrylic sheets into molds and illuminating them from within by color-changing, programmable socket-based LED luminaires. The leaves can shift color to glow in sync with the fins that line the stair railing leading to the mezzanine level, which rely on the same illusion seen in the entry hallway of spreading light from a hidden source across the face of the etched acrylic.

Follow the illuminated railing up the stairs and the upper floor feels even more intimate. Private dining is achieved through walls and ceilings finished in black plaster. Soft lighting glows from the red canopy structure enclosing the booths on the right wall. Their turquoise seating and bright red tables attract attention away from a left wall featuring two circular keyhole openings beyond which parties can discreetly indulge behind black velvet curtains. This private dining area pairs the same red tables, sconces, and other details with black seating to subtly distinguish the space. An eight-foot-diameter circular glass portal frames a view downstairs, reinforcing the sense of separation without fully disconnecting guests from the activity below.

Haii Keii blurs the line between perception and reality, and every element of the design works in tandem to sustain the illusion. Every surface, object, and layer of light has been intentionally arranged to shape the guest's experience. The interplay of texture, color, and illumination produces a space that feels fantastical yet grounded. Gin design group's collaboration with many Houston designers has transformed dining into a journey, one shaped through the deliberate design of the architecture and the cinematic artistry of the space. □

Pooja Desai is a landscape designer at SWA Houston.

↵ [LEFT] An eight-foot inverted bonsai tree hangs precariously over the bar, complete with cloud-shaped leaves embedded with programmable LEDS.

↵ [RIGHT] Luminous fins make up the stair railing to the more intimate mezzanine level, running on the same lighting system as the bonsai tree.

↑ Over 4,000 feet of red rope hangs in the space, forming canopies and partitions among the downstairs seating and carefully integrating the lighting and sprinkler systems within.

PROJECT	Haii Keii
LOCATION	Houston
CLIENT	JAG Hospitality
INTERIOR DESIGNER	gin design group
DESIGN TEAM	Gin Braverman, Christina Wilburn, Stephanie Lively
ARCHITECT	Tramonte Design Studio
CONTRACTOR	Objektfab with Anchor Construction
STRUCTURAL/MEP ENGINEER	Infinity MEP+S
LIGHTING DESIGNER	KPK Lighting Design
PROJECTION MAPPING/MEDIA	Input Output
SIGNAGE	Aria Signs & Design
AV CONSULTANT	Premier Audio Solutions
FF&A PROCUREMENT	GEWL Procure
PHOTOGRAPHER	Leonid Furmansky

DELIGHT IS IN THE DETAILS

Words by NYX VALERDY MARQUEZ, AIA

Total Design emerged in the Arts and Crafts movement as a holistic approach: Designers sought to control every detail of a space—from overarching volumes to the texture of a finish, from wall bases to draperies. It was a philosophy that wove interior décor tightly into architecture, creating spaces that read as unified, deliberate works. The disruption came with Adolf Loos's *Ornament and Crime*, a critique that reframed ornament as superfluous and heralded a "clean modern look." The ensuing shift did not erase the idea of Total Design; it transformed it. In today's studios, the same impulse to orchestrate detail persists, but it does so through coordination among disciplines, mastery across materials, and the selective deployment of technology. This essay follows three artisans—Kevin Austin, Hillary Water, and Peter Glassford—whose practices illuminate how a holistic, design-led craft survives and evolves in a contemporary economy.

The Arts and Crafts ideal of Total Design insisted that every element—volume, proportion, texture, craft—be coherent within a single design logic. The aim was not merely decoration but a disciplined integration of architecture, interior, and craft. Yet, as modernist ideas gained traction, ornament removal and the embrace of simpler forms gained cultural currency. The economics of craftsmanship also shifted: Fewer labor hours in highly ornate spaces, coupled with rising expectations for a "finished" look, paradoxically increased costs for the remaining skilled work as demand contracted. In a modern sense, the impulse to control every detail was not abolished; it was redistributed. Artisans, designers, fabricators, and craftspeople negotiate a shared design language across disciplines, balancing tradition with new materials, tools, and workflows.

The enduring question is how such a thread persists when the studio is no longer a single workshop but a network. The answer, as the portraits that follow suggest, lies in three commitments: rigorous training in classical proportion and craft; collaborative design processes that integrate still-pertinent architectural logic with contemporary fabrication; and a selective embrace of technology that clarifies, rather than replaces, the hand's guidance. Each practitioner illuminates a different facet of this commitment, yet all converge on a shared premise: Delightful detail results from disciplined collaboration, patient learning, and an attentive partnership with materials.

The Hôtel Tassel (1893) in Brussels, designed by Victor Horta, is widely regarded as a pioneering example of total design (Gesamtkunstwerk) and the first fully realized Art Nouveau building. Horta conceived every element—structure, decoration, furniture, ironwork, mosaics, and windows—as part of a unified and harmonious whole.
PHOTO BY HERITAGE IMAGES

WORDS BY NYX VALERDY MARQUEZ

↑↑ Here, stone substitutes for wood, with decorative details translated into a new material language.
PHOTO COURTESY AUSTIN STUDIOS

↑ Old Parkland building cartouche at the workshop of Kevin Austin.
PHOTO COURTESY AUSTIN STUDIOS

KEVIN AUSTIN

EXPLORATION OF MATERIALS

Kevin Austin began working as an apprentice in carpentry in Dallas in the 1980s and quickly found his passion for woodcarving. He experimented until he achieved mastery of a primary material and then followed his curiosity into other media, guided by a willingness to follow where the work leads. He describes a learning path shaped by books on classical orders and a practical apprenticeship with tools from the hardware store; the result is not merely skill in one medium but fluency across materials and methods. He notes, emphatically, that "skill in one area does not necessarily mean skillfulness across the board," a truth that underpins his approach to collaboration: Specialists contribute their strengths while the team coordinates to realize a cohesive design narrative.

Across Austin's practice runs a consistent thread—the value of repeat clients and long-term relationships. The craftsman's value is not only in the final carving but in the trust that enables ongoing projects—repeat commissions that allow for deeper, more elaborate detailing and cross-material exploration. The artisan's path also reveals an essential tension in modern practice: the need to balance precision and speed, tradition and experimentation. Austin's forays into stone—driven by an anecdote of a friend witnessing similar woodcarving detail in Italy rendered in stone—show how an idea can migrate across media, demanding different tools and refined techniques while preserving the sculptural logic of the original concept. An interest that started in wood carving evolved into carving in stone, as seen in the Old Parkland cartouche and at the entrance of a residence on Beverly Drive. This cross-pollination is a living example of Total Design reinterpreted: The overarching vision remains, but the tools and sequence evolve.

In Austin's world, collaboration is not a slogan but a practice. He emphasizes that design work is a dialogue among trades, with interior designers, architects, and artisans negotiating parameters, allowances, and details. The result is a space where the strengths of each participant—structural understanding, aesthetic judgment, and hands-on craft—cohere into a unified outcome. Even as materials change and the workflows shift, the discipline of listening, clarifying, and integrating remains central to each practice. Austin's story demonstrates how a modern craftsman sustains the ethos of Total Design by translating that old principle into today's collaborative, cross-material reality.

HILLARY WATERS

COMPLEXITY IN SIMPLICITY

Hillary Waters's FMW FabLab Studio extends the same ethos into a different sphere: a small, family-run operation that blends interior design insight, welding expertise, and architectural sensitivity to produce pieces that sit at the intersection of craft and architecture. Waters's background in interior design provides a design-centric lens on fabrication, ensuring that engineered solutions are not merely functional but integrated with spatial intent. Her partnership with a spouse who brings welding proficiency creates a collaborative team capable of translating concept into material form with a designer's eye for proportion, balance, and texture.

The collaboration ethic is explicit in Waters's practice. She describes a workflow in which designers supply guiding concepts, and the fabrication team engineers solutions that realize those concepts within the constraints of material behavior and construction detail. In practice, this results in furniture, fixtures, and architectural details that reflect Art Deco, modernist, or other stylistic cues while maintaining a contemporary sensibility. The work demonstrates how robust collaboration can honor historical design language while embracing current technologies and methods. The Art Deco–inspired pieces fabricated for the President's Suite at Texas A&M University, for example, illustrate how repeated semicircular motifs or sunburst patterns—timeless design elements—can be reinterpreted with modern materials and fabrication processes, yielding a core Art Deco vocabulary that speaks to today's spaces.

Waters's framework also brings into focus the human dimension of craft in a modern economy. The narrative she shares—designers guiding concepts, technologists enabling feasibility, and craftspeople ensuring tactile fidelity—aligns with a broader argument: Collaboration reduces friction between idea and realization, enabling more deliberate detailing and a more cohesive final composition. In this sense, Waters's practice demonstrates how the long arc of Total Design can be realized in a lab-like setting where design intent, manufacturing capacity, and craft prowess converge.

