

# CHICAGO ARCHITECT

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*Maldonado*

*Protsishin, AIA*

2021 Dubin Family Young  
Architect Award Recipient // 26



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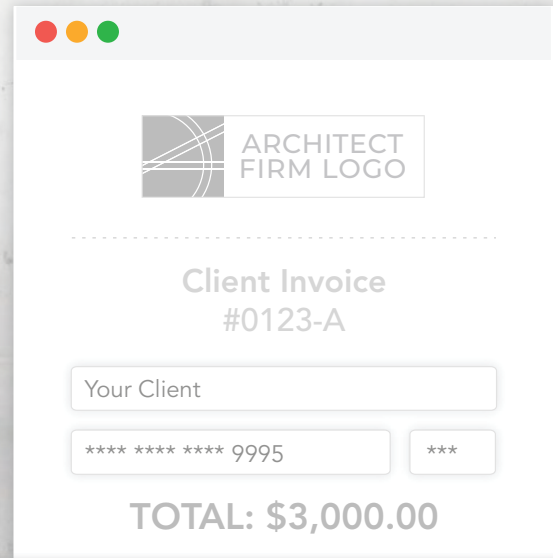
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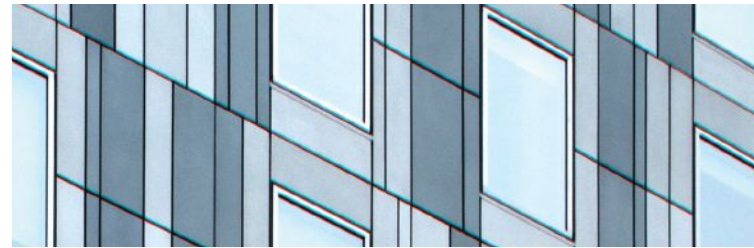
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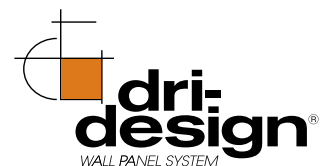
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# CHICAGO ARCHITECT

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# Thoughts of Renewal



Dear Members,

As the spring flowers start to emerge from the ground, this is a good time to look past those cold winter days and start to think ahead to the summer. Just as the seasons change, our profession is always changing. Our world has changed. This is a good time to reflect on where we have been and set a new path forward to what is ahead.

Last year, the Board of Directors completed our first strategic plan in 25 years. This year, we continue our work with the implementation of that plan that will provide you with industry-leading programs; our communications are improving to better inform you on our programs, events and news about our members; our development team is reaching out to the architecture community to reinforce our existing partnerships and create new opportunities; the awards committee is strategizing around our awards programs; and, our advocacy team is creating ways to make our profession more sustainable and equitable.

We are also working on creating more opportunities for our members to be involved with the chapter. Executive Director Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA, continues her listening tour, meeting with member firms to better support your work. We have created numerous opportunities through our knowledge communities, affinity groups, strategic planning implementation committees, and our conference planning committee to provide members with opportunities to participate.

In June we will welcome our fellow AIA friends and colleagues from around the world to the A'22 Conference on Architecture taking place here in Chicago. Our city is gearing up to host more than 15,000 architects and affiliated professionals to the City of Big Shoulders, and we are looking forward to welcoming attendees with a great roster of programs, tours, and celebrations. In this issue's Chapter Report, we've highlighted just a few of the dozens of tours being offered and led by our members, as well as the evening of Open Studios that the conference planning committee has organized with our local firms. Nearly 70 of our members are working hard behind the scenes to make sure this conference is a success.

In this issue we're highlighting an initiative

launched by AIA Chicago member Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, called The First 500. This initiative recognizes, celebrates, and supports the work of Black women architects and architects-to-be. You can read more about The First 500's origins and how you can support their work in the Façades section.

Our cover story features the 2021 Dubin Family Young Architect Award recipient, Alzira Maldonado Protsishin, AIA, whose work at EXP has been critically focused on public projects that enrich the lives of everyday residents. She is regarded in our community as a mentor, and in her story she speaks to how mentorship helped move her career forward and how she continues to "pay it forward" by participating in myriad mentorship programs in Chicago.

We also are excited to celebrate Optima, Inc. — our 2021 Firm of the Year — with a retrospective of some of their award-winning projects. Optima was founded by David Hovey, Sr., FAIA, and his wife, Eileen. The two have built a legacy of reinvention. From Hovey's work as a graduate student at IIT wherein he focused on prefabrication as a new solution to America's housing problems, to his 50-year career running a dynamic developer/designer/construction/property management firm, Hovey has redefined the typical business model for constructing new housing.

Finally, you'll read a conversation between Jen Masengarb and Maurice Cox, commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development (DPD). Cox discusses how Chicago has changed since he arrived in his role, Mayor Lori Lightfoot's INVEST South/West initiative, and more about his passion for equitable design in our city's most vulnerable communities.

Lastly, I would also like to thank our past president, Jessica Figenholtz, AIA, for her resonant leadership last year; and, to all past presidents who have guided and prepared me for this opportunity. As we inch back toward in-person activities and events, I am looking forward to a productive year when we can safely gather together, collaborate, and share in the benefits of AIA Chicago membership.

