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Dubin Family Young Architect Award Recipient // 30

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# CHICAGO ARCHITECT

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# Aligned With Our Mission

Dear members,

Happy 2021 from AIA Chicago! I am humbled and honored to represent you as this year's Board President and am excited to introduce our new Board of Directors — an exceptional group of diverse and creative leaders serving our professional community.

As we think ahead in 2021, none of us know what lies ahead. But we can begin to craft goals that align our actions with our mission as an organization, creating a resilient path forward.

**PEOPLE** — Continue to foster a healthy connection between members and AIA Chicago, by sharing stories and encouraging engagement.

In Member Voices, Tom Zurowski, AIA, of Eastlake Studio, and Susan Brain, AIA, our own Interior Architecture Knowledge Community co-chair, forecast what's to come in the "new normal" workplace: Anticipating that Chicagoans will reach a critical threshold of vaccinations this fall, they look into how design will accommodate changes to workplace culture in the long term, and how interior architects can be prepared for new ways of working.

**PARTNERSHIPS** — Strengthen and leverage resources with our partner organizations to inspire and support our community.

In the first issue of 2021, we're primarily addressing the issue of housing in the City of Chicago. You'll learn about a new modular home designed by Kinexx and developed by The Resurrection Project that will be replicated throughout the South and West sides of Chicago. The home can be built for under \$350,000,

promising new ways of approaching home-ownership. You'll also learn about Emmett Street Apartments, a forthcoming 100-percent affordable apartment and townhome complex coming to Logan Square. And, you'll read a profile of Home First, a new small development company with IFF that provides affordable, transitional and accessible housing to people with disabilities.

**PROMOTE HOPE** — Through the lens of climate change and social justice, doubling down to cultivate equitable communities.

Two additional features focus on our two 2020 Professional Excellence Awards recipients: bKL Architecture, the 2020 Firm of the Year, and Heidi Wang, AIA, 2020 Dubin Family Young Architect Award recipient. You'll learn more about Heidi's expertise in senior care and living facilities, and you'll hear from the team at bKL about their 10-year history and what they're looking forward to in the future.

I would like to thank April Hughes, AIA, our 2020 president, for her leadership and guidance through a challenging year globally, regionally and locally. Our chapter has accomplished so much, and as long as we open our arms and come together to think boldly and innovate, our future is bright.

Cheers to a prosperous 2021,

Jessica Figenholtz, AIA



*Chicago Architect*, the primary outreach tool of AIA Chicago, is published four times a year as an authoritative resource for architects, the larger design community and the public about architecture and related issues of interest to Chicago architects. The magazine communicates industry trends, the value of high-quality design and the role of AIA Chicago and its members in the world of architecture.

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# Striking Design

economical solution

To stay within budget, PAC-CLAD Flush panels were specified in Bone White and Stone White to create a subtle vertical pattern, broken up with broad bands of Charcoal Gray and blocks of Matte Black Corrugated panels to complement the other colors.

SkyVue Apartments, Pittsburgh, PA    Installing Contr.: Wyatt Inc.    Architect: Niles Bolton    GC: Massaro Corp.  
Material Distributor: Brock Associates    Owner: RISE: A Real Estate Company    Photo: hortonphotoinc.com

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Metal Wall Systems

Bone White, Stone White,  
Matte Black, Charcoal



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**Heidi Wang, AIA**

*Credit: Chery Lyn Photography*



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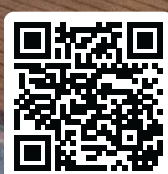
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# Announcing 2021 Fellows

Congratulations to the three AIA Chicago members to receive the distinction

AIA Fellows are recognized with the AIA's highest membership honor for their exceptional work and contributions to architecture and society. The prestige of FAIA after your name is unparalleled and the judging is rigorous.

Architects who have made significant contributions to the profession and society and who exemplify architectural excellence can become an AIA Fellow. Approximately 3 percent of the AIA's 90,000-plus members have this distinction.

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## CATEGORIES:

### Object One:

Design, urban design, or preservation. Promoted the aesthetic, scientific, and practical efficiency of the profession.

### Object Two:

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### Object Four:

Advanced the living standards of people through an improved environment.

### Object Five:

Made the profession of ever-increasing service to society.

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### LINDA NELSON KEANE, FAIA

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
Object Two (Education)

As citizen architect, academic innovator and catalytic educator, Linda Keane empowers the potential of people and places to engage the wonder of the built and natural environment.



### RENAULD DEANDRE MITCHELL, FAIA

Moody Nolan  
Object Two (Practice Management)

Expanding dialogue to engage diverse perspectives, Renauld Deandre Mitchell synthesizes client objectives with stakeholder aspirations to cultivate architecture that galvanizes consensus, revitalizes communities and exposes the profession to underrepresented constituencies.



### RAEL SLUTSKY, FAIA

Object Two (Technical Advancement)

Internationally recognized and award-winning renderer, Past-President American Society of Architectural Illustrators (ASAI), Rael Slutsky has collaborated with architects on projects and competitions worldwide, elevating professional standards for AIA members through lectures, seminars, exhibits and publications.

# AIA Chicago 2030 Data Reporting Badges Rollout

Earn your badge by reporting your building energy data by April 30, 2021!

Congratulations to the 54 Chicago-based AIA 2030 signatories that reported their building energy data to the AIA DDx database for the calendar year of 2019. Those firms' participation resulted in Chicago representing almost 20 percent of the total firms reporting nationally. Chicago architects are leading on climate!

Because of the commitment of these firms, AIA Chicago's Committee on the Environment (COTE) and the 2030 Working Group are recognizing them with the AIA Chicago 2030 Badge, to be displayed on their website or email signatures. The badge will expire on April 22, 2021, and will be reissued to all firms that report their data for the 2020 calendar year.



|                             |                                 |  |                                    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill  | GREC                            | Landon Bone Baker Architects                   | Solomon Cordwell Buenz             |
| bKL Architecture            | Gresham Smith                   | Laura Garcia Design, Architecture   Consulting | SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill)   |
| Brininstool + Lynch         | Harley Ellis Devereux           | Legat Architects                               | Stantec Architecture               |
| BuroHappold Engineering     | Harshorne Plunkard Architecture | Moody Nolan                                    | Studio Gang Architects             |
| Callison RTKL               | HDR                             | Pappageorge Haymes Partners                    | Studio Nigro Architecture + Design |
| Cannon Design               | HKS                             | Perkins+Will                                   | TBDA                               |
| Canopy                      | HOK                             | Perkins Eastman                                | Tvsdesign                          |
| Dewberry                    | HPZS                            | RATIO  | Urban Works                        |
| DLR Group                   | Huntsman Architectural Group    | Robbins Architecture, Inc.                     | Valerio Dewalt Train Associates    |
| dSpace                      | HUSarchitecture                 | Ross Barney Architects                         | Vinci Hamp Architects              |
| Engberg Anderson Architects | John Ronan Architects           | Sheehan Nagle Hartray                          | Wheeler Kearns Architecture        |
| EXP                         | Kipnis Architecture + Planning  | SmithGroup                                     | Wight & Company                    |
| Farr Associates             | KOO LLC                         | SMNG A Ltd.                                    | Wright Heerema Architects          |
| Gensler                     | Krueck + Sexton Architects      |  |                                    |

## Introducing the Roberta Feldman Socially Just Design Award

The Roberta Feldman Socially Just Design Award was established in 2020 to honor excellence in built projects and design programs guided by the conviction that access to high-quality architecture is not a privilege, but a human right.

Socially just design is defined by the following objectives: first, to engage a broader cross section of society, especially those not typically able to access architectural services and, second, to create innovative design solutions that address complex social

and economic inequities that impact these communities.

A monetary award will be given by the AIA Chicago Foundation for built projects and/or design programs that exemplify socially just design practices and impact.

Nonmonetary honorable mentions may also be awarded.

The award program will accept submissions from March 22-June 4, 2021, through the Award Force platform. Visit [aiachicago.org/dea](http://aiachicago.org/dea) to learn more about eligibility and requirements.

## Small Project Awards/ LARGE ONLINE PARTY

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# Design Excellence Awards 2021


## Call for Entries: 2021 Design Excellence Awards

March 22-June 4

AIA Chicago presents the 2021 Design Excellence Awards, an annual awards program that honors the best work by Chicago architecture firms found worldwide, as well as Chicago-based projects by national and international firms.