FMW FabLab is known for integrating several materials into one installation. "There is a lot of complexity that comes from making a straight line and a clean joint, you don't need ornamentation to make a detail delightful," says Waters. Education to understand the complexity of an assembly is needed to appreciate the craftsmanship of the detail. The challenge of matching the different thicknesses and expansion properties of each material is a skill. Waters shares that she "loves a clean detail; it is difficult to create simply." The feature walls at Fluor illustrate how Waters's team integrated reclaimed bamboo, metal, and moss into one composition. The decision to use specialty connections between the bamboo planks and the substrate, allowing for a clean joint without visible fasteners, is an example of the complexity behind a clean joint line.

Moreover, Waters volunteers her time toward professional education and mentorship. Through involvement with organizations such as the International Interior Design Association (IIDA) and a commitment to preparing emerging designers for the NCIDQ certification, she positions fabrication not as an end point but as a pathway for young practitioners to engage deeply with the craft. The implication for architects and designers is clear: When fabrication partners are integrated early and treated as essential collaborators, the design quality of the final space rises, and the interpretive latitude of the design team expands without sacrificing craft integrity.

↑↑ Art Deco-inspired desk at the President's Suite at Texas A&M University
PHOTO COURTESY HILLARY WATERS

↑ Several pieces of reclaimed bamboo are elegantly arranged in a patterned, floating feature wall by FMW|FabLab, joined without visible fasteners.
PHOTO BY SLYWORKS PHOTOGRAPHY

← Sculptural wooden columns at Mi Cocina Uptown in Dallas, layered across a wooden collage
PHOTO BY FREDERIK BRODEN

↙ Glassford's collage tiles create a zone of warmth between distinct seating areas within the restaurant, while also helping to dampen the space's reverberation.
PHOTO BY FREDERIK BRODEN

PETER GLASSFORD

MODULAR WARMTH

Peter Glassford brings a different yet complementary axis to the conversation. A UT Austin alumnus with a background in sculpture, Glassford's early engagement with scrap pieces—collected from his own furniture shop—led to a signature approach to wall panels that balance energy, improvisation, and structure. The method embraces randomness as a deliberate design parameter: Each piece is chosen for its energy and its edge, yet the overall composition preserves a disciplined logic that makes the panels cohesive when assembled as a system.

Glassford's process is, in his own words, meditative. He speaks of "turning off your consciousness, letting your hands do the work," an approach that yields vitality and rhythm that cannot be produced by planning alone. The panels are not simply decorative; they are a form of material storytelling that can travel with a project, attached to walls and architecture as a warm, human counterpoint to metal, glass, or concrete. The key insight from Peter's practice is the way in which craft becomes adaptable to architectural systems: panels designed for transport, compatible with standard framing, and capable of integration with other trades while maintaining a distinctive material voice.

The adaptation from collage sculpture to architectural wall systems is another result of Glassford's constant exploration with materials and trades. From sculpture to furniture making, back to sculpting with furniture scraps, all in collaboration with other artisans and craftspeople in his workshop and with project designers.

This integration can be seen at Mi Cocina, orchestrated by Droese Raney, a Dallas-based architecture and interior design studio, designed to honor tradition through craft and materiality. "At the heart of the design is a layered narrative of culture and craftsmanship," where the wooden columns and sculptural collage are two of the elements of "Mexico City's contemporary design language—refined, tactile, and deeply expressive." This example demonstrates how Total Design has shifted from a single practice into a collaborative network of design professionals and artisans: a design concept executed across different disciplines. In this case, Heather Magee, a project designer from Droese Raney, and sculptor Peter Glassford collaborate to "reinterpret the textures of Mexican materials into a custom textural material palette of wood." In addition to Glassford's wooden collage, the sculptural columns add warmth to the atmosphere.

Glassford's practice also emphasizes collaboration across the trades in a way that resonates with Austin's and Waters's experiences. Architects may want to control the formal reading of a space; designers might push for a certain texture or color palette; and the craftsperson translates those aims into objects and surfaces that carry the room's narrative. In Glassford's world, the boundaries between art and architecture blur, and collaboration becomes the mechanism by which a design idea gains depth, energy, and resilience. The takeaway for designers and planners is that modular, cross-material approaches can support a resilient design language—one that honors the past while enabling flexible, scalable implementation in contemporary spaces.

WORDS BY NYX VALERDY MARQUEZ

Across the work of these artisans, a throughline emerges in three intertwined performances of Total Design:

A shared commitment to disciplined training in classical proportion and craft, complemented by a willingness to learn across media. Austin's cross-material journey (wood to stone) and Glassford's collage-based panels exemplify this fluency, while Hillary translates design intent into manufacturable form with precision and elegance.

A robust culture of collaboration that treats designers, architects, fabricators, and craftspeople as co-creators rather than as isolated players. The mantra "Design is a collaboration" becomes a working principle that shapes decisions about materials, processes, and timing, ensuring coherence from concept to completion.

A nuanced integration of technology that enhances, rather than replaces, human judgment and hands-on skill. From digital scanning to modular fabrication, advances in tools enable greater precision, repeatability, and efficiency, while the final character of the space—its tactility, warmth, and proportion—remains a human achievement.

This has practical implications for today's architects, designers, and planners. It suggests a design workflow that begins with a shared vocabulary of proportion, material behavior, and craft intention; moves toward early collaboration with fabricators who can translate concepts into feasible systems; and ends with a disciplined refinement of detail that honors both the design's integrity and the material truth of the built environment. The three profiles collectively argue that Total Design is not a relic of early 20th-century reform but a living discipline—one that thrives at the intersection of hand skill, material imagination, and collaborative discipline.

A central tension in modern craft concerns how to reconcile the desire for hand-made detail with the realities of cost, time, and scale. These case studies reveal the pragmatic stance that technology can accelerate research, prototyping, and fabrication, but it cannot replace the tactile discernment of an experienced craftsperson. As Austin notes, the human hand remains the decisive instrument for the "final details" that give a space its character. Waters's FabLab model shows how designers can supply intent while fabricators provide the means to realize it, and Glasford's modular approach demonstrates how technology-enabled systems can carry a robust craft voice across multiple projects and scales.

Education and mentorship emerge as critical levers for sustaining craft across generations. Hillary's engagement with NCIDQ preparation and IIDA mentoring signals a deliberate investment in the next generation of designers, who will at least be aware of fabricators and craftspeople. For planners and architects, this underscores the importance of early, integrative collaboration with fabrication partners and allied trades, establishing a design process that respects craft while embracing appropriate technologies.

Total Design is not a fossilized relic of the Arts and Crafts era; it is a living philosophy reframed for contemporary practice. Austin, Waters, and Glassford embody three routes through which design intention—proportion, material truth, and collaborative clarity—enters the built environment. The result is spaces that feel deliberate, coherent, and, above all, human. In the words of the interviewees, design is collaboration, and the most enduring delight is found in the details that others might overlook. As you walk through a room, consider the joint where wood meets stone, the seam where metal and fabric align, and the pattern that unifies surface with space. Think of the people whose hands operated the tools to create this; imagine them reading, traveling, or studying nature. Consider the team of different trades involved and how they may have exchanged tools, materials, and knowledge. Reflect on the designers who allow room for one another's creativity and collectively refine the details. Now think again about the hours of training it must have taken them to achieve their craft. Behind every visible detail lie hours of study, dialogue, and hands-on work—an unspoken promise that craft, knowledge, and collaboration will continue to shape the places we inhabit. ☐

Nyx Valerdy Marquez, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, is an architect at the Perkins&Will Houston studio, where she works on science and technology projects. She is also interested in neuroscience and well-being, which inform her study of how people navigate their environments.

↓ The scene of an artisan delighting on the process of carving a detail, one chisel at a time.
PHOTO BY AUSTIN STUDIOS

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OWNER: HINES; ARCHITECT: MUNOZ+ALBIN & KIRKSEY; INTERIOR DESIGNER: MARS

ATLANTIS
OWNER: ATLANTIS; ARCHITECT AND INTERIOR DESIGNER: HBG DESIGN; PHOTOGRAPHER: CRAIG LENIHAN

PORT OF HOUSTON
OWNER: MIDWAY; ARCHITECT: PAGE; INTERIOR DESIGNER: INVENTURE; PHOTOGRAPHER: SEAN FLEMING

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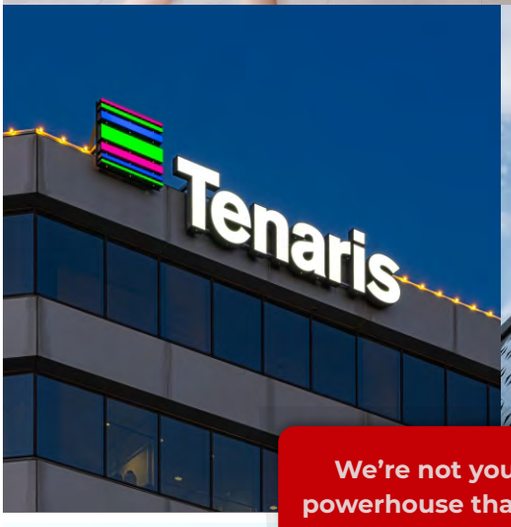