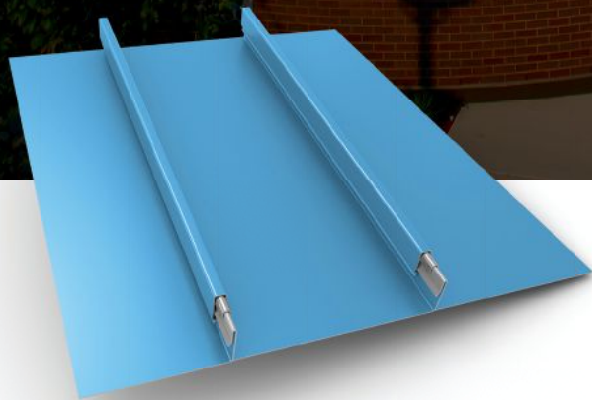
Drew Deering, AIA, LEED AP  
2022 AIA Chicago President

# Whimsical Roofline



**Vibrant Dynamic Blue Snap-Clad metal panels** brighten the playful roof shapes and walls of two interior courtyards, invigorating this mixed-use building that houses a Chicago Public Library, childcare center and community meeting space.

Altgeld Family Resource Center, Chicago | Installing contractor: Progressive Dynamics | Architect: KOO LLC  
Owner: Chicago Housing Authority | Photo: hortonphotoinc.com



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# A'22

The architecture & design event of the year returns to Chicago June 22–25!

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## AIA Conference on Architecture 2022

We are excited to bring more than 15,000 architects and allied professions to the City of Big Shoulders from June 22-25! AIA Chicago is planning a range of tours and activities to welcome our out-of-town colleagues — and, to showcase the talent and generosity of our local members. Register at <https://conferenceonarchitecture.com>.

## Tour Highlights

### Affordable Housing in Albany Park and Irving Park

This tour will explore Oso Apartments, designed by Canopy Architecture and Design, and Independence Library and Apartments, designed by John Ronan Architects — two affordable housing developments on Chicago's north side. These projects represent unique challenges and opportunities to provide quality affordable housing to the neighborhoods in which they are located. Oso Apartments was designed to provide housing for low- to moderate-income residents, at every stage of life. Independence Library and Apartments is a unique mixed-use building, which combines a neighborhood library branch with affordable senior housing. Designed by John Ronan

Architects, the project features best practices in senior housing and new models of community integrated senior housing. On this tour attendees will hear from the architects for these projects. Transportation for this tour will be via bus and include approximately one hour of walking.

### A Living Tradition: Murals in Pilsen

A Living Tradition mural walking tour is a 21.5-hour journey through the colorful "outdoors museum" in the Chicago's Mexican community of Pilsen. The tour showcases the best selected examples of surviving historic and contemporary murals to discuss the evolution of painted exterior murals in Pilsen. In the late 1960s, Pilsen became a focal point of the Chicago

mural movement. Since then, this neighborhood has generated a great collection of street art from different generations and multicultural experiences becoming a living tradition of muralism in the neighborhood. The tour leader, Rebeca Fernandez, is a former resident of Pilsen, a trained architect from Mexico City with a master's degree in historic preservation at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). A Living Tradition tour is based on Fernandez's research work that she presented for the first time as a lecturer in 2017 for the Preservation Snapshots Lecturer with Landmarks Illinois.

### Back to the Frontier: Pushing Beyond "Sustainable" Design to Regenerate Nature

The Academy for Global Citizenship and the

International Living Future Institute believe we must aim beyond the Living Building Challenge standard definition of sustainability and begin to actually repair the damage we've done to this planet in order to ensure a viable future. Tour the Academy for Global Citizenship, pursuing full Living Building Challenge certification during construction with the architect, contractor and engineer to see how it has been designed — not just to minimize its harmful impact on the environment but to regenerate it. Visitors will see what it takes to create a biophilic, net-positive energy, net-zero carbon school that challenges the conventional meaning of sustainability. Transportation will be by bus and there will be approximately one and a half hours of walking.

## Open Studios

### Friday, June 24

Thirty five AIA member firms will open their doors for an evening of studio visits and conversations. Each Open Studio collection of

three firms showcases a diverse range of practice types, firm sizes and disciplines. Many firms are located in architecturally significant buildings and/or have unique city views. Visit the three

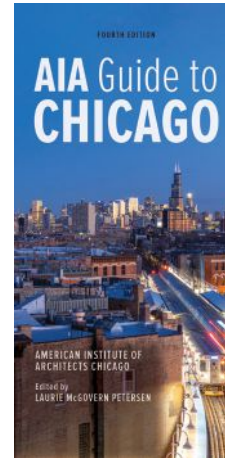
firms in your collection in any order you choose, for as long as you wish. All three firms in the collection are within a 20-minute walk of each other. Learn about the firms' latest work and chat

with staff. Drinks and snacks are generously provided by the firms.

Visit [www.conferenceonarchitecture.com](http://www.conferenceonarchitecture.com) to see the full Open Studios firm itinerary and to reserve your spot.

## AIA Guide to Chicago: 4th Edition

AIA Chicago will release a fresh and updated version of the *AIA Guide to Chicago* just in time for the convention in June! Edited by Laurie Petersen, the fourth edition provides new additions to Chicago's skyline and streetscape, including entries on the Riverwalk, St. Regis Chicago and The 606, as well as updated descriptions of old favorites and refreshed landmarks. The book will release publicly in July 2022, but you can pick up a copy at the AIA Convention in June.



## AIAChicagoFoundation



## Architects in Schools News

 The AIA Chicago Foundation resumed their Architects in Schools programs in the fall 2021 school year at Cameron Elementary. Thirteen volunteer mentors worked with 8th graders to create proposals for a vacant lot in their

neighborhood. The 2022 season will continue at Chavez Elementary and will expand to Pullman Elementary this spring. The Architects in Schools program has also received a generous grant from the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH).

## Funding Opportunities for Students

The AIA Chicago Foundation students. Deadlines and Diversity Scholarship and requirements vary; visit the Martin Roche Travel Scholarship are currently accepting applications for [www.aiachicago.org](http://www.aiachicago.org) for more information on Chicago-area college both opportunities.