There will be three categories associated with the 2021 Design Excellence Awards:

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- Divine Detail Award

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## Respect the Context

Emmett Street Apartments will bring much-needed affordable housing to Logan Square

BY ANJULIE RAO

In the heart of Logan Square, amid the bustle of residents and visitors hurrying in and out of the underground El terminal, a large parking lot that sat mostly empty for years is undergoing a much-needed transformation. After a long community-driven process led by Ald. Carlos Rosa (35th Ward) and numerous community groups, the site is being developed into Emmett Street Apartments.



Designed by Landon Bone Baker Architects and developed by Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation, Emmett Street Apartments will add 100 units of affordable housing — including 18 three-bedroom family units — to a neighborhood that has seen more than a decade of displacement due to rising housing costs. The site was the perfect space for new affordable housing, said Peter Landon, FAIA.

“The city saw this as a ‘unicorn project,’” described Landon. “It’s a city-owned lot at a transit station in a neighborhood going through gentrification, with an application to do [the project] with a developer who had experience ... The city felt like it was a critical project to do. And we ended up with a design that the alderman could support.”

That design, according to Landon and project manager Tyler Brown, AIA, went through many iterative rounds using feedback from the alderman and

neighborhood groups like the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and the Logan Square Preservation Society.

“We try to be as open as we can; we generally have confidence that we can solve a design problem if we can get programmatic political social programs addressed,” said Landon.

The building’s final design, currently under construction, is a careful sequence of massings that “step down” as the building gently turns from Kedzie Avenue to Emmett Street — a quieter residential row of single-family homes. “We were sensitive to how a project of this scale fits into the neighborhood,” commented Brown.

The residences on Emmett Street were designed as “engaged townhomes” with individual doors to each unit. Brown noted that the addition of a plaza, ground floor retail space and community room are integral components to the building’s relationship with the

**“We try to be as open as we can; we generally have confidence that we can solve a design problem if we can get programmatic political social programs addressed.”**

**Peter Landon, FAIA**

public. “The goal is to create an active positive pedestrian experience that will contribute to the street’s vitality,” he said.

LBBA worked with CDOT to ensure the building complements the upcoming Kedzie Avenue reroute project that will overhaul how the streets surrounding the Logan Square roundabout curve and connect, improving public space, pedestrian and cyclist safety, and access to transit.

The project is seeking Enterprise Green Community certification, which, according to Brown, is “more focused on

things that tenants and the community realize the benefits of, like efficient systems, good air quality, utility usage, thermal envelope and fresh air ducted to each unit.” Though the project is technically a Transit-Oriented Development and requires zero parking units, the design team provided 20 spots.

The addition of color through public art, the firm’s enthusiastic collaboration with community groups and the careful attention to neighborhood needs and character are promising components of a welcome change to the half-filled parking lot. **CA**



Located in Maywood, this new construction, multifamily home is one of many scattered-site projects called Access West Cook by WJW Architects that integrate highly accessible, transitional housing into residential neighborhoods. ALL PHOTOS BY WJW ARCHITECTS

# Home First

## Renovating Units to Expand Accessibility

BY KATIE PROUT

**W**ith Illinois nursing home residents accounting for 50.3 percent of COVID-19 deaths, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), moving out of congregate living settings can be lifesaving. Michael Grice, who has used a wheelchair since he was a young adult, knows this challenge.

“Accessible apartments are hard to find in Chicago,” Grice said. “And the No. 1 issue is most of them are not affordable.”

Grice moved into his first institution in his 20s. Over the next two decades, the Chicago disability activist lived in eight different facilities. In 2005, Grice applied to be on the waitlist for Chicago Housing Authority’s (CHA) Housing Choice Voucher (formerly known as Section 8); if selected, he would still have to pay up to 30 percent of his income from SSI in rent and utilities.

Grice was on the waitlist for five years. When the call came, there was another obstacle: The home was not accessible. Renovations would be costly; how would Grice pay for it? And who would do the work?

Home First (HF), a small development company within IFF (a provider of financing and real estate development to Midwest nonprofits), works with disabled Chicagoans to create safe, dignified homes that meet their occupants’ needs. By hiring contractors and architects to renovate existing properties, Home First eradicates the financial obstacles that prevent individuals from moving out of nursing homes and into independent living and ensures they move into an integrated community.

“If you have a building that’s all full of people with the same disability, that’s not community living. That’s segregation in its own way,” said Dena Bell, lead developer at IFF.

Since 2011, Home First has renovated 262 apartments. According to Bell, the first wave of developments focused on 70 condos that went into foreclosure all across Chicago and Cook County. The wide-ranging



WJW Architects’ Elizabeth Godbold, AIA, attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Access Peoria, along with guests from the City of Peoria, Mayor Jim Ardis, state and local representatives, LIISC and a resident of the development. The 16 scattered-site, affordable duplex units have either one or two bedrooms. All units were designed to be fully accessible, as part of the Home First program.

locations meant the condo occupants would be integrated, rather than restricted to one area: “They were truly in the community,” said Bell. Costs of the rehabs vary but hover around \$150,000, and each unit is financed to remain affordable for 30 years.

Home First didn’t exist when Grice moved into his first apartment; its inaccessibility and a decline in his health led to his return to a nursing home. One year later, he found a Home First apartment. Before moving into the spacious one-bedroom apartment in Buena Park, Grice met with HF staff, providing feedback and overseeing development on what would eventually be his home.

Grice’s accessibility needs have changed over his lifetime — not unlike any resident aging in place. “I can’t use a key to unlock my door. That’s why I have

an automatic door opener. I have to make sure that the cabinets I can reach are easy for me to open,” he said. Adapting a unit to be livable for an individual with disabilities means rejecting a “one size fits all” approach. “You can’t put all accessible needs in a box and say that they work for everybody,” said Grice.

Worn Jerabek Wiltse (WJW) is the architecture firm responsible for the majority of Home First’s renovations, including Grice’s unit. According to WJW principal Todd Wiltse, AIA, it takes an average of three years from inception to completion for each unit.

“Accessibility codes are minimum standards, not necessarily the desired target,” Wiltse said. “It is human nature to ‘design for ourselves,’ so if the ‘average’ architect is still a white, economically self-sufficient male,

perhaps in his 30s, 40s or 50s, a conscious effort must be made to design empathetically for a broader cross section of society: people of color, economically disadvantaged communities, seniors, children and people with disabilities. It takes effort to create a culture of empathy, reinforced by technical know-how,” he continued.

The result of this empathetic, careful listening is an apartment where Grice can live safely, comfortably and with dignity. “Basically, I’m able to do what I want when I want and how I want. I know that a lot of people with disabilities still don’t have that option,” said Grice. With the work of activists like Grice, the funding of Home First, and the people-centered approach of firms like WJW, more disabled people will have greater options for where to call home. **CA**

IMAGES BY PAUL TEBBEN



# Making Modular

## A New Partnership for Affordable Homeownership

BY LEIGH KUNKEL

**“Y**ou say modular, people hear manufactured. They think about the double-wides made with popsicle sticks that are very low quality. And that’s not the case for us.”

Paul Tebben, AIA, is well aware of the stigma against modular housing, but he and partner Josh Braun haven’t let that deter them. As the team behind Kinexx, the pair has partnered with The Resurrection Project, based in Pilsen, to bring stylish, affordable modular housing to some of Chicago’s most underserved neighborhoods.

The team recently completed their first modular home in Back of the Yards, which is set to go on the market this spring. The new houses are a response to the shortage of single-family homes listed on the market for under \$350,000, forcing many financially stable Chicago families to rent rather than own.

“For working families, particularly for Hispanic and Black families, homeownership is one of the few vehicles by which to build wealth,” explains The Resurrection Project’s Chief Executive Officer Raul Raymundo. Homeownership in these communities lingers in the low 40 percent range, while for white families it is above 70 percent.

Tebben likens the process of building a Kinexx house more to manufacturing than construction; different modules can be combined in a variety of ways to build everything from single-family homes to three-flats. The supplies used are of the same quality as traditional





Housing modules are manufactured off-site and are transported and assembled.



houses, and great care has been taken with the look of the homes to help owners avoid any negative preconceptions about attainable housing.