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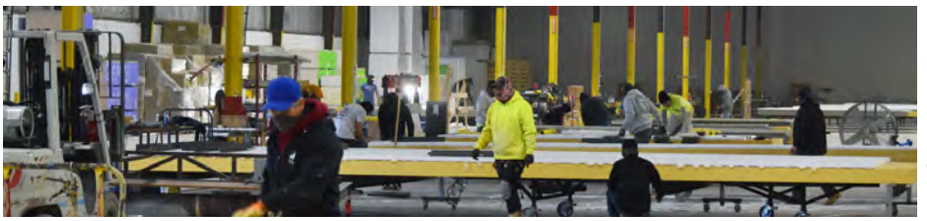

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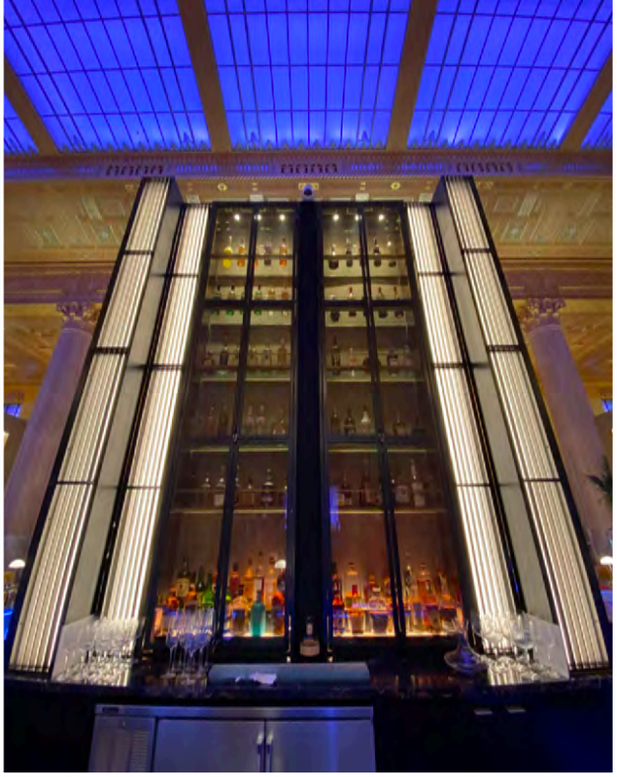

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STORIES FROM TEXAS'S 2026 FELLOWSHIP COHORT

by Canan Yetmen, Hon. TxA

A pioneer in sustainable design, Thom Powell elevates architectural practice, integrating cutting-edge sustainable technical excellence with relentless innovation, empowering teams and transforming communities by making sustainable design the standard, not the exception.

Thom Powell, FAIA
Dallas
Object 2: Practice/Technical Advancement

Gianna Pigford, FAIA, NOMA
Dallas
Object Five: Service to Society

Gianna Pigford changes the face of architecture by founding enduring mentorship pipelines, advancing equity policy, building thriving organizations, and inspiring underrepresented youth and professionals—leaving a measurable, sustainable legacy of inclusion, leadership, and community transformation.

Connie Rivera, FAIA
Corpus Christi
Object Three: Led the Institute

Connie Rivera's commitment to AIA has ensured equitable service for members, acted as a catalyst for advancement in the face of disruption, and expanded engagement and inclusion, both within the Institute and the broader community.

As a healthcare architect, Whitney Fuessel leads with empathy. She creates deeply intentional and compassionate buildings, empowers peers and future leaders, and embraces every opportunity to employ supportive architecture to uplift and transform vulnerable communities.

Whitney Fuessel, FAIA
Houston
Object Two: Practice/Technical Advancement

Daimian Hines, FAIA, NOMA
Houston
Object One: Design

Daimian Hines pursues design excellence as professional practice and civic responsibility, creating architecture that achieves its highest potential by uniting technical rigor and cultural meaning, and expanding representation in the profession and its work.

Ford was awarded the Whitney M. Young Jr. Award for his visionary work merging hip-hop culture with architecture to inspire underrepresented youth and create pathways into the design profession.

Michael Ford, FAIA, NOMA
Dallas
Recipient of the 2025 Whitney M. Young Jr. Award

While things are moving—albeit slowly—in the right direction, AIA continues to struggle with diversity, a problem that is particularly visible in one of its highest membership awards: Fellowship. Seventy-one percent of the 66 new AIA Fellows are white, and 61 percent are men, according to the AIA's statistics. These numbers align directly with the racial and gender identities of the entire class of submissions. In other words, most people who applied for Fellowship continue to be male and white.

That's the discouraging news. The better news is that Texas led the way in diversifying this group of leaders. The six-person Texas cohort—8 percent of this year's class—is the most diverse in the country. The group is evenly divided by gender and includes all three Black architects elevated nationwide this year, along with one of the two Hispanic architects. It also embodies a wide range of experiences and achievements.

This shift reflects a broader national trend: Over the past decade, Fellowship has evolved from a late-career capstone recognition into one that often comes in mid-career, celebrating architects who are actively reshaping the profession and their communities. This alone offers a more representative picture of the profession and lays the groundwork for continued progress.

Eligibility for Fellowship requires that a candidate be an AIA member in good standing and have completed 10 cumulative years of AIA Architect membership by the date of the submission deadline. The nomination process has two paths: One is nomination by the candidate's chapter or state component, the other is nomination by peers, which requires the signatures of either 10 AIA architect members or five Fellows. The type of nomination has no bearing on the jury's evaluation of the submission.

Here, the new Texas Fellows share their individual journeys and their experiences with the sometimes mystifying process. Collectively, their contributions represent four of the six Fellowship categories, or Objects of Nomination, and demonstrate advancement in innovative sustainability and empathetic healthcare design, inclusive AIA leadership, culturally significant design excellence, and service focused on expanding diversity and inclusion. Michael Ford, FAIA, NOMA, the recipient of the 2025 Whitney M. Young Jr. Award honoring exemplary social responsibility in the profession at the national level, was automatically elevated to Fellowship this year for his inspiring engagement with underserved youth.

Let's start at the beginning. What did your journey to Fellowship look like?

GIANNA PIGFORD I didn't conceive that it would even be possible for me to achieve Fellowship. I didn't think about it. I just did what I thought I should do to support architecture and the profession, and what I saw as a way for me to help champion, cheer, mentor, and coach others in their endeavors. I never really thought beyond what was in front of me. It took someone tapping me on the shoulder and saying, "Hey, you're ready."

THOM POWELL I was at the AIA national conference in 1998 in New Orleans and ended up at a Fellows party. All of the people I met were fascinating. I thought, I want to be a part of that. I knew that there was a process. Fast forward to 2016 at the Philadelphia conference, I attended the ceremony to see a friend inducted into Fellowship. Around that time, people mentioned that I should pursue it. I looked at the process and didn't feel ready. So I put it on the back burner for a while. I focused on my LEED Fellow submittal, and when I achieved that, it was reaffirming.

CONNIE RIVERA I became executive director for AIA Corpus Christi in late 2008 and was licensed about six months later. I was going to my first CACE [Council of Architectural Component Executives] annual meeting, and Jeff Potter [FAIA] was there. He was president-elect for AIA national. I had met him years before when he was president-elect for TxA. We were riding an elevator to a meeting, and he looks over at me and says, "You know you're going to be a Fellow, right?" It was crazy. And I was like, "Well, one, I just got licensed, and two, I am not in a traditional firm role—I'm not doing any of that stuff. Where is this coming from?'" He says, "No, it's going to happen."

WHITNEY FUESSEL This was not on my radar. I grew up with the idea that you need to do what's good for people—you elevate, mentor, and be kind to others. That's how I led my career. I've only worked in healthcare, so it's been easy to live that out. I went from pediatrics and women's services to county hospitals and projects in Africa, serving those who need it most. It's fed me more than I could have imagined. Then I got a random call from AIA Houston saying, "We've nominated you." I was like, "That's fantastic. What do I do now?"

DAIMIAN HINES For most of my career, I really just focused on designing objects while working at large firms in Detroit, Chicago, and Houston. Then I decided to work overseas and pursue projects that aligned more closely with my ethos and my values—to really dive in. I did that for close to three years. When I came back, I hung my shingle and said, "I'm just going to pursue those kinds of projects." I think for the past three years, AIA Houston nudged me to pursue Fellowship. I was a bit cynical and frankly didn't feel I had the time [to put the nomination packet together]. I was too busy doing the work, but it was actually the work that drove me to make the decision. With the culmination of a project we had been working on, I saw how the community reacted to that project and how other communities responded looking for ways to bring their own similar projects to life.

MICHAEL FORD It was not something that was on my radar early in my career. I would say that the speech that Whitney Young gave to AIA, when he talked about architects' "thunderous silence" and the profession's irrelevance to the civil rights movement—it stayed with me so early in my career.

But I wasn't thinking about awards or Fellowship—that wasn't my focus. It was more about trying to make architecture more approachable, more relevant to people who normally don't see themselves in the profession. I was trying to figure out how architecture could connect to culture, music, and everyday life. I wanted to make people feel like architecture was something that they could participate in, as opposed to something that simply impacts their lives without their voices being part of it. I can remember early in my career, I wore a T-shirt to an AIA lecture that said "Not my AIA" on it. I was very critical of AIA and some of the decisions they were making back before I was licensed as a young professional.