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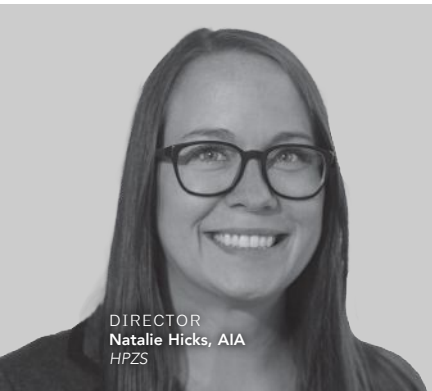
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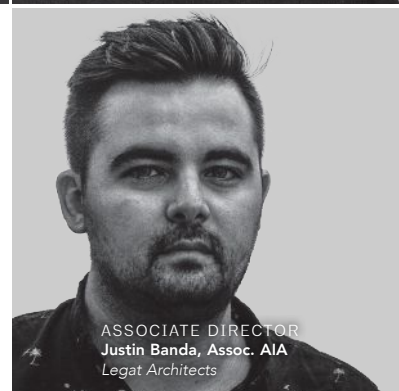
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## The First 500

There have been more people launched into outer space than there are Black women architects. Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, NOMA, created The First 500 — a website dedicated to showcasing Black women architects and supporting Black women architects-in-the-making — as a means to change that.

The First 500 sprouted from personal experience; according to Hughes, much of her career pathway experience was spent as being one of, if not the only, Black architect in her high school or college courses. “Then of course, getting to the industry and realizing I’m in practice and have

not met a Black woman architect. I’ve never learned about a Black woman architect’s work,” explains Hughes. She soon discovered that Black women make up less than one percent of the nation’s licensed architects.

She began a series of speaking engagements to both raise

awareness of this startling statistic and to spotlight the work of Black women in the profession. “These women exist, their work is great, their contributions to the built environment are

phenomenal, and you should know about it. I was screaming from the rooftops at all these talks,” says Hughes. She moved from rooftops to phone lines, cold-calling Black women



architects to ask them to share their stories with her.


Launched in October 2021, First500.org is a digital space where these stories are catalogued and shared: Black women practitioners can submit their own stories and photographs, they can share their social media handles so others can follow them. Visitors can peruse nearly 75 profiles — the number grows every day.

The site also includes resources for students at all stages of their career pathway, including K-12 activities and programs, high school scholarships, college scholarships, and resources for exams. There is also a reading list for those seeking to read books authored by or featuring Black architects. Coupled with the profile platform, The First 500 is designed to support Black women architects at every stage of their career, including those who are licensed. Unlike other platforms that specifically target youth, The First 500 wants to acknowledge those practicing Black women architects who have paved the way.

“I think it is time for her to get her flowers, and this platform is completely dedicated to celebrating and elevating her work, her achievements, and everything that she’s contributed to this industry in our communities,” says Hughes.

Hughes has established a leadership board and advisory council to carry on this work, and the team will soon launch their first fundraiser to raise money for this initiative. Crucially, the money they raise will go toward supporting young Black women practitioners’ career paths — taking exams and paying for college, but also the “unseen” expenditures that often take young people by surprise, like moving and travel expenses to go to college.

“There are a lot of scholarships out there that can go toward tuition. But how are you paying for books? If you’re going to school in Georgia, how are you paying for your summer internship in Chicago? Those unorthodox payments that the standard scholarships don’t cover, we want to reach into that space as well,” she explains. Funds raised will also support additional programming, and potentially starting a podcast series about Black women architects. The fundraiser will launch in the second quarter of 2022.

*AIA Chicago members can support The First 500 by donating to their spring fundraiser or by booking Hughes to speak at their organization or firm. First500.org also provides visitors with graphics and logos to share on their social media.* 



TIARA HUGHES,  
ASSOC. AIA.  
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**“These women exist, their work is great, their contributions to the built environment are phenomenal, and you should know about it. I was screaming from the rooftops at all these talks.”**

**Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, NOMA**



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**Anney Grish** joined **AltusWorks Inc.** as a planner/cultural resource specialist on January 1, 2022.



**Keshia Patel** joined **AltusWorks Inc.** as an architectural designer on January 1, 2022.



Designed by **a+c architects**, a Skokie-based architectural design firm, the new Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church is an eye-catching, modern structure at 3939 W. Devon Ave. The 65,000-square-foot, three-story building features a sleek, geometric limestone façade that stands out within this northwest side neighborhood, which is dominated by brick bungalows and one-story commercial space.

The opening of the project is the culmination of a multi-year collaborative design process with Elim church leadership and members of the community.

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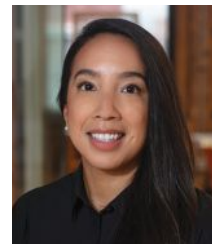
**Elizabeth Rack, AIA, LEED AP** joined **SmithGroup** in fall 2021 as a principal and senior health care planner.



The following **SmithGroup** architects have been promoted to associate: **Marybeth Dietz, AIA, ACHA**; **Holly Harris, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C**; **Raquel Guzman Gears, AIA, LEED Green Associate**; **Taft Cleveland, Associate AIA, LEED GA, AORN, NOMA**; and **John Rushing, SE, RA, LEED AP**.



**Goettsch Partners** announces the completion of Mennica Legacy Tower, a new 115,000-square-meter, two-building office complex in Warsaw, anchored by mBank, one of Poland's largest banking institutions, and leading co-working provider WeWork. Located at the intersection of Prosta and Żelazna streets in the CBD, the 35-story and 10-story office buildings open to a large, landscaped plaza, with a pedestrian path that winds between them.