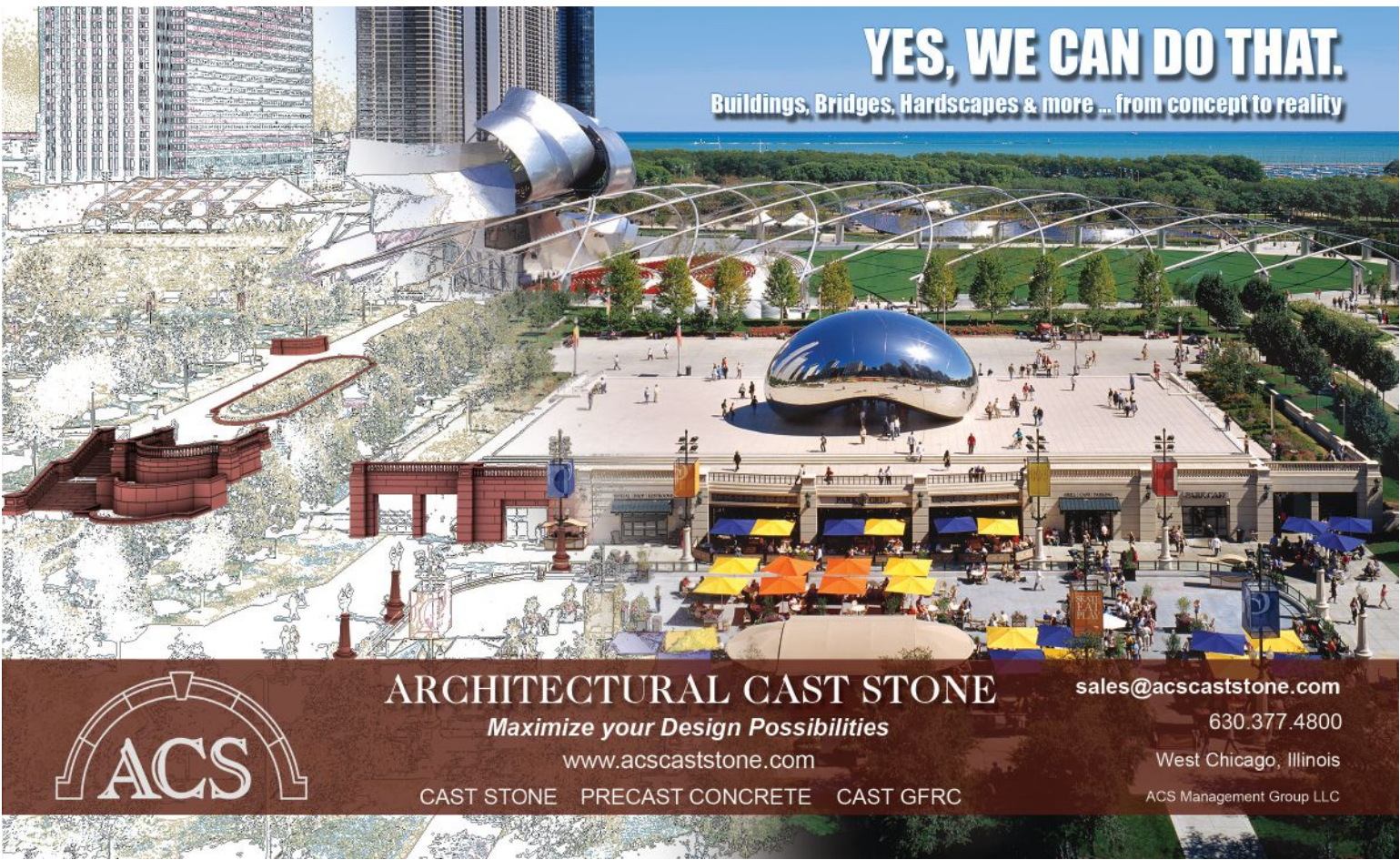
Kinexx is making some tweaks to the process for its next round of homes, slated to be located in Back of the Yards and North Lawndale. They discovered that the modules could be reoriented to improve ease of transport as well as flexibility of layout and speed of construction, and are also planning changes that will provide extra floor space.

“We’re looking at different designs that fit the needs of the community and what they’re looking for,” Raymundo says, adding that they’re exploring the possibility of including basements in future homes.

And, of course, there are the aesthetics: Chicago’s neighborhoods are famous for their unique architectural styles, and Kinexx wants to ensure that its houses can blend in anywhere. They’re hoping to offer a variety of rooflines and façades that will improve curb appeal and also preserve local character. And yes, they’re looking into how to incorporate the city’s ubiquitous brick.

As for the future? “We’re very committed to the issue of affordable housing,” says Braun. “We aren’t the first company to work on modular housing, and hopefully we won’t be the last.” CA

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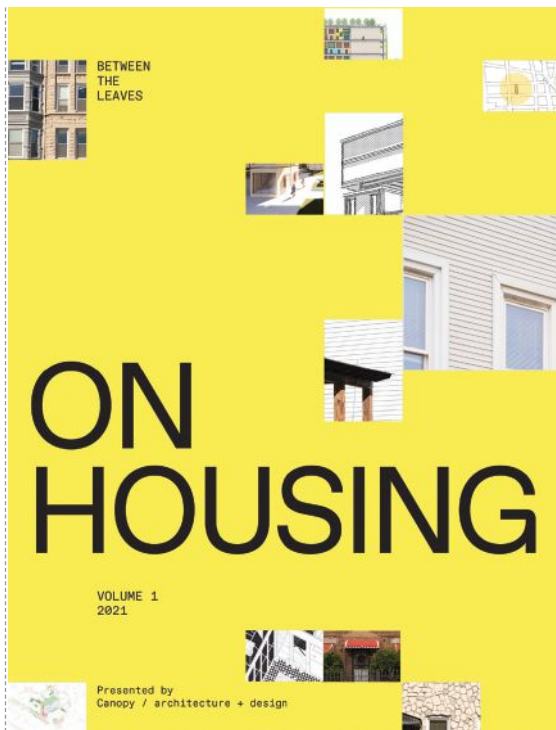


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## Of Note: *Between the Leaves*

**C**anopy Architecture + Design's new book series *Between the Leaves* will focus on equitable housing design and initiatives in Chicago and around the world.

**"I think we get wrapped up in the day-to-day, and whether you're working on a project for an existing building or site or thinking of something without any context, the ability to imagine stems from an understanding of the lessons learned from previous projects."**

**Jaime Torres, AIA**

Canopy Architecture + Design will be releasing the first volume of an upcoming series of books this spring. In its first volume, Canopy will focus these leaves on housing — an issue that is, according to principal Jaime Torres, AIA, close to the firm's heart.

The firm has completed several housing projects in recent years, including a simultaneous new-construction/rehab project that integrates three generations of one family in conjoined homes. Yet, *Between the Leaves* will integrate their values and best practices under one cover.

"I think we get wrapped up in the day-to-day, and whether you're working on a project for an existing building or site or thinking of something without any context, the ability to imagine stems from an understanding of the lessons learned from previous projects," explained Torres. "But then when there isn't the precedent for something that could be thought of as going

against the grain, *Between the Leaves* captures the learnings from our work and the periphery of our work. We capture that, hoping to build a moment for it, and then hope that that can be a seed for other people to grow."

The firm has also invited outside practitioners and affordable developers such as Angela Hurlock (Claretian Associates) and Edgar Flagg (The Resurrection Project) to contribute articles and interviews to the book, alongside putting out an open call to architects around the world. "We put a simple request on hierarchy neck and some other places. And sure enough, we got tons of people that were interested in participating. So we have people from all over the world giving thoughts on what housing could look like in the future in Chicago," added Torres.

The book is expected to be released in early spring 2021, with design by Normal Studio. **CA**



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Five Chicago architecture firms are finalists for the 2020 Building of the Year by *American-Architects.com*.