One of the more challenging aspects of the Fellowship and the Whitney M. Young award submissions is the way candidates are expected to make a case for their work as an individual achievement rather than a collective one. How did you work your way to making peace with that approach?

HINES It was very uncomfortable in the beginning. It was just unnatural to talk about myself, and I tried to avoid it. But once I told myself, this can impact the work because this work needs to be elevated, it gave me the courage to actually say, "You know what, I have to stop under-claiming this narrative, lean into it, and embrace it." I'm involved in a lot of organizations. It's a choice. For me, it was okay to acknowledge what I was doing. Often for the first 30 minutes in a room I have to justify being in the room, and I wanted a more efficient way of getting to the meat of discussions. I thought Fellowship could be a bit of a wind in our sails.

FUESSEL You were taught it's *we*—even if no one is there all night with you, whenever we present the project, *we* did it. Changing that mindset to "*I* did this; this was *my* impact," was tough for me at first. My sponsor was great about saying, "Imagine this is a pearl necklace and you're weaving the story together." It was the best advice because I was able to see how one project or one activity bled into the next. It really evolved into a great story.

POWELL Gianna [Pigford] and Connie [Rivera] and I went through the same process. Norm Alston [FAIA]—I'll give him all the credit—led our Dallas group, and he would say that we cannot be shy. He said to not talk about the *we* and be forceful. He really coached us through it. Having someone else push me to do that was helpful because it's not in my nature to focus on just me. The work is a group effort always. But Norm really helped.

Another challenge for applicants is turning your CV from a list of achievements into a narrative that gives the work bigger meaning within the context of the profession and society at large. It's not the usual marketing; it's persuasion, to get people to come to an understanding of your contributions. How did you work with that part of the process?

PIGFORD The first step, putting together the CV to be accepted into the AIA Dallas [Fellows Network] workshop , was eye opening for me—what about the work was meaningful? Having conversations with people was helpful. You meander through one thing after another—leadership, organizations, tasks, committees, and community engagement—doing the things that you think are right for the profession, rather than thinking about getting rewarded for it. The first submission was a struggle, not just the *we* versus *I* thing, but the challenge of pulling it together with words that made sense. My advice for people going through this process is: Get different points of view; get colleagues or acquaintances who may not know much about you to look at your submission. Does it resonate with them? Do they understand it? Do they get it?

POWELL It was a great six months of getting together with the people who've gone through it. The process, although long and arduous, was rewarding. The monthly get-togethers [for the AIA Dallas Fellows Network], talking through everything as a group, I found really rewarding. In the end, it felt as though whether I made it or not, the process itself was worthwhile.

HINES We started deconstructing my achievements, because what I'd put forward as a first draft looked like a brochure or project proposal. But it's not a mission statement. It's a series of choices you make over and over and over again, and no firm's mission statement could align with your actions.

FORD Oftentimes we're in a room, and we're selling an idea. We're trying to show how we can create an object, a singular thing, to a client. We're used to drilling into the details when selling the idea. This required something different. I had to step back and tell the story of the impact. I love that it forced me to move away from what I did in a singular instance to focus on the systematic impact. I saw a full ecosystem of the work: the camps, students I worked with, the programs I developed, the partnerships with brands, the projects, and even scholarships I've given away to young people while still paying off my own damn student loans. It's tough to talk about yourself. You instantly want to step back and say, "Okay, it seems like I'm gloating. I'm saying too much. I'm overstating. Did I really do all of this?" You have this moment to reflect.

RIVERA You should have seen my office as I was putting this thing together—papers, souvenirs, and all that sort of stuff. I was like, "Okay, I have this pile from several different roles." I mean, I have done just about everything, from executive director to president of TxA. It was about finding the common theme. Because I wasn't pursuing recognition. I was just finding my passion and following it, depending on where I was in my career. As executive director, I was advocating on behalf of small chapters. In leadership at TxA, I was advocating for those who've gone through disasters and for those who don't have as much access to the profession or leadership. We boiled it down to one thing: I'm always fighting for the underdog.

Now that you've been elevated and reflected on that, what's been your experience? How do you see your role in the profession evolving?

PIGFORD An amazing thing that's happened—I'm sure others here have had this happen since we've been announced and elevated as Fellows—is that someone's hit you in your DMs or LinkedIn messages and said, "Congratulations. How did you do it?" Or "I'm interested. Could we talk about it?'" Or "Here's my submission, this is my third go at it, and I can't seem to get past this hurdle. What can I do?" I say to people you have a story you need to craft. You also may need to invest in someone to help you tell the story. Tap into your local Fellows. Ask them how they did it. What was their path? How were they able to achieve it? Everybody's going to have a different story.

I'm seeing the hurdles. There are people who are capable of doing this. They have the story and have quite a bit of it pulled together. They just don't have the support of their chapter or can't find seven people to write letters for them. They don't have the funds to submit and pay $450, or they don't have the software to pull the package together. There are access barriers. As a new Fellow, I want to support those who also can achieve this but don't have the means or the level of access that I found.

FUESSEL I've already been asked to write a couple letters and to review a package. I don't know that we emphasize enough how important it is for the letter writers to tie into the larger stories. Creating relationships when you're younger and continuing them is so important so that people are able to write authentically about you.

What are your thoughts on Fellowship as an aspirational goal, given that it wasn't on your radar initially. What would you tell someone who might not see themselves as Fellowship material?

HINES I would say Fellowship is not a trophy. It's a marker. It's a marker, for me at least, of responsibility. There are so many architects out there whose practice and purpose just need to be amplified. So that's why I would say everyone has a story.

RIVERA There were many times I had to remind myself that I believed I was enough. I don't think I could have finished it if I didn't think I had what it took to cross the finish line. You have to believe that you're that and that you have what it takes to be there.

POWELL The letter writers' support really helped drive me to what Connie [Rivera] is talking about, to get to the finish line. If I had any self-doubt, it was certainly helpful when the group from AIA Dallas chimed in to say, "You deserve to be there."

FORD I would tell young professionals, don't aim to become a Fellow. Aim to change the profession. If your goal is recognition, you're always going to be chasing validation from others. That can't be the motivation for work. Motivation should be to make architecture better, make it more relevant, make it more connected to the communities that we serve. Go out there and see what it is that you want to change. Create programs or join up with individuals or existing programs to help scale them. It's not a cookie-cutter process; you're not going to follow what someone else has done exactly. And then, I would say, apply. Don't think that you haven't done enough. Submit to awards as often as you possibly can when you have found your true purpose. Make your driver be changing the profession. When you feel that you've hit it, don't be afraid.

Canan Yetmen, Hon. TxA, is a writer based in Austin.

The 2026 class of AIA Fellows will be celebrated at the investiture ceremony at the AIA Conference on Architecture & Design in San Diego.

IT'S A MATERIAL WORLD

Bruce Goff: Material Worlds Art Institute of Chicago

by James Russell

Bruce Goff in his office at the University of Oklahoma

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP B. WELCH, THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, RYERSON AND BURNHAM ART AND ARCHITECTURE ARCHIVES, BRUCE A. GOFF ARCHIVE

If there's any architect whose personality, buildings, and vision for the world and the field of architecture can make you feel an iota of hope, it's Bruce Goff. Hands down. No argument. And that's why if we can't be gifted more of one of the 20th century's greatest architect's imaginative houses, churches, and public spaces, then the exhibition *Bruce Goff: Material Worlds* at the Art Institute of Chicago, which ran through March 29, should have been a permanent installation. It was accompanied by the exhibitions *New Affiliates on Goff's Domestic Matter*, *Japanese Prints from the Collection of Bruce Goff*, and *Janna Ireland: A Goff House in Los Angeles*.

Material Worlds was as refreshing as Goff's designs, and the credit all goes to Alison Fisher, the Harold and Margot Schiff curator of architecture and design, and Craig Lee, assistant curator of architecture and design, who dug through his archives—donated in 1992 to the museum by Shin'enKan, Inc. and Goff's executor Joe Price—as well as donations and loans from private collections and from the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma.

The gist of Goff's story is this: He was a prodigy who trained as an architect at 12 years old and significantly transformed the skyline of Tulsa with one of his first major projects, the Boston Avenue Methodist Church. He was also known for two magnificent houses: the Bavinger House in Norman, Oklahoma, demolished in 2016 after a period of neglect, and the Shin'enKan house, built in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, for executor Joe Price and lost to arson in 1996. (Price's father commissioned the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Price Tower.) By the time Goff died in Tyler in 1982, he was wrapping up commissions for a community on Lake Palestine. His career resulted in 150 completed buildings of an estimated 500 designs across 15 states. That's enough for one lifetime, and the exhibition could have started and ended there.

Fisher's curatorial style emphasizes relationships, which made her an excellent choice to curate a comprehensive exhibition about someone whose personality was inseparable from his practice. (Another similar example of Fisher's work is *Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention*, which was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011.)