HPZS is growing their expertise in preservation and sustainable design with seven female leaders: **Kelly Moynihan, AIA, NCARB, WELL AP, CPHC®, LEED GA**, Principal, **Natalie Hicks, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C**, Technical Leader, **Andrea Sforza, AIA, CSI**, Preservation Project Architect, **Noelle Kramer, Assoc. AIA**, Junior Associate, **Riya Desai, Assoc. AIA**, Architectural Designer, **Lexy Martone, Assoc. AIA**, Architectural Designer, and **Sarah Godbee, Affiliate AIA Chicago**, Marketing Coordinator.

# Art IN ARCHITECTURE

Spirit of Space Is Redefining Empathy in Architecture Through Film



**B**efore the architecture filmmaking endeavor Spirit of Space was created in 2006, its founders Adam Goss, RedMike and Ryan Clark — all then-architecture or engineering students of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee — were exploring their interests in other artistic media. Goss, while in architecture school, would head over to the movies before going back to the studio; Clark was taking classes in music; RedMike was shooting old-school VHS tapes for architecture assignments. When they met on a study trip in Milan, their collective interest in architecture coalesced not through the buildings as objects, but as spaces for people. So they started making films to tell the stories of spaces through their users, and the result has been a decade-and-a-half long collaboration between their film company, architecture firms and communities-at-large.

Today, their archive is more than 300 short films deep, with clients like Studio Gang, The Art Institute of Chicago, SHoP Architects, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and many more. What is unique about watching these narratives unfold on screen is that, for many of the films, the architects or designers are never seen. Instead, the team relies on on-the-ground interviews with the public, slow-pans of the built environment in context and sound design to tell the story.

“Authenticity is what we’ve always strived for, and coming from a composition and sound design perspective, it just makes it possible to try to create something that’s emotive — that provides an emotional bend. Each film is a two-dimensional representation, and it has an arc,” says Clark.

Their most recent composition, a five-minute documentary of the Brooklyn Bridge Park by Michael Van Valkenburg Associates in

**“Authenticity is what we’ve always strived for, and coming from a composition and sound design perspective, it just makes it possible to try to create something that’s emotive — that provides an emotional bend. Each film is a two-dimensional representation, and it has an arc.”**

**Ryan Clark, Spirit of Space co-founder**

## ART IN ARCHITECTURE

Brooklyn, New York, exemplifies the group's approach to unconventional narrative storytelling. Captured over Memorial Day weekend 2021, the film includes interviews with springtime loungers, longtime

nearby residents and kids playing basketball; it follows trail runners and home chefs grilling lunch.

"I went to record the park and just sat back as an observer," says Goss. "There was no storyboard. In post [production], we just

started to weave these narratives together and put together what I think is a *cinéma vérité*, and I think it's one of the most special things that we've ever created."

As an exercise in trust between the architects and the

film crew, Spirit of Space specializes in unscripted storytelling. Their film for Wrightwood 659 in Chicago captured the *Balkrishna Doshi: Architecture for the People* exhibition in a collaboration with



SPIRIT OF SPACE AT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK

Monica Chadha, AIA. They connected with artist Edra Soto, journalist Natalie Moore, and Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.) co-founder Asiaha Butler, who explored the exhibition with the film crew. Then, the three guests took the film crew to places in their neighborhoods of Garfield Park, Englewood and Bronzeville, to discuss specific ideas and objects from the exhibition that reminded them of home.

“There was no deliberate ‘we want this to say this’ or ‘have this specific message,’” explains Samantha Thomas, Spirit of Space executive producer. “It was simply how memory is triggered by architectural experiences. And I think that’s one of the most beautiful things that can happen through film, but you really need it to be authentic because if you stage it or try and make it happen, or if we had tried to organize the interviews in Brooklyn Bridge Park, it just wouldn’t have been the same film.”

What Spirit of Space’s vision speaks to is a shifting form of empathy in architecture. Empathy, Thomas says paraphrasing a quote from the actor and writer Anna Deveare Smith, is about the attention we place on someone, or someplace. “In this age of so much rapid-fire information, we all need to pay attention to the things that are

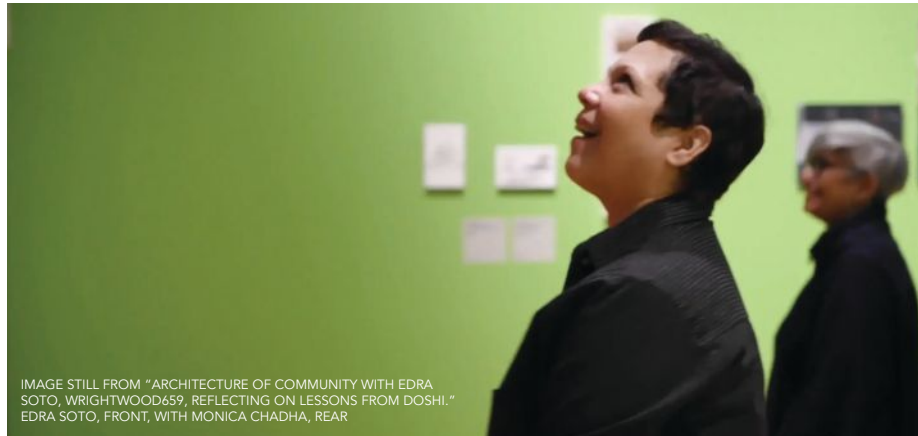
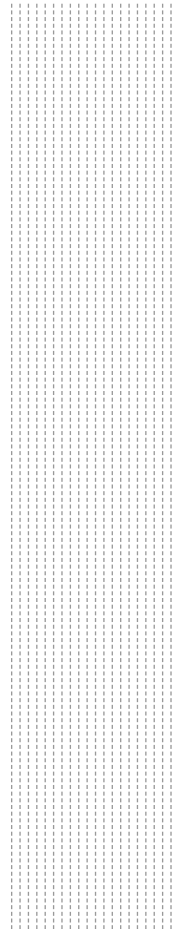


IMAGE STILL FROM “ARCHITECTURE OF COMMUNITY WITH EDRA SOTO, WRIGHTWOOD659, REFLECTING ON LESSONS FROM DOSHI.” EDRA SOTO, FRONT, WITH MONICA CHADHA, REAR




IMAGE STILL FROM SPIRIT OF SPACE’S BAY AREA DISCOVERY MUSEUM FILM

important, and I hope that all of our films start to give more attention to the things that really matter; that they start to invite people to the table to have conversations that aren’t normally invited. That’s something that film can give you that no other architectural communication medium can,” she says.