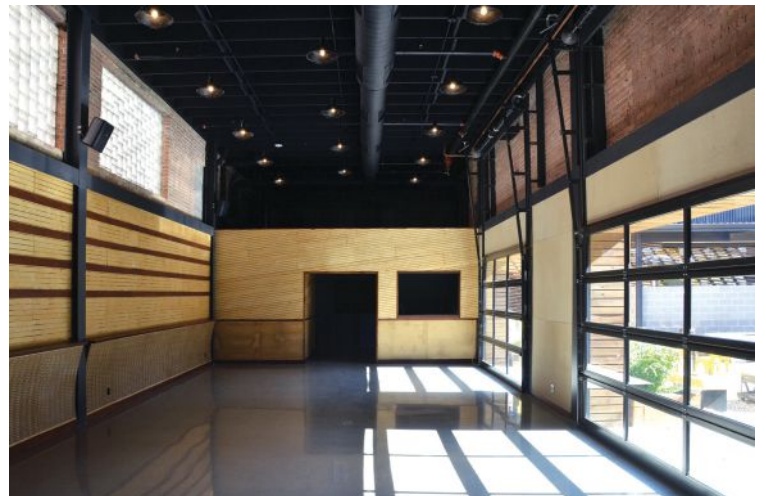
- **STL Architects** for Williams Park Fieldhouse (Chicago).
- **bKL** for Whitney M. Young Jr. Branch, Chicago Public Library (Chicago).
- **SOM** for National Museum of the US Army (Virginia).
- **Ross Barney Architects** for McDonald's Disney Flagship (Florida).
- **JGMA** for Esperanza Wellness Center (Chicago).

These projects were featured in the US Building of the Week by *World-Architects.com* in 2020.

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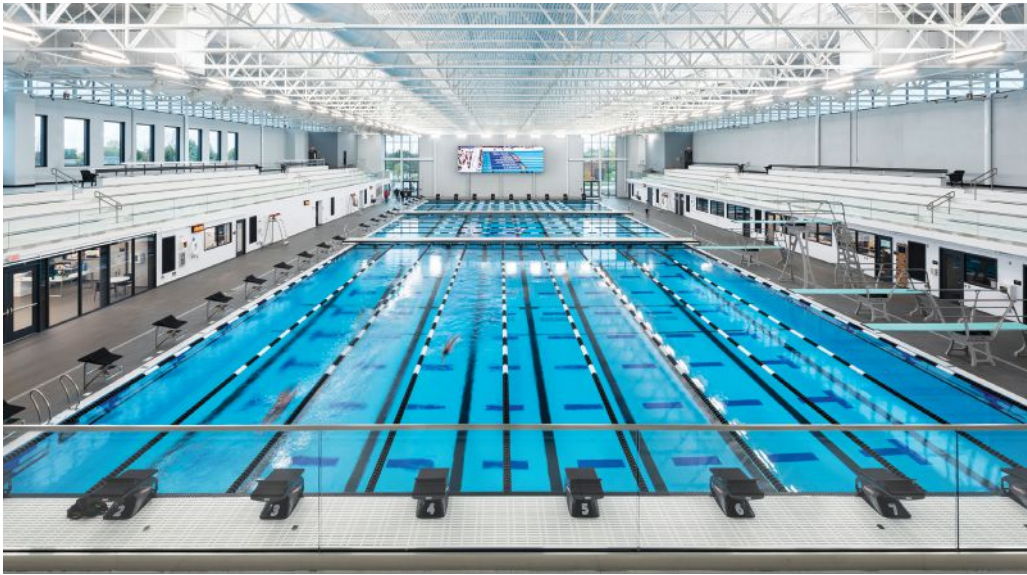


Three Chicago firms — **GREC**, **CallisonRTKL** and **Built Form** — have designed several upcoming structures at 1450 N. Dayton St. The development will include a mix of market-rate apartments and affordable condos positioned around a new public park — all developed by Structured Development. GREC has also done the updated master planning.



**DAAM** completed an adaptive reuse and addition project for Guild Row's flagship location, sited adjacent to the North Branch of the Chicago River at the eastern end of the city's up-and-coming Avondale neighborhood.

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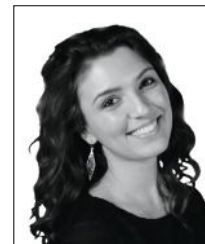
Construction has finished on the FMC Natatorium at Ty Warner Park (Westmont, Illinois), designed by **Legat Architects**. The 71,000-square-foot facility features a 50-meter Olympic-size competition pool with seating for 1,200 on three sides, as well as a 25-yard development pool for community swim programs and competition warmup.



**Ryan T. Giblin, AIA, LEED AP BD+C**, and **Krista Simons Gliva, AIA, LEED AP**, are now principals at Ross Barney Architects.



A renovation and expansion designed by **Legat Architects** transformed a vacant medical office building in Waukegan, Illinois, into US HealthVest's 88,000-square-foot Lake Behavioral Hospital. The 146-bed inpatient and outpatient acute care facility responds to a shortage of mental health and addiction inpatient/outpatient services in Lake County, Illinois.



**Linda Chavez** has joined JGMA as a project principal. Linda is currently one of the top design leaders for the firm's O'Hare Satellite Concourses 1 & 2 project.

**Samra Pecanin** has joined JGMA as a senior project designer. Samra is currently leading the design efforts for a new office tower in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood.

**Agustina Siquot** has joined JGMA as the director of media and relations. Agustina is responsible for promoting the firm's brand in the United States and internationally.



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**Landon Bone Baker Architects** has designed 43 Green, a transit-oriented development comprised of a multiphase, mixed-use, residential and commercial project anchored by the 43rd Street Green Line station at 43rd and Calumet.

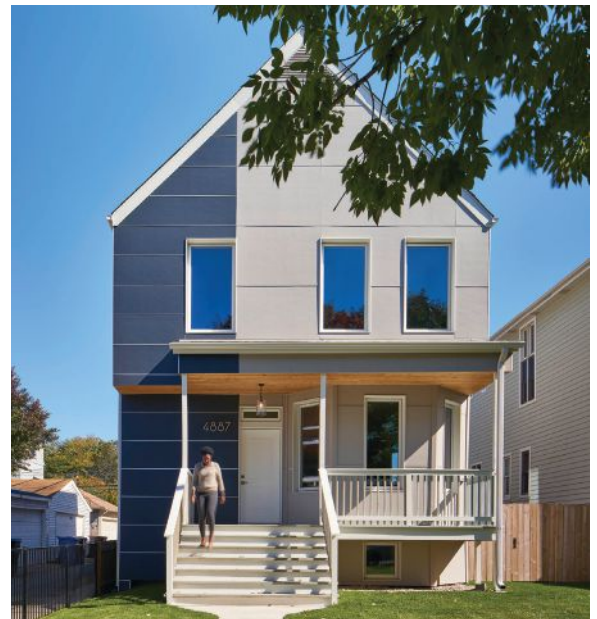


**Eric Davis, AIA**, has joined the 2021 class of the Civic Leadership Academy (CLA) based at the University of Chicago Center for Effective Government (CEG) and the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. This is the seventh cohort of 30 government and nonprofit leaders selected.

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**HED** completed the new 39,252-square-foot corporate headquarters for global manufacturing company IDEX Corporation. The new Class A office occupies half of the third floor of an existing office building in Northbrook.



**HPZS** has designed the first certified single-family Passive House Institute US (PHIUS+) Renovation in Chicago. The objective of this retrofit low-energy project was to bring to market the latest in sustainable homebuilding science in the Midwest in order to transform the speculative renovation market.

SKETCH COURTESY OF LEGAT ARCHITECTS/STEVE BLYE



**Legat Architects** designed expansions and renovations to the 35-year-old Hawthorn Elementary School South (Vernon Hills, Illinois). The new and revived spaces celebrate art and the collaborative creation process. Communal areas showcase student artwork, while art rooms open to a new courtyard with learning stations.



**DAAM** remodeled the Shell House, a retreat home located in the Catskill Mountains, originally designed in 1996 by architect Seymour Rutkin with consultation from the Monolithic Dome Institute as a prototype for Mr. Rutkin's utopian vision of the new single-family home. The project earned a 2020 AIA Chicago Small Projects Award, Citation of Merit, in the residential category.



**Perkins+Will** designed The Reed, a new residential tower in the developing Southbank neighborhood.



**Scott Seyer, AIA, LEED AP**, has joined SCB as a principal. Seyer joins **Jay Longo, Strachan Forgan, Martin Wolf** and **Sheyla Conforte** on the firm's commercial office leadership team, bringing more than 25 years of experience working in major urban centers around the globe.