The archives were full of ephemera, photographs, bolo ties, funky shirts, journals, paintings, and musical compositions. While plenty was donated from Goff's office, and Fisher and Lee could have stuck with the routine of the architect, they didn't. Although there's some indication that dated approach perhaps would have satisfied Goff. He once said in *Goff on Goff*, a compilation of interviews with former student Philip B. Welch, "Architecture with a capital A is…bigger than any architect who has ever lived and always will be."

But Fisher and Lee leaned on another quote: "I've been controversial ever since I started. I can't help it. I'm neither ashamed nor proud of it. That's just what happened." And with that, the theme was set.

"A retrospective a lot of times is this rigid chronology, and that's why we wanted to start differently," Fisher said. "We started with objects so that you had a real snapshot of his values and his interests, which among them are his interest in sparkle and shine and his incredible ability to mix high and low."

The first object on display was, naturally, a mini disco ball.

"We were so delighted to find what we felt like was a pretty beautiful object that if we presented it in an elevated way could be appealing," she said.

Nearby were samples of shag carpets. "Perhaps no one has done more in the history of shag carpeting than Bruce Goff," Fisher said with a laugh.

Of music Goff told Welch: "I could almost say I have learned more about architecture from music than I have from architecture. Apologies to Wright." Playing throughout the gallery was one of his many compositions performed on a self-playing piano.

The museum owns around 500 of his paintings in total, most of which have not been publicly displayed. Every Sunday, Goff sat and painted, as it was another way to see and feel architecture. To display them, New Affiliates of New York set up like a salon-style wall highlighting a selection of these bright experiments.

Goff was also queer, a point the curators wanted to add. On display was a photograph with his partner, the poet Richard San Jule, with a gong from their house placed above it. His sexuality wasn't an issue for many. He even was commissioned to design the Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity House at the University of Oklahoma, which was one of the models on display. But he was subject to the whims of homophobia when he was forced out as head of the University of Oklahoma School of Architecture, which he ran and revolutionized, despite administrative, student, and faculty objections.

Goff faced other forms of adversity, too, including cycles of economic booms and busts. And at the ground level Goff had to steer clients in the right direction. He told Welch that if the clients said that they wanted two-foot-deep stairs, he would say no out of practicality. But he emphasized he didn't reply with a gruff Wright "no."

"He was super soft spoken. People said he had the demeanor of a country doctor," Fisher said.

His clients listened because Goff believed in the relationships. The relationships lasted for years, and he constantly gave and received gifts. It was all important.

When walking through the exhibition with former clients, Fisher said, "They're like, 'Oh my gosh, I gave him that!'"

The objects and stories are essential to understanding Goff. The models, photographs, and sketches, which include unbuilt residences in Amarillo and Highland Park, all reflect his life's work and moments of his life. His signature bolo ties and flashy button-down shirts stand among the Pavilion of Japanese Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Given Goff's early start, he first designed more traditional structures. But Tulsa was a booming and creative place, and Goff was eager to expand his reach. It's where he developed a signature style starting with a geometric shape that swerved around an axis, with a room adorned with plants and beloved recycled glass embedded sporadically on site. (An example of that glass, made from Coke bottles, was also on display.)

The sketch for the Highland Park residence commissioned by Jerry Alex and Mary Blakely from 1949 looks like a spaceship. (He loved fantasy and science fiction.) The pencil and graphite sketch captures everything Goff would pursue in his lifetime. It's a space almost impossible to conceive, hovering between indoors and outdoors, with plants in improbable places, hanging lamps not to scale, and windows, or perhaps a wall.

For Al and Jean Dewlen in Amarillo, two sketches show the impossible. Weaving up onto a mountainside are what look like claws, with half circles embedded into hills until it narrows, and appears like feet protruding out.

As seen in photographs of the built structures, he made it all work. Though, as he told Welch, "To satisfy zoning requirements, loan requirements, and many other physical requirements and still produce a good small house is almost a magician's feat."

That's an understatement. For Goff, the inconceivable still became the possible.

James Russell is a journalist in Fort Worth writing about art, the built environment, and politics. His writing has appeared in *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, *CityLab*, *Arts and Culture Texas*, and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, among other publications.

Hopewell Baptist Church, Edmond, Oklahoma, Perspective 1948-49

DRAWING BY BRUCE GOFF, COURTESY THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, GIFT OF SHIN'ENKAN, INC.

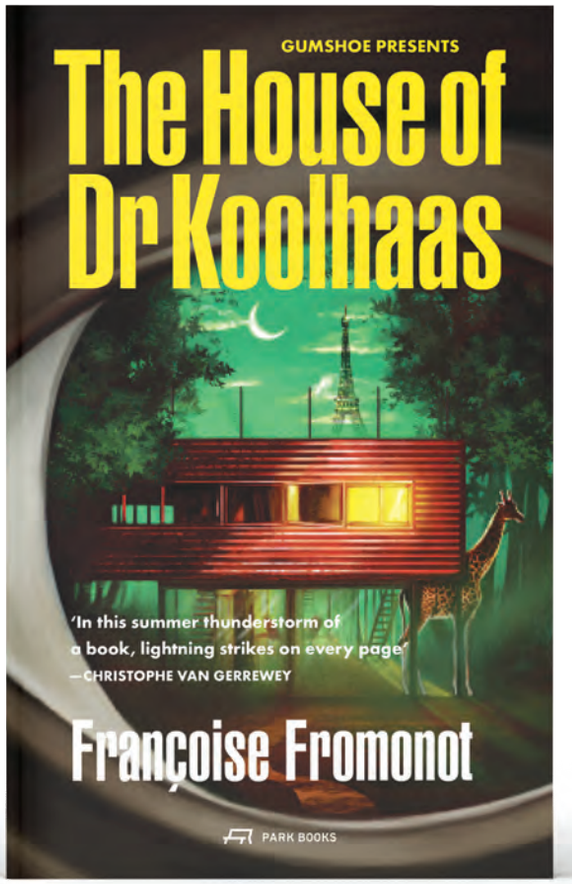
DON'T LOOK FOR ZEBRAS

The House of Dr Koolhaas

Françoise Fromonot with editor Thomas Weaver

Park Books, 2025

by Jes Deaver, AIA



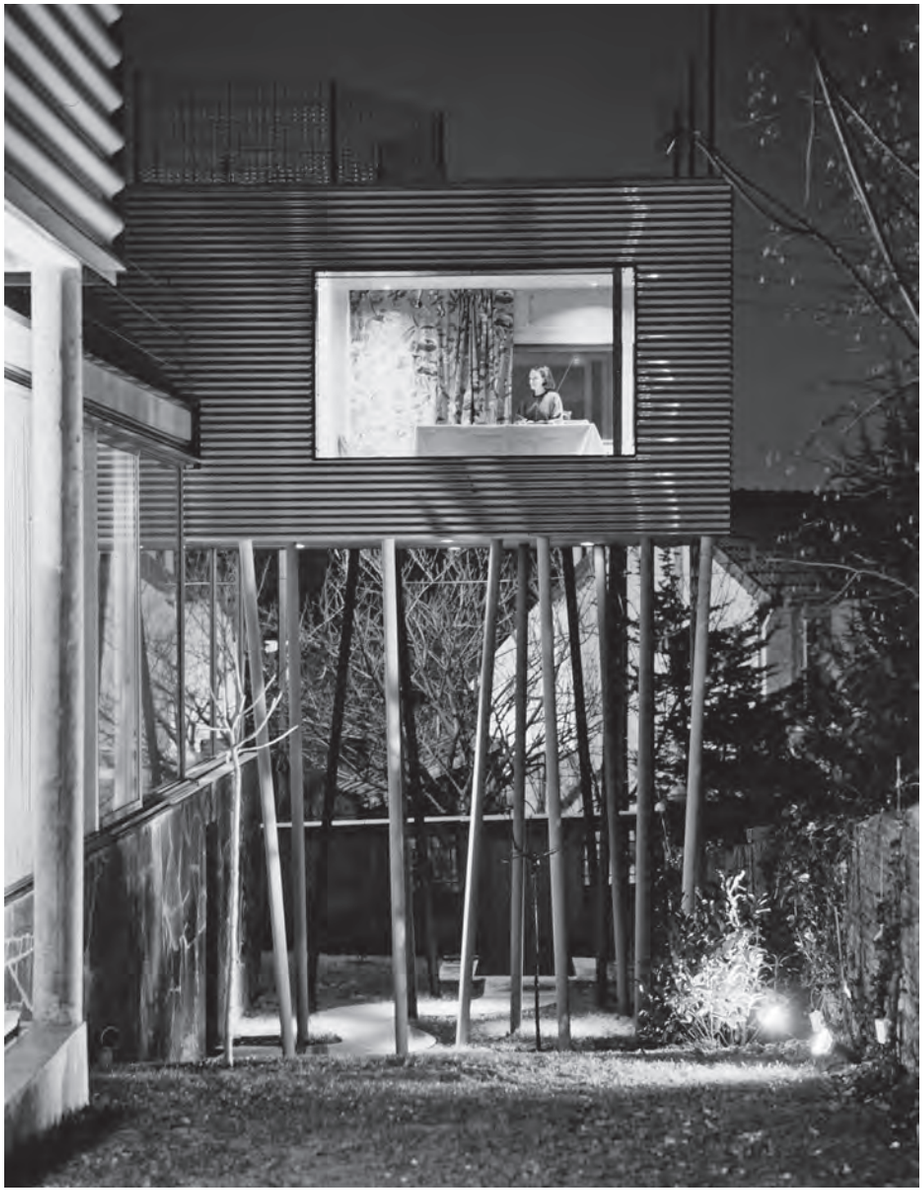
The adage "when you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras" cautions medical interns to consider common diagnoses before rare ones. Practical advice—unless you are attending the autopsy of Office of Metropolitan Architecture's (OMA) rousing Paris dwelling Villa dall'Ava, where surrealism emerges as the prime suspect. That is precisely the premise of *The House of Dr Koolhaas*, a provocative, pulpy architectural mystery that reexamines the villa through the guise of a cold-case criminal investigation.