Using filmmaking as a tool to recalibrate how architecture

communication can generate empathy, Spirit of Space is looking to create a future where architectural stories are driven by people — their participation, their memory — in one short, yet meaningful, moment. RedMike expands: “Being a part of the camera lens for that magical moment, that one day in time when the weather conditions

will never be the same. The people that are there won’t be the same. The state of the materials will be different. The property value will go up and down. The owners will change. We’ve captured it at this moment, and that’s what *[Chicago Architect]* readers need to ask themselves: What is the story about this design that’s worth sharing?” 

# BUILDING CIV



PROTSISHIN WORKED ON THE WASHINGTON/WABASH CTA STATION REDEVELOPMENT BEGINNING AS A STUDENT INTERN AT EXP THROUGH ITS COMPLETION. CREDIT: JAMES STEINKAMP PHOTOGRAPHY

# IC IDENTITY



ALZIRA MALDONADO PROTSISHIN, AIA,  
2021 DUBIN FAMILY YOUNG ARCHITECT  
AWARD RECIPIENT

When the author Joseph Campbell analyzed cities, he remarked on understanding what is most valued through looking at its built environment. “You can tell what’s informing a society by what the tallest building is. When you approach a medieval town, the cathedral is the tallest thing in the place. When you approach an 18th-century town, it is the political palace that’s the tallest thing in the place. And when you approach a modern city, the tallest places are the office buildings, the centers of economic life,” he wrote in his 1988 seminal work, *The Power of Myth*. Urban writers and scholars, today, might say that a city’s values can’t be measured by its tallest buildings, but instead, the densest infrastructure that supports the livelihoods of all its residents.

**“I was really interested in working on projects that could benefit all people, not only for the private but for the overall community.”**

Alzira Maldonado Protsishin, AIA

Alzira Maldonado Protsishin, AIA, knows precisely what the built environment communicates.

In her nine years at EXP, Protsishin has worked on myriad projects that her boss, EXP Principal Tom Hoepf, FAIA, calls “cultural infrastructure.” From the 95th street Red Line station in Chicago, to the United States Courthouse in Saipan, Mariana Islands, Protsishin has focused her career on communicating civic values through design.

Born in the former Soviet Union to her Ukrainian mother and Colombian father —

both structural engineers — Protsishin spent her earliest years on site visits. After relocating to Colombia as a child, she watched her parents run their own practice, observing how drawings became construction sites that then became buildings. “What was interesting to me was seeing the designs and how when you get to use the building, how that changes the perception of the spaces or the lives of the people who use the space,” she says.

Protsishin knew she didn’t want to be a structural engineer, but she instead pursued her

undergraduate degree in architecture at University of Los Andes in Colombia. Her thesis project was a proposal to transform a section of an impoverished part of Bogota located near a river into a thriving public place. The existing condition is one that many American architects are familiar with, wherein the city turns its back to the river, but Protsishin saw an opportunity to reorient the neighborhood toward the river and open up space for parks, agriculture and family programming.

“After working on that, I was really interested in working on projects that could benefit all people, not only for the private but for the overall community,” she says.

After moving to Chicago to attend the Illinois Institute of Technology’s College of Architecture, Protsishin connected with Hoepf and took on an internship with EXP. According to Hoepf, much of her early work was focused around modeling the Washington/Wabash CTA station that was in its early design phases, as well as the Illinois Medical CTA station competition. After completing her internship and graduating from IIT, Hoepf offered her a full-time position, where she has remained since 2014.

Protsishin has continued to sharpen her skills in designing cultural infrastructure and working on EXP’s portfolio of CTA stations, including the award-winning Washington/Wabash station, as well the 95th Street/Dan Ryan Red Line terminal, the Quincy Elevated Station, and the recent Red/Purple line modernizations. Each presented their own challenges: According to Hoepf, the Quincy Station required historic preservation elements while also performing accessibility upgrades; the 95th Street Station, on the other hand, was a ground-up construction with high needs for connectivity to other services and infrastructures. Yet no matter the scope of work, Protsishin could draw a straight



95TH / DAN RYAN CTA INTERMODAL TERMINAL STATION. CREDIT: JAMES STEINKAMP PHOTOGRAPHY



PROTSISHIN AS A STUDENT INTERN IS SHOWN HERE WORKING ON THE WASHINGTON WABASH CTA STATION. CREDIT: EXP



line to each project — a thread of community connectivity.

“One of the great things about the infrastructure is that you start looking at a city through its connectivity, how this public service is connecting people

throughout a city and what things could improve in the system itself, but also how a project in a neighborhood improves the community around the neighborhood,” says Protsishin.

Her most recent project was

one of the most challenging: A new federal courthouse in the Northern Mariana Islands provided her an opportunity to lead a project’s design with a process rife with intense learning. Located roughly 1,600 miles from

the Philippines, the small island presented unfamiliar climates to design within, as well as challenges faced by COVID-19 travel restrictions. Her final punch-list, she said, was completed over Zoom.

“Sometimes when you’re doing public projects, the opportunities are harder to see because oftentimes in the beginning, you may run up against procedures and standards that seem overbearing or overly restrictive in terms of your creative problem solving and thinking,” says Hoepf. “It takes a certain stamina, drive and vision to find those cracks and pry that door open to; to really exploit those opportunities.”