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**Valerio Dewalt Train Architects** designed the expanded headquarters and production facility for Omega Yeast, a Chicago-based yeast producer for professional and amateur brewers.



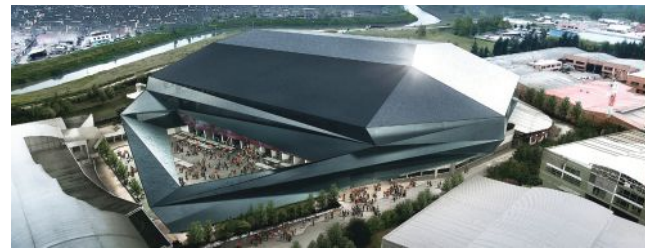
**Vladimir Radutny Architects** was recognized as one of the top 50 interior architecture firms working in the United States, by *Architect's Newspaper*.



**Sheila Sipes** joins the Chicago office of global design firm HKS as director of business development.



**IA Interior Architects** will design Sterling Bay's new headquarters.



Construction has begun on **JGMA's** first stadium project in Latin America, located in Bogotá, Colombia. When completed, Arena Bogota will be Latin America's largest music-only venue. The grand opening is anticipated for December 2021.



**Perkins Eastman** announced that its new Chicago studio, located in the historic Rookery Building, has become WELL™ Certified to the Platinum level under WELL v2 pilot. It is the first project in Illinois, and one of only four in the United States and 25 worldwide, to gain the distinction.

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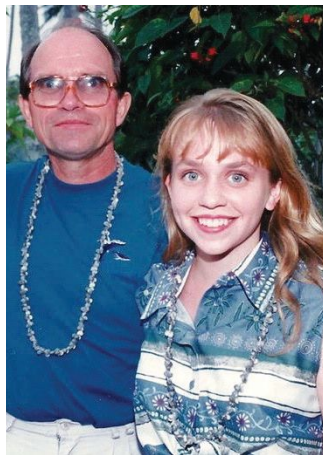
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# CHANGING THE WAY WE SEE AGING

HEIDI WANG, AIA, DUBIN FAMILY YOUNG ARCHITECT AWARD RECIPIENT

BY ANJULIE RAO



Heidi and her father.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HEIDI WANG

**T**here is something particularly special about speaking with architects who design spaces for care. Healthcare buildings, schools and senior care facilities don't often get the glamour or shine shared by contemporary downtown towers or modern residences, but their designers have a unique attention to these spaces because they know that, someday, their children may attend these schools; they may need to seek help at those outpatient centers. In the case of Heidi Wang, AIA, 2020 Dubin Family Young Architect Award recipient, it was senior care that captured her career — and her heart — to usher in new ways of designing and improving care for our elders.

It wasn't always senior care; according to Wang, she studied and interned in education design, thinking she would go on to design schools. It wasn't until 15 years ago at WJW Architects — where she is currently a principal — that the firm was brought on to a new project: a skilled nursing facility built in the 1960s that badly needed an update.

“The client group was amazing,” commented Wang. “And they saw that they needed to do something in order to enhance ... the care that they could give to the residents’ experience. Fifteen years ago they saw that the industry was changing and that they wanted to be out in front of that.”

Wang, fresh out of grad school and filled with energy, committed herself to learning everything she could about skilled nursing. “It lit a fire in me — professionally, and personally,” she said.

Professionally, she was just starting on this new path that would eventually become her primary focus of expertise. Personally, this assignment carried a different meaning, a heavier weight, that had begun far before the project: While she was in college her father was diagnosed with early onset dementia; at around the same time her grandfather had been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease.

“Seeing how they struggled both with disease but also physical space, I ... started to learn how the environment could help them,” commented Wang. She observed how much more comfortable her father was at home — where he was cared for by Wang’s mother — being surrounded by the familiar. Her mother, according to Wang, made physical adjustments to their home for that comfort. Her grandfather, on the other hand, lived on a farm in a more rural area. “I saw how much he could have benefited from living somewhere that was more supportive,” she explained.

Wang began attending conferences on gerontology, including the Environments for Aging conference. Though it was a smaller conference



Evergreen Senior Living Orland Park  
Memory Care Courtyard.

CREDIT: DARRIS LEE HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

at that time, Wang began making connections with other practitioners and felt at home in that community. “Almost everyone I met was like me — they had a personal story, a personal commitment, and they truly felt passionate about making places better for elders because it’s our parents. It’s our moms; it could be us.”

Since discovering this emerging field, Wang has been able to work on different types of senior housing that incorporate a vast array of supportive infrastructure and programs, including independent living facilities, assisted living, and skilled nursing programs; she has also specialized in memory care facilities for people with cognitive diseases.

**“Almost everyone I met was like me — they had a personal story, a personal commitment, and they truly felt passionate about making places better for elders because it’s our parents. It’s our moms; it could be us.”**

**Heidi Wang, AIA**

And, with her personal story, she has helped to shape those facilities to support residents, nurses and families visiting their loved ones.

“Memory care used to be a wing of a building that had locks on it to prevent residents from leaving,”

commented Wang. Today, she and WJW Architects have developed a robust portfolio of welcoming, supportive and safe living environments for people with dementia or other cognitive challenges. Projects include access to secure outdoor



Above: Evergreen  
Senior Living  
Decatur.

Right: Evergreen  
Senior Living  
Orland Park.

Facing page:  
St. Clara's Rehab &  
Senior Care, Lincoln,  
Illinois.

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DARRIS LEE HARRIS  
PHOTOGRAPHY



space, ample daylight in rooms and gathering spaces, and community spaces to cultivate relationships. Though often more sequestered from other wings (rehab facilities or general care wings), these spaces provide the comforts of home, said Wang, while also creating direct sightlines to nursing stations.

“My hope is that people will take a cue from what’s been done [in] memory care and with household-type senior living communities and really try to find ways to apply that to other types of senior living,” said Wang.

Ultimately, as Wang’s portfolio continues to expand, she’s paying



close attention to policy decisions that affect senior care in Illinois as well as research and new trends in aging in place — including the plight of senior loneliness and its effect on health.

A study released in 2020 from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine and cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention points out that “more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated.” According to that study, isolation significantly increases the risk of premature death, including a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease and 32 percent increased risk of stroke.

Incorporating strong social programs into their projects is one step toward remedying the problem, but Wang has a higher purpose and bigger goals.

“One of my big hopes is continued attention to integrating seniors into community life, looking at mixed-use design opportunities,” stated Wang. “These facilities are traditionally in remote areas of urban or suburban locations. They’re so remote and disconnected from the rest of society and now you’ve just isolated a bunch of people of the same age group away from the richness of the rest of life.”

As such, Wang and WJW Architects have been working through aging in place strategies to keep seniors in their homes or develop intergenerational, mixed-used communities at the financial and policy level. “Ask 10 people how and where they’d like to grow old and you’ll get 10 different answers. Architects can really play a role in making sure that there are a variety of solutions that meet the variety of needs that are out there. I think the industry is getting better [at] not having a one-size-fits-all solution,” said Wang.

Wang is dedicating her career to a type of service that, while once unglamorous, is transforming more than an industry — she’s changing the way we see aging, piece by piece. Each brick laid is part of an evolving system of care that ties compassion to the built environment, and that makes children into advocates and activists for their parents. It’s a practice and ethos of dignity. Said Wang, “I really believe that we’re getting to a wonderful turning point where we’re talking about the dignity of senior citizens more than we talk about their management; we can create communities that make people feel less like commodities and provide more dignity, privacy and a sense of normalcy as we age.” **CA**

## Q & A WITH HEIDI WANG, AIA

### 1. When did you decide you wanted to pursue architecture and why?

I have been interested in architecture and the built environment from a very early age. My father had a wood flooring business, and I would accompany him to job sites; I was also the family vacation planner/navigator and loved spending hours studying maps and guidebooks to plan out the best routes for exploring new cities. A career in architecture wasn’t at all on my radar in high school as I didn’t know any architects, nor was it presented as a possible career path, but this curiosity about the built environment combined with an interest in the visual arts led me to study interior design as an undergraduate. I was also fortunate enough to get a job at our campus facilities planning department and was mentored by the staff architect.

### 2. How have you benefited from mentorship? Since you’ve been a principal at WJW Architects, how has your perception of mentorship evolved?