Presented as a post-mortem, the book is *The House of Dr Koolhaas*, a modest four-and-one-quarter-inch by seven-inch paperback reminiscent of early detective novels. It is the first in the Gumshoe Series of Architectural Mysteries published by Park Books. Conceived by professor of design, history, and theory Françoise Fromonot and architectural writer, educator, and editor Thomas Weaver, the book teems with black-and-white photography, illustrations, references, and enough evidence to build a strong case against surrealism. The question of the purpose is what makes the read exciting, proving that architectural critique is not dead. There are also giraffes.

The author opens with a visit to Villa dall'Ava, the striking residence of Dominique Boudet, editor-in-chief of the French design trade publication Le Moniteur. It is Bastille Day in 2009, and Fromonot observes the rooftop pool in its native habitat: a party. From there, a brief overview of OMA founder Rem Koolhaas leads to historical clues and occasional red herrings. Fromonot examines architectural photography and the history of pools with equal glee, drawing conclusions and forming questions that lead to deeper scrutiny. Each new discovery ranges from mildly quixotic to absurd, connecting threads from the seemingly disparate worlds of surrealism, eggs, animals, and even New York City's popular midcentury pool performance troupe the Aquazanies. Throughout, evidence is bolstered by Koolhaas's seminal works of architectural writing, *Delirious New York* and *S, M, L, XL*, the latter splayed across a two-page spread for forensic study.

Images spill from the pages offering insights into Koolhaas's avant-garde perspective of blurring authority with irreverence. The 12-minute film that came out of the original architectural shoot of the residence was photographed by Hans Werlemann and filmmaker Chiel van der Stelt and titled *2042: The Villa dall'Ava by OMA*. Fromonot juxtaposes the short film against what she describes as the voyeurism of *Rear Window*, the paranoia of *Vertigo*, and those films that capture the involuntary burlesque of modern environments like *Mon Oncle* by Jacques Tati or their underlying pathologies." The handy references at the end of the book make for a nice list of additional reading and viewing material.

Fromonot is not shy to lean into the stylistic motifs of the detective genre referencing the "raw concrete carcass" of the parting image in *S,M,L,XL*. "The five points of a new architecture are all present in the Villa dall'Ava," she writes, "albeit in a distorted form, twisted to the point of irrationality—and it is this spectacle of their systematic



↑↑ Page 90-91, Peter Aaron, *Swimmer*, 1991

PHOTO BY PETER AARON/OTTO

↑ Page 36, Pilotis and elevated front bedroom

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↑ Page 124-125, Lucian Freud, The Painter's Room, 1944

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misuse that Koolhaas is inviting us to witness." Fromonot's commentary is as fascinating as the questions she jots alongside her revelations: "Independent frame?" or "Pilotis?"

Her search plays the authoritative Holmes to her own inquisitive Watson, balancing the personas against a voluminous knowledge of Koolhaas's body of work. The ploy is mostly successful, making surprising connections that feel as though you are uncovering something new. Anything dug up from such a rich history, however, will eventually start to lose its freshness. Perhaps the weakest component is Fromonot's zeal for the subject, which bleeds her academic vocabulary into lengthy tangents.

In dissecting Koolhaas's "salute to Dali," she begins a dizzying association stating: "There is, moreover, a famous precedent for the idea of fomenting a retroactive plot by means of a covert surrealist operation." Forgiving these momentary lapses and learning new words in the process are part of the promise of the book, whose true strength, lies in searching for zebras or, in this case, Romeo the giraffe. Fromonot gives the reader time to savor the peculiarities while enjoying the surreal, genre-bending fever dream that is *The House of Dr Koolhaas*.

As refreshing as a swirl of vermouth in an ice-cold Manhattan, this ambitious book asks more questions than provides answers, opening the door for readers to speculate on when the next Gumshoe book will drop. The series suggests new examinations into well-known or unnoticed buildings observing, "All human artifacts are enigmas, some more than others—not least buildings." A bold methodology that invigorates the field of architectural criticism. Next for the series is Niemeyer and the *Mysteries of a Communist Cave*.

Jes Deaver, AIA, is an architect and writer in Austin.

The rounded edges of these products align with the growing trend toward incorporating more organic, softer shapes and curves into hospitality interiors.

by Rita Catinella Orrell

↑ ROTIN
Ethimo Outdoor Décor
ethimo.com

The Rotin lounge collection includes an outdoor sofa, lounge armchair, coffee table, and a pouf with a structure in pickled teak or stainless steel. Inspired by bamboo, Rotin is the first product line from Ethimo entirely manufactured with a special draining system and fabrics specific for outdoor use. Tubes of warm pickled teak or stainless steel joined with nautical rope embrace the seats, highlighting their contours, and create the structure of the coffee tables, which have handmade tops of enameled terracotta, waste quarry marble, or cement.

↓ OVAL FIREPLACE
Ortal
ortalheat.com

Commanding the center of attention, the Oval Fireplace's steel-sculpted, sleek curved design is powered by a sealed system that ensures cleaner, safer, and more efficient heating while maintaining superior indoor air quality. Ortal's Power Vent system enables installation in previously restrictive areas by moving exhaust away from the fireplace for increased venting range, while its smart Heat Control system allows heat to be transferred to different rooms. Oval can be fully suspended or wall-mounted for seamless integration into contemporary residential, hospitality, and commercial environments.

↓ THE NESTING ROOM
Moooi + ABK Group
abkgroup.it

Moooi's first-ever ceramic collection transforms animal traits like eggshells and plumage and natural landscapes into tactile, architectural surfaces. Created in collaboration with the Italian ceramics brand ABK Group, the collection features three motifs: Hypnotic Owl, Reiki Rhea, and Cloistered Dove. Available in 47" x 110", 47" x 47", 24" x 47", and 24" x 24" sizes, the neutral base tiles have refined textures and decorative patterns that are designed to be mixed and matched.

← OCEAN MASTER MEGA MAX VOILARE
Tuuci
tuuci.com

With a beauty that belies its strength, Tuuci's Ocean Master Mega Max Voilare parasol has a sophisticated silhouette and an intricate frame system that creates its own focal point beneath the canopy. Spanning an attention-grabbing 20 feet in diameter, the umbrella features Tuuci's latest design constructed of marine-grade stainless steel and 24 ribs. A curved, fluted reinforcement design supports the massive canopy and defends against wind, while the mast's four-channel aluminum extrusion amplifies its strength.

↑ ARCADE BAR CART
Giobagnara
giobagnara.com

With a leather-covered wooden structure paired with a metal frame on four wheels, the Arcade bar cart is conceived as a complete hospitality service unit, designed to discreetly accommodate storage, refrigeration, and technical needs within a single, mobile piece. Access to the interior is provided through two discreetly integrated doors, behind which the internal layout can be composed according to service requirements.

↓ TULIP
Hastings Bath Collection
hastingsbathcollection.com

Designed and manufactured in Italy, Tulip features a range of modular components and accessories, including freestanding and wall-mounted consoles, sculptural solid-surface basins and bathtubs, and a swivel mirror column. The collection's defining visual language is soft geometry and expressive contours, with curved metal elements finished in a choice of 44 matte lacquered colors. Completing the collection are accessories like towel racks, robe hooks, toilet roll holders, and mobile carts, all echoing the curved metal motif.