For Protsishin, the opportunity was to express the values of that particular community. “Working on [the Saipan Courthouse] gave me an idea of public architecture. The challenge of visualizing that building so far away had me think clearly about a building that actually communicates the values of our community — or in this case, a country. You can have that presence as a country, but at the same time, make a space that is welcoming for all users, day to day,” she says.

Protsishin’s own day-to-day life revolves around her work with EXP, but she has expanded her orbit to include young practitioners and students as a mentor. Mentorship, she notes, has been key to her own success as she transitioned from life in Colombia to graduate school in Chicago. But meeting Hoepf, as well as other faculty at IIT, she was encouraged to join AIA and attend events; eventually, she applied to the Bridge Mentorship program. Now, she has decided to pass it on.

As a mentor, Protsishin volunteers at IIT’s WING pro-

gram, Arqutinia, and at EXP’s in-house program that brings students from Kuwait to intern at the firm. Much of what she accomplished with her mentees was precisely what she needed (and received) upon arriving in Chicago in 2012 — advice for acclimating to Chicago, working as a non-native English speaker, building a community and, of course, advising on design.

“Just by telling your story — saying what the challenges are, how to overcome them, seeing how other people did it — then knowing that you can do it, too, and aspire for those things, as well,” she explains, “I think it’s really a big deal. Being available for the younger generation, younger than me, to be open to them, it’s incredibly important.”

Through her design practice and as a mentor, Protsishin is signaling what she values, and what she believes is most valuable in our cities: people. The virtues of tall buildings matter less, in her practice, than producing a collective “temple” of neighborhoods made strong — not by individual development, but by connectivity. In the future, she says she hopes that Chicago will continue to invest in connectivity solutions, bringing people together from all sides of the city with publicly accessible and sustainable transit. “I would also like to continue to mentor, so that I can reach more young people so they can pursue the architecture profession here, to keep growing the city.” CA



UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE IN SAIPAN,  
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS.  
CREDIT: BILL BEZZANT



## 2021 Firm of the Year:

# OPTIMA INC.

**F**ounded in Chicago by David Hovey, FAIA, and his wife Eileen Hovey, Optima has been a continuous force of innovation in Chicago and across the country.

Optima, Inc, was started with the intention of creating multifamily housing that combines design, development and management into one entity. Optima has been paving the path for modular construction and vertical integration for decades.

From his time as an undergraduate and graduate student at the Illinois Institute of Technology's School of Architecture, Hovey has been interested in critiquing and disrupting conventional home-building practices, according to Michael Glynn, adjunct associate professor at IIT. "Optima changed what a practice of architecture could look like," he says.

At this year's annual meeting, Glynn read from Hovey's Master's thesis, completed in 1970:

*"At this time, the housing industry is archaic, fragmented, and inefficient. If it is to meet the housing needs of the next few years it must be combined into a rational organization of the most modern technological nature."*

*"America after years of charging enthusiastically, but blindly ahead should reevaluate its goals."*

Optima completed their first projects in Chicago suburbs: Sheridan Elm in Winnetka (1982) and Sandy Knoll in Homewood, Illinois (1986), followed by Chicago projects in Hyde Park, including a set of six townhomes and a plan to continue doubling project sizes with each new development. By the 1990s, Optima had completed 17 developments in Chicago and

sought to expand their footprint both locally and nationally. They opened their Scottsdale office in the early 2000s, calling it, "A challenge."

The primary challenge, of course, was the harsh desert climate in cities like Scottsdale, where they began developing climate-responsive dwellings that retained their signature modernist, Erector-Set quality using materials like concrete, steel, high-performance glazing, green roofs and louvers. Their patented steel connector system was developed under their company's offshoot, DHC Global, and was designed to streamline construction while allowing for a diverse array of building shapes and also optimizing views and floorplans.

"Their work is very well detailed and technically advanced, and they changed what an architecture firm could look like," commented one of this year's Firm of the Year Award jurors.

More than 50 years after their firm's founding, the company has become a family business, with Hovey's son, David Jr., and his daughter, Tara, working alongside their father as COO and principal designer, and as president, respectively. Their work continues to be a guiding light for those companies that are beginning to embrace modular and climate-sensitive design and construction. In the following pages, you'll read and see some of Optima's most iconic and award-winning projects — here in Chicago and around the world.

OPTIMA OLD ORCHARD WOODS  
CREDIT: JOHN MILLER/HEDRICH BLESSING



**Optima Old Orchard Woods, Skokie, Illinois (2006-2010)** is made up of three interlocking 20-story residential towers on a site with a highway on one side and a forest preserve on the other. The architect positioned the towers to take advantage of views to the east over the highway to Chicago and Lake Michigan and to the west, to the forest preserve. The composition is dynamic with an asymmetrical site plan enlivened by features like setbacks, cutouts, terraces, and bridges and details like louvers and red sunscreens.



OPTIMA SONORAN VILLAGE.  
CREDIT: BILL TIMMERMAN

**Optima Sonoran Village, Scottsdale, AZ (2012-2019)** is a five-building, mixed-use residential complex with concrete structures and post-tension concrete slabs. It is designed for the desert with exterior details like perforated sunscreens, louvers and a system of plantings that hang from every level to cool the air. Materials are sustainable with a high recycle content. Parking is below grade, leaving open space for landscaping that mitigates a heat island effect. **Awards:** AIA Chicago Distinguished Building Honor Award, AIA Chicago Divine Detail Honor Award, Green Good Design Award.