There have been several mentors who helped me on my path as an emerging professional; many were teachers but others were more established professionals — who had no direct obligation to help — who reached out and offered guidance.

Since becoming principal I’ve thought a lot about how each of those relationships helped me to get to the next step in my career and that I likely wouldn’t be the architect I am today without them. Many of those mentors may not have realized how impactful they were, or that they were even serving as a mentor. Mentorship can happen in the smallest moments and actions and doesn’t need to be constrained by the bounds of a formal mentorship program.

### 3. Describe one of your career “aha!” moments.

One of the big aha moments in my career was doing a sleepover post-occupancy study of the first memory care assisted living community that our firm designed.

I packed a sleeping bag and spent the weekend living in the community, eating with residents, doing activities with them and observing how they lived in the space. Those few days had a profound impact on me; I learned things I would never have thought to consider by reading a research article. Many of the observations were minor details, but for the individual person they might have a huge impact on their comfort or ability to maintain independence. I was also able to gain a much deeper understanding of the challenges faced by staff and operational model details that they hadn’t been able to convey in a formal design meeting.

### 4. What are you looking forward to in the next few years of your career? In the long term?

I’m looking forward to becoming more established in my new role as principal and shaping the firm’s direction. I’ve taken on a larger role in business development, growing our reach into new market sectors affiliated with senior living and supportive housing, and have really enjoyed that expanded role. I’ll be devoting more time to looking for areas of continuous improvement in our design work and encouraging younger staff to take on leadership roles. I also hope to have more time to devote to formal and informal mentorship opportunities as I emerge from the challenge of balancing parenting a young child while simultaneously trying to expand my professional capabilities.

# Family Business

BY ANJULIE RAO

**b**KL Architecture, AIA Chicago's 2020 Firm of the Year, emphasizes the importance of optimism and community — from their day-to-day operations to their bigger vision for design in Chicago.

For almost five years in a row, the Firm of the Year Award has gone to architecture firms that started in a recession and are, at the time of the award, celebrating a major anniversary. For bKL Architecture, founded in 2010, their recognition comes at their 10th anniversary. Besides their accolades and anniversary, it's the firm's legacy of optimism, ingenuity and community that are most laudable.

When Tom Kerwin, FAIA, founded bKL in the midst of the Great Recession, the economy wasn't his first thought. Rather, he wanted to return to his roots. "I became an architect to build buildings and affect cities. It's what I love to do. That, combined with wanting to build a team with like-minded individuals, made me excited for the hustle," commented Kerwin.

"The hustle" was a big one — though the economy was still reeling, Kerwin and his partners tapped into their networks. According to Kerwin, he had strong relationships with clients that, in combination with his partners, helped move the team in the early years through building relationships with clients and setting up a talented team.

Kerwin noted that by viewing the recession as an opportunity, he was able to amass that "team of like-minded individuals" he had sought. "[Recessions] do provide an enormous

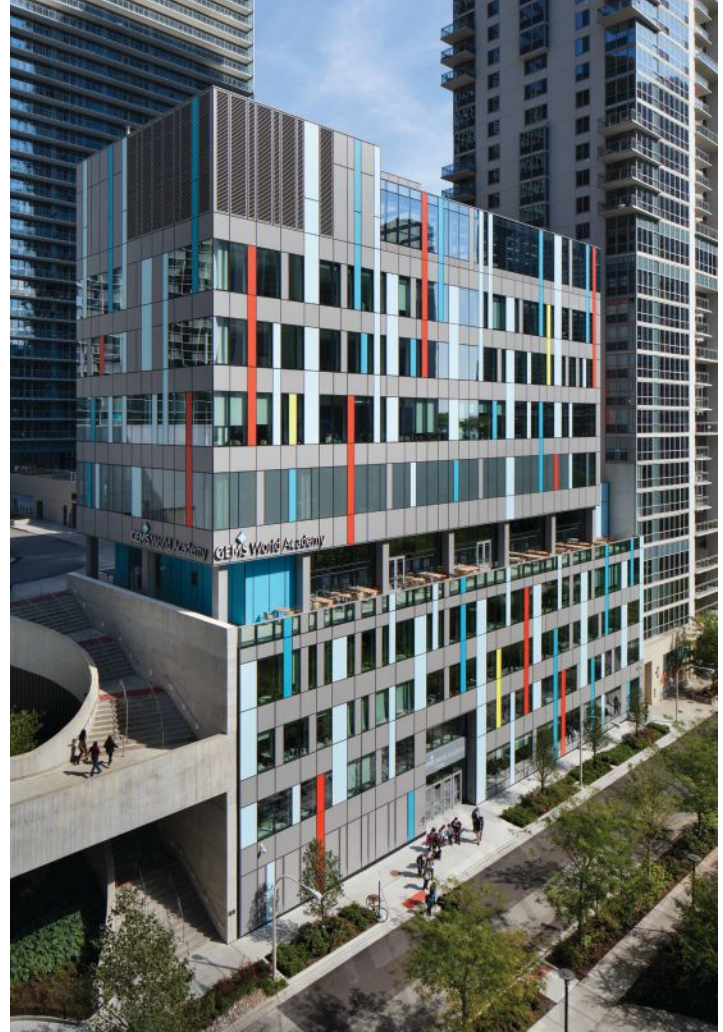




Rendering of 300 N. Michigan. CREDIT: IMAGE BY BKL ARCHITECTURE



GEMS World Academy. CREDIT: DARRIS LEE HARRIS



opportunity to hire great talent. We've hired some amazing people during economic downturns, not only talented individuals who were sidelined, but also people who proactively came to us from firms with an environment based on extreme expansion and contraction during economic cycles."

"The feeling was what any entrepreneur goes through — we wanted to make it work. We had to make it work. It was exhilarating," added Kerwin.

Resourcefulness and a sense of optimism propelled bKL into a solid practice; some of their first projects were secured in what Kerwin describes as a "jittery" environment with reduced capital. "We came up with design solutions that were impactful and cost-effective," commented Kerwin. "I think we proved that because Coast was the first new building that opened after the Great Recession, so I think we established a reputation that we

could design impactful buildings, but also get them built within difficult environments."

bKL continued to grow their portfolio steadily, completing towers around the world and adding GEMS World Academy Upper and Lower schools, Coast Chicago and Wolf Point West to their Chicago portfolio. Those early Chicago projects helped establish bKL's prominence in the city's skyline and established a firmwide ethos that prioritizes community in their work.

"We definitely want to be part of the success of this city and [have] other people interact with it," commented Juan Robles, AIA, one of bKL's newest principals. "We aspire to do community work in two ways: working with the city, and with leadership within communities. We present to community groups and welcome that feedback because that way we can actually engage with the residents of those neighborhoods."

According to Danielle Tillman, AIA — also a new principal and a member of the bKL team since 2010 — Lathrop was one successful example of working with city and community leadership. The firm worked collaboratively with a large team of local architects including HED, JGMA Farr Associates and Related Midwest, as well as with planners, city government, preservationists and federal government and nonprofit groups. Importantly, they were able to meet with the Lathrop community.

“We had to go into the community on that master planning portion of the project to help guide the community through the process,” commented Tillman. “We had engaging conversations and distilled information so that it made sense to the neighborhood and to the stakeholders, so that they could influence what they want it to see, and then we translated that into documentation.” The team, according to Tillman, was able to meet with residents who were still living at the then Lathrop Homes prior to its renovation, as well as neighbors, local businesses and prospective clientele.

From large-scale, collaborative projects like Lathrop to smaller-scale, community-centric projects like their recent renovation of the Chicago Public Library Whitney Young Jr. Branch in the Chatham neighborhood, the firm focuses on the building’s current and potential community in all of their work.

John Gately, AIA, bKL’s third new principal, noted, “We build projects that are rooted in the community. It’s really important that we’re dedicated as a studio to do that process — at all scales.”

The studio has also dedicated itself to fostering a strong internal community. Kerwin’s dream team of like-minded individuals has expanded to more than 80 diverse employees (50 percent women and over 30 percent minorities), along with the recent promotions of Tillman, Gately and Robles to principal, all of whom

have been with the firm between five and 10 years. Hiring, according to Kerwin, is a careful process in which people don’t just fill positions; positions can be built around people.