JUNE

SATURDAY 6

EXHIBITION CLOSING
2026 Art of Architecture Competition
AD EX
325 N. St. Paul St. Ste. 150
Dallas
dallasadex.org

EXHIBITION CLOSING
2026 Wing + Build Student Exhibition
AD EX
325 N. St. Paul St. Ste. 150
Dallas
dallasadex.org

WEDNESDAY 10

EXHIBITION CLOSING
The Legends Project Exhibition
Austin Central Library
710 W. Cesar Chavez St.
Austin
library.austintexas.gov

THURSDAY 11

EXHIBITION OPENING
GIANT by: Ken Womack
Museum of the Southwest
1705 W. Missouri Ave.
Midland
museumsw.org

SUNDAY 14

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Desert Rinpa by Mitsumasa Overstreet
El Paso Museum of Art
One Arts Festival Plaza
El Paso
epma.art

SATURDAY 20

EXHIBITION CLOSING
15-Minute City: UTA CAPPA Student's Masterplan for Dallas City Hall and Downtown
AD EX
325 N. St. Paul St. Ste. 150
Dallas
dallasadex.org

SUNDAY 21

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Raimundo de Madrazo
Meadows Museum
5900 Bishop Blvd.
Dallas
meadowsmuseumdallas.org

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Mario Ayala: Seven Vans
5216 Montrose Blvd.
Houston
camh.org

EXHIBITION CLOSING
[_____] Mirage
Crow Museum of Asian Art
2010 Flora St.
Dallas
crowmuseum.org

EXHIBITION OPENING
Hew Locke: Passages
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
1001 Bissonnet St.
Houston
mfah.org

The most comprehensive survey to date on the work of Guyanese-British artist Hew Locke, this exhibition showcases over 40 sculptures, collages, and assemblages examining the histories of colonialism across five continents, filtered through present-day realities of global trade, migration, and diaspora.

IMAGE CREDIT: HEW LOCKE, *WHERE LIES THE LAND? 2*, 2019, THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, © 2019 HEW LOCKE; PHOTO COURTESY THE ARTIST AND HALES GALLERY, © ANGUS MILLS PHOTOGRAPH

FRIDAY 26

EVENT
Ken Roberts (KRob) Memorial Delineation Competition Awards Broadcast
Virtual
aiadallas.org

SUNDAY 28

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Suzi Davidoff: Wander
El Paso Museum of Art
One Arts Festival Plaza
El Paso
epma.art

JULY

SUNDAY 5

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Roy Lichtenstein in the Studio
Dallas Museum of Art
1717 N. Harwood
Dallas
dma.org

THURSDAY 9

EVENT
Designing My Future K-12 Camps
(Ages 10–13 through Friday 10; 14–18 through Saturday 11)
AD EX
325 N. St. Paul St. Ste. 150
Dallas
dallasadex.org

SUNDAY 19

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Rhythm of the City
Dallas Museum of Art
1717 N. Harwood
Dallas
dma.org

THURSDAY 23

EXHIBITION CLOSING
Soñadoras: Yuyi Morales
Art Museum of South Texas
1902 N. Shoreline Blvd.
Corpus Christi
artmuseumofsouthtexas.org

SATURDAY 25

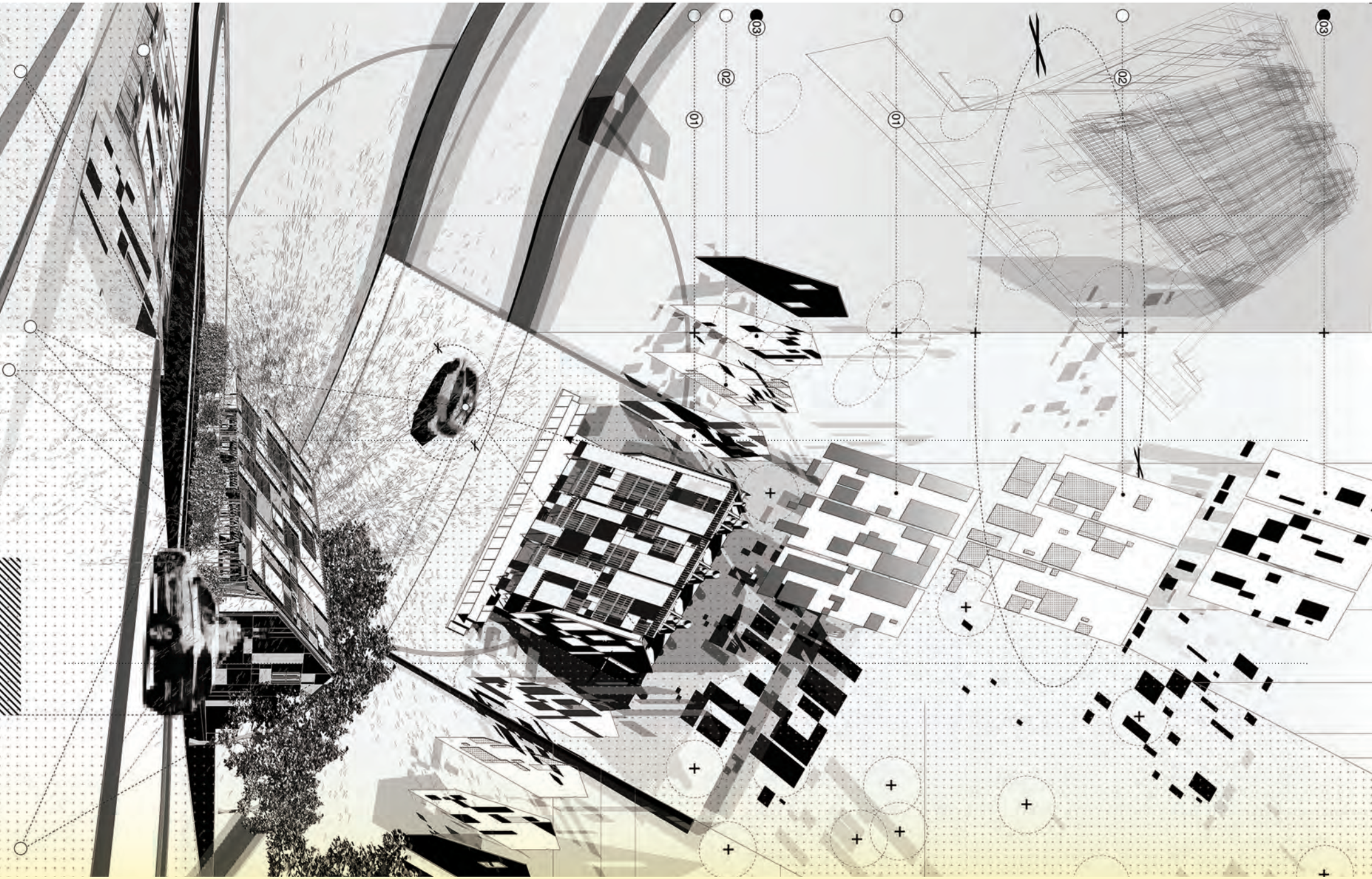
EVENT
Designing My Future K-12 Camp
(Ages 6–9)
AD EX
325 N. St. Paul St. Ste. 150
Dallas
dallasadex.org

TUESDAY 28

EXHIBITION OPENING
52nd Annual KRob Gallery
AD EX
325 N. St. Paul St. Ste. 150
Dallas
aiadallas.org

This exhibition features the winners and finalists of the 2026 Ken Roberts (KRob) Memorial Delineation Competition. The most senior architectural drawing competition currently in operation anywhere in the world, KRob honors hand and digital delineation by professionals and students, averaging over 300 entries from 25 countries in the past several years. Pictured on the facing page is the work of 2025 finalist Campbell Brod of the Wentworth Insitute of Technology.

IMAGE BY CAMPBELL BROD, WENTWORTH INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, 2025 KROB FINALIST, STUDENT DIGITAL/HYBRID MEDIA



THE PERCH

SEE PAGE 44

LOCATION

Austin

CLIENTS

Annie Cobb and Dylan Robertson

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

Nicole Blair

DESIGN TEAM

Nicole Blair, AIA

CONSULTANTS

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Structures
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: D-Crain

RESOURCES

CLADDING: Western States Metal Roofing
ENTRY SLIDING GLASS DOOR: Windsor (Martel Windows and Doors)
CUSTOM-FABRICATED AND BENT TRIM: Pat's Sheetmetal
BATH SKYLIGHT: Velux (Martel Windows and Doors)
WINDOWS: Windsor (Martel Windows and Doors)
WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS, SLIDING AND/OR FOLDING: Arrow Glass
COVERED PORCH WOOD: Woodtone Fineline Paneling (GTown Lumber)
INTERIOR METAL FABRICATION/INSTALLATION (KITCHEN SHELVES, HANDRAIL, COAT RACK, CABINET PULLS): Tim Schmidt
STRUCTURAL STEEL FRAMING: Drophouse Design
FRAMING: BMC (Boban Brothers)
CARLISLE WIP 300 HT UNDERLAYMENT INSTALL: Boban Brothers
SPRAY FOAM: Maxx Seal
FIBERGLASS (FRONT PORCH AND SHOWER): Sova Construction
CUSTOM INSULATED GLASS PANELS (ENTRY WALL): Arrow Glass
IKEA CABINET & CUSTOM FRONT INSTALLATION (KITCHEN & HALL): A Plus Cabinetry
BOOS MAPLE BUTCHER BLOCK EDGE GRAIN COUNTERTOPS INSTALLATION (KITCHEN & HALL): Tim Schmidt
FLOOR TILE: Artistic Tile – Veronese Crema Terrazzo (Architectural Tile and Stone)
PREFINISHED T&G FLOORING: Remnant Mix of Rift and Flat Sawn White Oak (Artisan Floors)
DRYWALL INSTALLATION: Celis Drywall and Paint
BATH WALLS & CEILING COLOR: LaHabra Meadowbrook (Jose Rivera)
FRAMELESS SHOWER GLASS & CUSTOM BATH MIRROR: Arrow Glass
COPPER FAUCETS AND SHOWER PLUMBING: Switch Range
BATH SINK AND TOILET: Duravit (Ferguson)
IMPERIAL VENT HOOD INSERT/CUSTOM VENT HOOD COVER: Pat's Sheetmetal
CONCRETE FOOTING INSTALLATION: Herrera Concrete and Masonry
PAINT: Sherwin Williams, Behr, Benjamin Moore (Celis Drywall and Paint)
MCNICHOLS EXTERIOR STEEL STAIR INSTALLATION: Tim Schmidt