OPTIMA SONORAN VILLAGE.  
CREDIT: BILL TIMMERMAN



OPTIMA CHICAGO CENTER I AND II.  
CREDIT: BILL TIMMERMAN

**Optima Chicago Center I and II, Chicago, Illinois (2013-2017)** is a complex of two offset 47- and 52-story residential towers respectively in downtown Chicago that take advantage of a preserved public view corridor. The towers are simple shafts encased in curtainwalls of silver on one and green on the other that bring to mind the sculpture of Donald Judd. The post-tensioned concrete structures have two-way cantilevered slabs that allow for column-free corners. Both towers have retail bases that look out on a plaza where a sculpture designed by Hovey Sr. animates the scene.

WHALE BAY  
CREDIT: PATRICK REYNOLDS



**Whale Bay, Bay of Islands, New Zealand (2016)** is dramatically located 130 feet above the Pacific Ocean. It was designed using the connector system and takes a sophisticated environmental approach. The site is on a ridge descending in three directions. Cantilevered floors rest lightly on the ground and minimize disruption to the land. The envelope, made entirely of energy-efficient glass, dissolves the indoor-outdoor barrier. Rainwater for the house is captured and stored below ground.



ARIZONA COURTYARD HOUSE.  
CREDIT: BILL TIMMERMAN



ARIZONA COURTYARD HOUSE.  
CREDIT: BILL TIMMERMAN

**Arizona Courtyard House,  
Paradise Valley, AZ (2017)**

is made up of two glass pavilions — one a residence and the other a fitness center — facing one another across a grass courtyard. The structures employ a patented prefabrication system composed of standardized, factory-made connector plates that fit together like pieces in an erector set for rapid, efficient, precise construction. CA

## *Shared Vision*

Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA, Executive Director, in Conversation with Maurice Cox, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development for the City of Chicago



MAURICE COX AT A LAUNCH EVENT FOR INVEST SOUTH/WEST. CREDIT: THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT



**Jen Masengarb:** The city is not the same city in which you arrived. Tell me

about the changes you have seen in the city in the last two and a half years since you arrived in Chicago.



**Maurice Cox:**

When I arrived, there was a sense that Ful-ton mar-

ket, downtown and the Loop were doing wonderfully, so much so that the mayor could effectively turn her attention to the areas that were otherwise neglected and fulfill one of her campaign goals to shine a light on the inequity between our vibrant downtown and our struggling neighborhoods. Two months into arriving we were announcing INVEST South/West. One month later COVID was very much a concern.

I got six months of full-fledged introduction to Chicago as a vibrant city with challenges, with direct engagement with people, and then all of a sudden, we had to pivot and do our work virtually. At the same time, civil

unrest emerged. There were some real challenges in the built environment having to do with small business resiliency, and it was showing up all over town.

The city has fundamentally changed, having exposed all of the inherent inequities that we all knew exist between the north side or downtown versus the South and West. So when INVEST South/West was created, it was meant to address a lot of the issues that were laid there as a result of COVID. I felt like we were actually ahead, because we not only had recognized the inequities, but we had also started to develop an urban program to address it.

**JM:** Let's shift to We Will Chicago. The last time Chicago had a comprehensive municipal plan, the Hancock Tower was under construction. Can you talk to me a little bit about the approach and process?

**MC:** [I] often wonder how Chicago continues to prosper without a collective roadmap of where we're going. And I think that, truth be told, it was personality driven. [Chicago] had very few mayors that created a level of continuity, and this fractured political organization of 50 wards. It doesn't allow you to have a city-wide view of where we're going.

We are called to convene the conversation about equity, around resiliency, sustainability and climate change. And so those emerged as the core questions. Looking at housing through a lens of equity; looking at transportation within equity and zoning, through the lens of arts and culture; looking at sustainability through the lens of equity. And same thing with resiliency. There's a ton of research that has to underpin these conversations.

**JM:** The Burnham plan, for all its shortcomings, also focused mostly on the city center. It did at least provide a vision. But of course, that's dangerous, too. It should be a collaborative process. How do you balance that, providing a vision without figuring it all out alone?

**MC:** Chicago is a city of neighborhoods. And inherent in that

structure was a degree of neighborhood autonomy. They all had theaters, significant shopping districts — they had their own downtowns. There are areas where we tore down those neighborhood downtowns. We still see the vestiges of having destroyed that in favor of a singular downtown. If it turns out that there is strength in the village model, that might emerge as a framework for how we should be rethinking neighborhoods. Should we codify that neighborhoods have a high-density core, that begins to play out: The transportation system should reach further, or there should be a lakefront transportation system. Does a Metra line turn into a capillary collaboration with CTA? I think there [are] some big spatial implications that we will get through in the planning of We Will.

**JM:** You've talked previously about the role and power of

**“The experience I had in being educated as an architect — it was all about choices. It was about clients who were directing or sharing in the vision. I thought, ‘If you could give that level of power and service to everyone, what an amazing community that could emerge.’”**

**Maurice Cox, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development for the City of Chicago**

design in dignifying Black and Brown communities. Can you share more of your thoughts and experiences?

**MC:** This is a real passion of mine. It goes back to my own childhood growing up in Brooklyn, where I saw the neighborhood I lived in fall into decline. Stores closing, buildings being demolished. I didn't call it design, but I knew something about the built environment, and who builds it, that is impacting the quality of life in this majority African American community. I knew that design could adversely impact and shape the quality of

people's lives, and that people in lower incomes did not have a lot of choice.

The experience I had in being educated as an architect — it was all about choices. It was about clients who were directing or sharing in the vision. I thought, "If you could give that level of power and service to everyone, what an amazing community that could emerge." Part of my challenge was, how do you get our community to focus on the quality of the built and natural environment when they are not accustomed to having access to such choices? We see it all the time, when we

go through low-income neighborhoods: new housing, commercial structures that were built were kind of a bottom line — an attitude about living, as opposed to being a celebration of living. And so I thought — if I got in control of who makes the rules — I was going to give those places that were historically disinvested, that historically did not have choice, access to the same quality that I have seen in other parts of our city.