“We pay special attention to everybody — we want to make sure we understand what’s driving our folks. We’re attuned to their goals for what they are doing with their career, and the assignments and the projects they are working on advance that goal,” explained Kerwin. “We hire smart, talented people and try to build a position around them.”

“In our studio you have a path — no matter how old you are, what your experience level is — you have a path toward leadership and creating your own niche within the firm,” added Tillman. Robles believes that, like employee wellness, cultivating that unique path for each architect leads to better work. “I always try to encourage [younger architects] to take ownership over the project, so they feel like they have a voice and they take pride in what they do. This usually gets translated into the quality of the work that we produce because everybody feels vested in the project,” he said.

With 10 years under their belts, bKL principals are looking forward to a prosperous future, weathering the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recession. “As we’ve gone through the past year of this pandemic ... that has brought out something that could be potentially really exciting,” said Gately. “We’re questioning a lot of things right now, and a lot of it has to do with space, and where we live and how we interact — the core elements of architecture. We’re excited to be a

part of this new wave of thought and development.”

Just as Kerwin saw opportunity in the Great Recession, the new bKL firm principals are approaching the post-pandemic environment with optimism. According to the firm leaders, they’ll continue developing their staff while expanding their portfolio. And while it might not require the big hustle that Kerwin used to launch bKL 10 years ago, it’s the same optimism that they bring to their firm culture and community that will carry them forward. **CA**

**“In our studio you have a path — no matter how old you are, what your experience level is — you have a path toward leadership and creating your own niche within the firm.”**

**Danielle Tillman, AIA**



Chicago Public Library Whitney Young Jr. Branch. CREDIT: JON MILLER © HEDRICH BLESSING



Lathrop. CREDIT: TOM ROSSITER, FAIA

# Interior Architecture: In the Spotlight

BY SUSAN BRAIN, AIA

**W**e are familiar with this Environmental Protection Agency statistic, yet it necessitated a pandemic to hammer home the reality that Americans spend over 90 percent of their time indoors. Seemingly overnight, families huddled inside their homes amid shelter-in-place orders. Commutes shortened from home and office to bedroom and dining table. Virtual Zoom technology replaced social outings. Intangible statistics suddenly became a stark reality.

Focus on the interior environment is now greater than ever. At the forefront are health, safety, function and comfort. *Houzz* reports that public interest in home remodeling increased 58 percent in 2020. Interior renovations comprised a large portion of these inquiries. Clients, along with the public at large, are asking how interior architecture can best support health, enhance well-being and provide enjoyment.

**“In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity.”**

**Albert Einstein**

While a COVID-19 vaccine consumes the world's immediate focus, interior architects are developing the long-term solution. Design is key to creating healthier buildings and thriving communities. Successful architecture promotes human connection, inclusion and diversity. Design directly influences human behavior, and interior spaces are what connect us. We not only value human engagement and social interaction, but these are

fundamental to our sense of belonging and purpose.

Our isolation can catastrophically impact both mental and physical health, but quick design fixes like expanses of scrubbable white tile and plexiglass barriers are reactions rather than long-term sustainable solutions. Now is the time to advocate for a holistic architectural response, which can measurably enhance quality of life. Architects must actively guide society toward healthy, habitable interior communities capable of supporting social engagement and enhancing the human spirit.

Wired with an optimistic lens, architects see beyond today to envision tomorrow's possibilities. As problem solvers and solution seekers, we are skilled at both research immersion and knowledge application. The pandemic has heightened our societal responsibility and our impact potential. Now is the time to collectively harness and share this power, by promoting long-term society-enhancing interiors.

Allow lessons from this experience to inform design for a safer, healthier tomorrow. Be selective by continuing pandemic response measures that promote productivity and well-being while abandoning those that isolate and divide.

**“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”**

**Maya Angelou**

Use this moment to propel public demand for interior architecture that is responsive, sustainable, adaptable and connected.

Promote interior architecture that enhances and transforms the human experience.

As society prepares for reentry, consider these five actionable opportunities:

1. Educate ourselves, enlighten our clients and mentor emerging professionals about the value of high-performing, spirit-elevating architectural interiors.
2. Advocate for comprehensive, long-term and resilient design solutions.
3. Support and inspire one another in the collective pursuit of interior environmental excellence.
4. Thoughtfully examine and refine our approach to interiors within architectural practice.
5. Guide the renewal of public trust in interior environments,

particularly those that promote community, inclusion and diversity.

Join AIA's Interior Architecture Community in elevating the conversation. 2020 brought tremendous disruption and fragmentation. Let 2021 be a time of connection. Thoughtful interior architecture has the power to bring us together and raise our spirit. **CA**



*Susan Brain, AIA, is an associate with Perkins&Will, where she serves as a senior interior project*

*manager within their Corporate Interiors studio. Susan co-chairs AIA Chicago's Interior Architecture Knowledge Community and is the 2021 chair of AIA National's Interior Architecture Knowledge Community Advisory Group.*

# The Future of the Workplace

BY TOM ZUROWSKI, AIA



If your practice is anything like most Chicago businesses, there's a good chance that you're still

working remotely. So, what do we need to be thinking about when we get back to the workplace? Safety? Yep. Wellness? No doubt. But success starts with a leadership team who exhibit both trust and flexibility, and who aren't afraid to lead with an eye toward the future.

Over the past year, we have proven to ourselves how important leadership is in crisis situations. We immediately realized that it was critical for us to get smarter about where the focus of our practice, workplace design, was headed. Although we were still busy with project work, we engaged the entire studio in research on the impact of safety and wellness concerns, publishing a 60-page draft of our findings in April 2020, which we update regularly.

Early on, we encouraged people to focus on positive aspects of wellness, rather than the virus, because its long-term implications in design will be similar to those associated with security post-9/11. Wellness extends from hands-free solutions to lower density occupancies and encompasses physical and mental well-being.

Flexibility closely follows wellness in importance and will help organizations easily pivot through these changes. While everyone has different sensitivities, our workplace survey of 350 respondents confirms



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that more than 80 percent of people will not consider a job change after the pandemic without remote working opportunities. Workplaces will require enhanced flexibility to respond to the collaboration needs

of teams and the dynamic nature of people working remotely. Less personal space (i.e., free address workspaces) will also be a fact, and in that sense, we think future offices will tend to look more like

showrooms, with a variety of different settings.

Structure may seem in direct contrast to flexibility, but it provides a balance. If everyone only comes into the office a few days a week, the chance of seeing others may be limited. We think organizations will need to give people a reason to celebrate their culture together. Whether it's a party or a company-wide meeting, humans are social animals. Spaces that bring everyone together will continue to be important, even if they might not be a priority in the near future.

Technology will continue to be key to making remote work succeed, and having the right tools will challenge every organization. Teams will want people who can't attend face-to-face meetings to join via video conference. We're convinced that large monitors with docked laptops will be the model for most companies. When paired with a tablet and cellphone, professionals will have everything they need to do their jobs from their backpack.

Much of what Eastlake Studio has been doing the past year directly reflects points Simon Sinek is trying to make in his book *The Infinite Game*. Sinek makes the case for focusing on the long term rather than the short if you want to build a firm that will last — things like advancing a just cause, building trusting teams, preparing for existential flexibility and demonstrating the courage to lead. In other words, before we get back to the workplace, let's make sure we're focused on what matters. 

# IBC Now Allows Ultra-Large Porcelain Tile Panels on Exteriors

BY SCOTT CONWELL, FAIA, FCSI, INTERNATIONAL MASONRY INSTITUTE



Aria Group project. PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT CONWELL, FAIA

**T**he 2021 edition of the International Building Code (IBC) creates new opportunities to use large format adhered porcelain tile and ultra-large format tile panels on building exteriors. The new code requirements represent the first major update for porcelain tile since its introduction to the IBC in 2009.

The International Masonry Institute (IMI) and the Tile Council of North America (TCNA), with the cooperation of tile and setting material manufacturers, jointly proposed these new criteria for exterior tile to the International Code Council (ICC), who unanimously approved the proposal and implemented the language into the 2021 IBC.