CRUX PFLUGERVILLE

SEE PAGE 52

LOCATION

Pflugerville

CLIENT

Crux Climbing Center

ARCHITECT

Derrington Building Studio

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Aday & Associates

CONSULTANTS

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Structures
MEP ENGINEER: APTUS
WATERPROOFING: Ericka Bonfanti Acton Partners
REGISTERED ACCESSIBILITY SPECIALIST: Contour Collective
LIGHTING REP: Spectrum Lighting – Austin

COSMIC SALTILLO

SEE PAGE 66

LOCATION

Austin

CLIENT

Cosmic Hospitality Group

ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGNER

Clayton Korte

CONTRACTOR

Solutions GC

CONSULTANTS

Landscape Architect: Ten Eyck Landscape Architects

RESOURCES

WATERPROOFING: Ericka Bonfanti Acton Partners
LOCAL GRAFFITI ARTIST: Miles Starkey

HAII KEII

SEE PAGE 74

LOCATION

Houston

CLIENT

JAG Hospitality

INTERIOR DESIGNER

Gin Design Group

CONTRACTOR

Objektfab with Anchor Construction

ARCHITECT

Tramonte Design Studio

CONSULTANTS

STRUCTURAL/MEP ENGINEER: Infinity MEP+S
LIGHTING DESIGNER: KPK Lighting Design
PROJECTION MAPPING/MEDIA: Input Output
SIGNAGE: Aria Signs & Design
AV CONSULTANT: Premier Audio Solutions
FF&A PROCUREMENT: GEWL Procure

RESOURCES

EXTERIOR SIGNAGE: Aria Signs
CUSTOM METALWORK/BAR TOP/BAR FACADE: Objektfab
ETCHED LUCITE PANEL GRAPHIC DESIGN: Raydon Creative
FLOATING STEPS & STAIR RAILINGS: Objektfab
FIRST-LEVEL OVERSCALE PRINTED VINYL WALL ART: By Client
SECOND-LEVEL OVERSCALE PRINTED VINYL WALL ART: Arc Com
METALLIC PLASTER/MURAL: Republic Finishes
UPHOLSTERY: House of Fine Interiors
SHOJI SCREENS: Anchor Construction
ROPE INSTALLATION: Ellen Bruxvoort/FIBROUS
PROJECTION MAPPING ON SHOJI SCREENS: Input/Output
BONSAI TREE: Moon Papas Art

2026 EDITORIAL CALENDAR

SPRING 2026

FEATURE	Adaptation
PRODUCTS	Lighting
EDITORIAL	Closed
RELEASED	March 2026

EARLY SUMMER 2026

FEATURE	Delight
PRODUCTS	Hospitality
EDITORIAL	Closed
EST. RELEASE	May 2026

LATE SUMMER 2026

FEATURE	Water
PRODUCTS	Kitchen & Bath
EDITORIAL	Closed
EST. RELEASE	July 2026

FALL 2026 (AWARDS)

FEATURE	The Awards Issue
PRODUCTS	Best of Show
SPECIAL INSERT	TxA26 Design Expo Exhibitor Guide
EDITORIAL	Closed
EST. RELEASE	October 2026

WINTER 2026

FEATURE	Identity
PRODUCTS	Contract Furnishings
EDITORIAL	Jul. 17, 2026
EST. RELEASE	December 2026

Have a compelling story or new project that would be a great fit for one of our upcoming issues?

Submit pitches online at:
magazine.texasarchitects.org/submitting-materials

CRAFTING YOUR PITCH

We value diverse perspectives and welcome many content types that support our mission. Project types of any kind may be submitted for consideration.

The theme for each issue is intentionally broad and open to interpretation. We recommend that you consider how your project or article idea might align with an issue when crafting your submission.

Because we receive more submissions than we can publish, we often must decline strong proposals due to space limitations or because they're not distinct enough from other articles. Pitches received earlier in the editorial cycle have a greater likelihood of being accepted. Strong pitches that we receive that we do not have an immediate placement for may be used to inform the development of the editorial calendar the following year. If we don't have an immediate placement for an article, we may in the future.

These are some of the qualities we look for when evaluating what to publish:

ALIGNMENT – We seek content that supports each issue theme, TA's mission, and TxA's strategic priorities.

ORIGINALITY – We appreciate new perspectives on fresh and historical topics alike.

RESEARCH – This may be original academic research, interviews, or secondary references.

ENGAGING WRITING – We look for topics that are not only informative but pleasurable to read.

SPECIFICITY – Avoid ideas that are too broad. Most professionals will already be knowledgeable about general design and sustainability principles.

AD INDEX

FLYING SAUCER ON THE PRAIRIE

Driving east from Dallas along State Highway 276, the landscape opens into the Blackland Prairie. Fields stretch out from the highway. Low industrial buildings, scattered houses, and roadside businesses punctuate the horizon. Near Royse City, something unexpected appears.

At first glance, it reads less like a building than a visitor—a bright orange flying saucer set down on the ground. A ring of oval windows punctures the shell, and a narrow stair descends from a hatchlike door. The object hovers above the open ground, poised between architecture and spacecraft.

The structure is a Futuro house, one of a small number of surviving examples of a design by Finnish architect Matti Suuronen.

Introduced in 1968, the Futuro was conceived as a portable ski chalet—a prefabricated retreat assembled from 16 fiberglass segments and transported to remote sites. In period images, helicopters deliver the components to alpine clearings, where the capsule settles onto concrete piers, ready for weekend skiers.

Everything about the Futuro belongs to the exuberance of its moment. Fiberglass promised lightweight forms and industrial production. The Space Race saturated popular culture with images of domes and capsules. Suuronen's design translated that atmosphere into domestic space: a circular interior organized around a central hearth, with seating along its perimeter.

The early history of the Futuro in North Texas is difficult to pin down. Accounts suggest it arrived in the 1970s, possibly in Garland, before being moved east. Some recall it briefly operating as a roadside business—perhaps even a burger stand—though the details persist less as record than as local lore.

Fewer than one hundred Futuro houses were produced before the oil crisis made fiberglass construction prohibitively expensive. Today, only around 60 are known to survive worldwide.

A field outside Royse City is not the setting Suuronen had in mind. Designed for snowy slopes, this Futuro now surveys a quiet stretch of prairie. Passing drivers slow along the highway, some pulling over to photograph it.

For locals, the structure has passed through several lives. Engineer Hubert Windholz recalls that it once functioned as a compact dwelling, with a kitchen and bathroom fitted into the circular interior. Over time, it was abandoned and vandalized, its bubble windows broken or stripped away. Still, "You want to show everybody," he says. "You go, 'Oh, you see the flying saucer?'"

Windholz recalls wanting to buy it and turn it into a spaceship-themed clubhouse for his son—an object less architecture than possibility.

More than half a century after it was conceived as a prefabricated future, this Futuro still waits. The future it promised never quite arrived. What remains is an artifact of optimism, stranded in the prairie, still capable of interrupting the everyday.

As drivers approach, for a moment the ordinary landscape gives way to something stranger—and more expansive—than expected.

Murrye Bernard, AIA, LEED AP, is a North Texas–based architecture writer.

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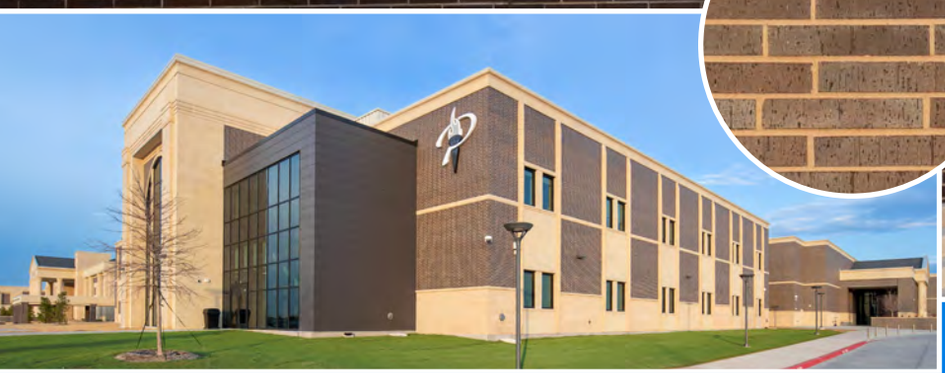

MASONRY CONTRACTOR
Skinner Masonry, LLP

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
Pogue Construction

RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

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