There is no difference in my mind between the South side or the West side and downtown relative to the expected quality. So part of it is raising people's

expectation that you deserve better and you need to demand better. But ultimately, it's those who commissioned that work who have to demand on behalf of public interests. That's where planning comes in: I can demand that you show up in a Black and Brown community, with a team that reflects the community you want to build in, and I can request that you use design as an empowering value. **CA**

*This interview was edited for length and clarity. An expanded version will be made available at [www.aiachicago.org](http://www.aiachicago.org).*



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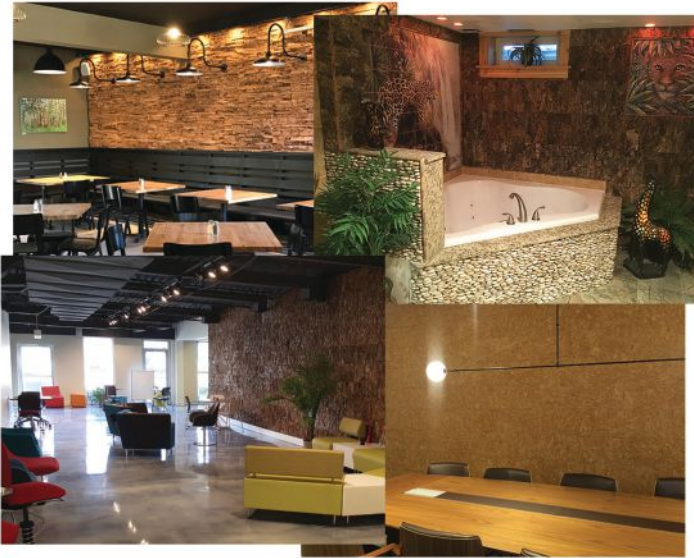
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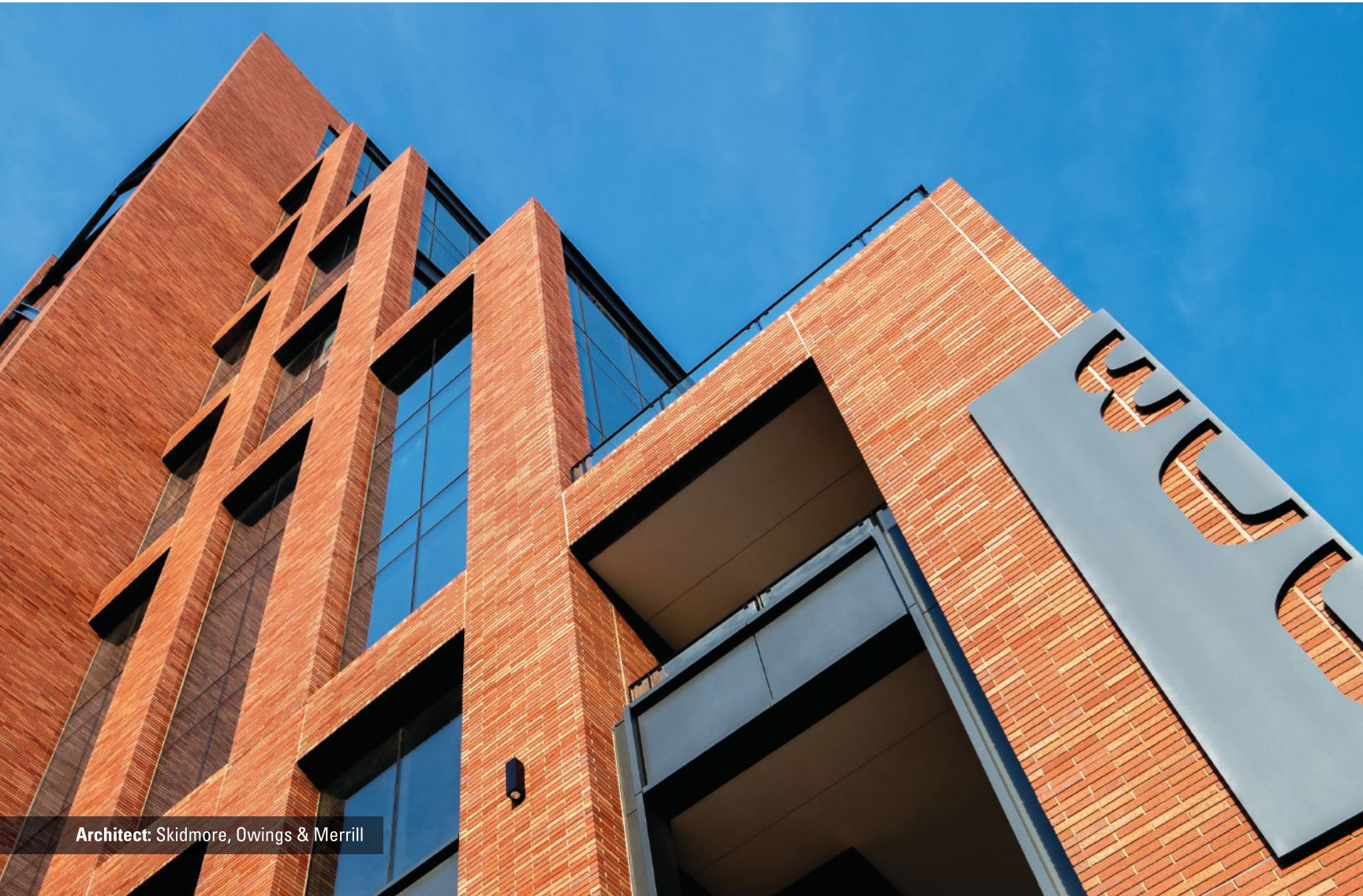
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