The new requirements respond to the increased availability of larger, thinner porcelain tiles, improved technologies in bonding mortar, and the tile industry's focus on qualified labor. The updated section from the 2021 IBC reads as follows in its entirety:

**1404.10.2 Exterior adhered masonry veneers – porcelain tile.**

Adhered units weighing more than 3.5 pounds per square foot (0.7 kN/m<sup>2</sup>) shall not exceed 48 inches (1219 mm) in any face dimension nor more than 9 square feet (0.8 m<sup>2</sup>) in total face area and shall not weigh more than 6 pounds per square foot (0.29 kN/m<sup>2</sup>). Adhered units weighing less than or equal to 3.5 pounds per square foot (0.17 kN/m<sup>2</sup>) shall not exceed 72 inches (1829 mm) in any face dimension nor more than 17.5 square feet (1.6 m<sup>2</sup>) in total face area. Porcelain tile shall be adhered to an approved backing system.

**Code Requirements from 2009 Through 2018**

In 2009, porcelain tiles meeting ANSI A137.1 *American National Standard Specifications for Ceramic Tile* were typically manufactured to a thickness between 9/32 inch and 7/16 inch (7-11 millimeters), and were adhered with mortar manufactured in compliance with ANSI A118.4 *American National Standard*

*Specifications for Modified Dry-Set Cement Mortar*. Due to safety concerns and recommendations of the tile industry at that time, the IBC limited the size of these relatively thick and heavy tiles to a maximum of 24 inches (610 millimeters) in any dimension, and a maximum area of 3 square feet (0.28 square meter) for any one tile. Moreover, the IBC imposed the restriction that any one tile shall not weigh more than 9 pounds per square foot (0.43 kilonewton per square meter). By today's standards these requirements seem overly restrictive, but they served the tile industry well in the last decade.

**What Factors Have Sparked the Code Changes?**

It is now safer and more efficient than ever to use larger adhered porcelain tile. This is a result of major industry improvements over the last decade like larger and thinner tiles, stronger mortars and increased focus on installer training and certification programs.

**Larger, Thinner Tiles**

Porcelain tile manufacturers worldwide now have the technology to produce tiles that are significantly thinner and larger than tile manufactured in previous decades. Porcelain tile manufactured to ANSI A137.3 *American National Standard Specifications for Gauged Porcelain Tiles and Gauged Porcelain Tile Panels/Slabs* are commonly 1/8 inch to 7/32 inch (3.5-5 millimeters) in thickness. Gauged porcelain tile (GPT) panels also frequently have facial dimensions nearly as large as 6 feet by 12 feet (1,800 millimeters by 3,600 millimeters in actual size). The thinner profile of these tiles results in units that remain relatively lightweight despite their ultra-large format.

**2009-2018 IBC**

5/8 in. maximum thickness, 9 psf maximum weight

24 in. maximum edge

3 S.F. maximum area

12 in. x 12 in.

16 in. x 16 in.

20 in. x 20 in.

12 in. x 24 in.

**2021 IBC**

No maximum thickness, 6 psf maximum weight,

1/8 in. minimum thickness

48 in. maximum edge for tiles > 1/4 in. thick

9 S.F. maximum area for tiles > 1/4 in. thick

24 in. x 48 in., > 1/4 in. thick

**2021 IBC**

No maximum thickness, 6 psf maximum weight,

1/8 in. minimum thickness

72 in. maximum edge for tiles ≤ 1/4 in. thick

17.5 S.F. maximum for tiles ≤ 1/4 in. thick

36 in. x 72 in. nominal (2.95 ft. x 5.91 ft. actual) ≤ 1/4 in. thick

48 in. x 48 in. ≤ 1/4 in. thick

**Stronger Mortar**

Just as tile manufacturers were developing technology that would test the limits of tile size and thickness, Mapei and other setting material manufacturers were improving their products to provide more tenacious bond strength. ANSI A118.15 *American National Specifications for Improved Modified Dry-Set Cement Mortars* was approved as a new standard in 2014, establishing more rigid criteria for resistance to shear forces. For example, the required 28-day shear strength of mortar meeting ANSI A118.15, the standard recommended by most GPT panel manufacturers, is double the

requirement for mortars meeting ANSI A118.4, at 400 pounds per square inch (2.76 megapascals) and 200 pounds per square inch (1.38 megapascals) respectively.

**Industry's Focus on Qualified Labor**

Even with these tremendous improvements in materials, the tile setters, finishers and contractors installing them must be qualified. Trained, skilled craftworkers and contractors are paramount to the success of any tile project, and when the public's health, safety and welfare are at stake, qualified labor is critical.

The tile industry has made great strides in the last decade in expanding the delivery of

long-standing programs like the apprenticeship and training program of the International Masonry Training and Education Foundation (IMTEF) and joint apprenticeship and training committees. These programs provide union installers with training and technical expertise reflecting the latest technologies and ANSI requirements. Further, the Trowel of Excellence certification of the Tile Contractors' Association of America (TCAA) establishes credentials for best practice tile contractors who are signatory with the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC). For installers who aspire to be the most technically proficient in their field, the Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) assess and certify installers in seven critical skill areas including large format tile (LFT) and GPT. Each of these qualified labor training and certification programs works closely with manufacturers of tile and setting materials to ensure that the union labor force is constantly kept up to date with the latest material and installation technologies. Architects can ensure qualified labor on their projects by making one or more of these credentials a requirement in their specifications.

**The New Code Requirements in 2021**

So how large a porcelain tile can now be adhered to a façade? To simplify the new code requirements, the criteria in the 2021 IBC may be summarized as follows: For tiles greater than 1/4 inch (6 millimeters) thick, the maximum tile size is 9 square feet (0.84 square meter), which in common tile sizes is 36 inches by 36 inches (915 millimeters by 915 millimeters) or 24 inches by 48 inches (610 millimeters by 1,220 millimeters). Tiles of this thickness may not have any face longer than 48 inches (1,220 millimeters).



For tiles less than or equal to 1/4 inch (6 millimeters) thick, the maximum tile size is 17.5 square feet (1.6 square meters), which translates to 48 inches by 48 inches (1,220 millimeters by 1,220 millimeters) or 36 inches by 72 inches nominally (900 millimeters by 1,800 millimeters in actual size). Tiles of this thickness may not have any face longer than 72 inches.

Finally, while this update applies to large and ultra-large format tiles, it is important to remember that ceramic and porcelain tiles in traditional sizes continue to be allowed under the IBC for exteriors. With this code change, architects can now specify these larger size tiles without submitting any special requests to the local building code official. If an architect wishes to specify tiles that exceed these requirements, it may still be possible to do so with the

approval of the authority having jurisdiction. This is exactly what was done on the recently completed Perry's Steakhouse restaurant in Schaumburg, Illinois.

**Case Study**

Perry's Steakhouse, designed by Aria Group Architects Inc., is a great example of ultra-large GPT panels as an adhered façade. ICI was the general contractor, and the tile work was performed by Ready Tile of Bartlett, Illinois. The panels are 40 inches by 117 inches, and they were set in Granirapid, an improved modified thinset mortar manufactured by Mapei over a substrate of cementitious backer board (CBU) on heavy gauge steel studs and glass mat reinforced gypsum sheathing. Mapei's AquaDefense waterproof membrane was applied in two coats directly over the CBU prior

to the tile installation. Among the many challenges was the necessity to coordinate crews of tile setters and finishers working from three lifts to reach heights of almost 30 feet, simultaneously spreading mortar on the substrate and back-buttering the tile while working from the lifts. Ready Tile LLC employed tile setters who were trained and certified for GPT installation, an important criterion that should be included in the architectural specifications. Because the installation of GPT required special tools, material handling and installation techniques drastically different than those used in conventional tile installation, the training and skills of the installers were paramount to the success of this project. Brian Zielinski, AIA, of Aria Group had this to say about the project:

"We are always looking to explore new technology and materials that help our designs. We faced some review board challenges in Schaumburg on exterior materials we typically use for our client, so the opportunity presented itself to use ultra-large GPT, which we believed was the best choice to achieve our design intent. We couldn't be happier with the outcome and are now considering the incorporation of GPT as a standard material in the design evolution of the restaurant brand's future locations."

**What's Next?**

Chicago architects are encouraged to consider ceramic and porcelain tiles in all sizes, installed by qualified BAC craftworkers. The durability, low maintenance, sustainability, health benefits and unlimited design aesthetics of expertly installed tile make it the perfect choice for building façades, and it is now easier than ever to meet building code requirements and deliver a beautiful, healthy building. CA

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