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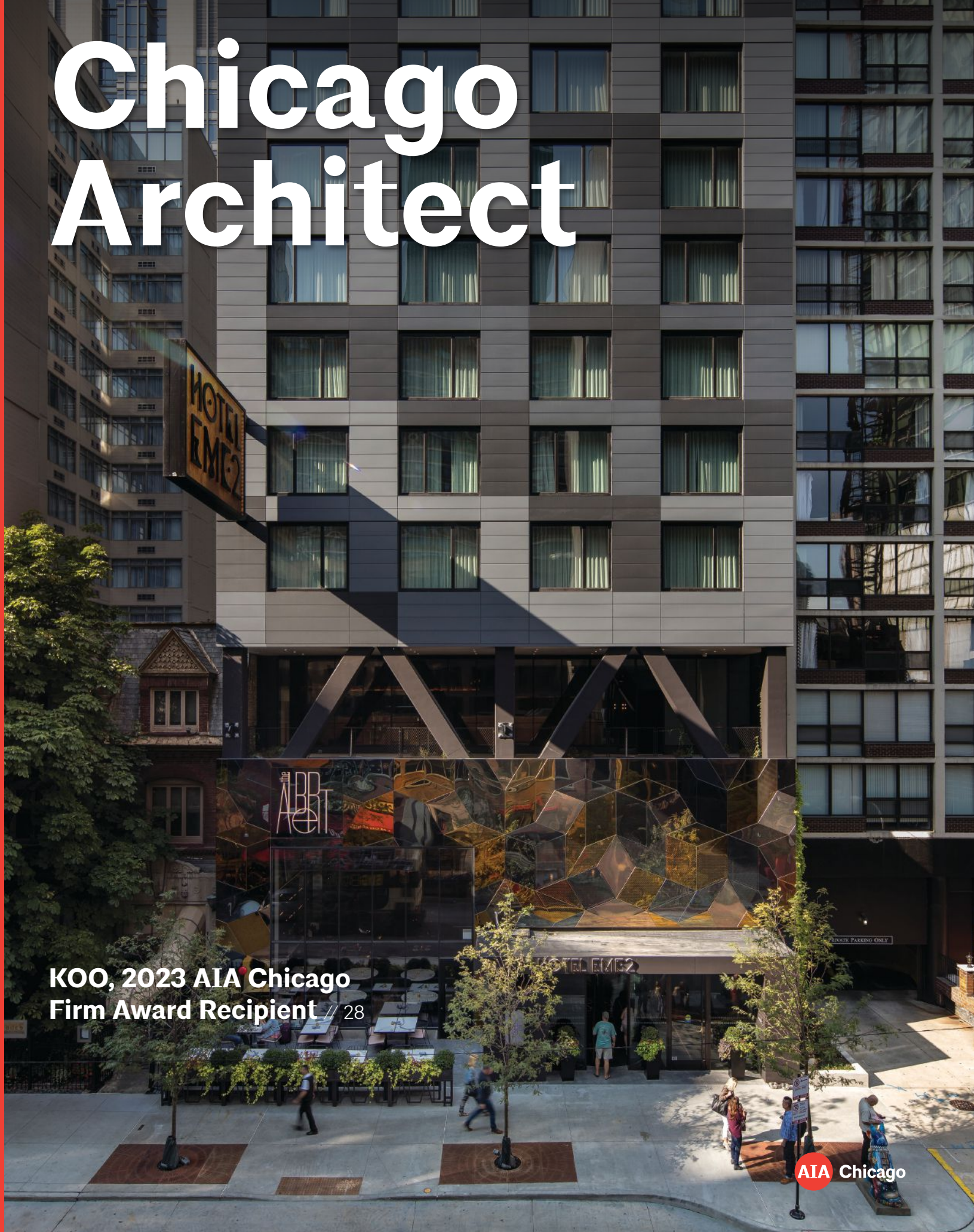

KOO, 2023 AIA Chicago Firm Award Recipient // 28

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AIA Chicago // KOO, 2023 AIA Chicago Firm Award Recipient // 28

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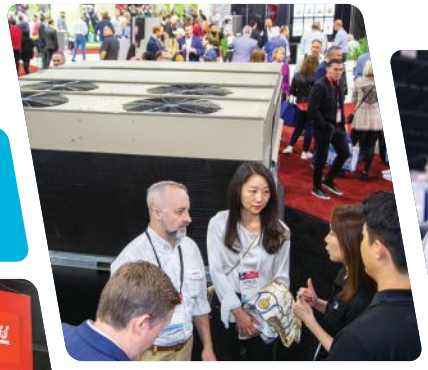

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Dear Members and Friends,

Like hundreds of our chapter's members who work downtown, I too have the joy of stepping inside an iconic Chicago skyscraper each day for work. As I climb the marble steps to our small firm's third-floor offices in the 1891 Monadnock Building, I am reminded of the pioneering role Chicago architects have played in the evolution and innovation of tall buildings.

Skyscrapers run as a theme throughout our third issue of 2023. This issue's cover story celebrates the work and people of KOO, the 2023 AIA Chicago Firm Award winners — a firm that first gained recognition for designing theWit Hotel, a skyscraper that would come to define a new era in downtown hotels in the early 21st century. Writer Taylor Moore dives into the origins and ethos of the firm, founded by **Jackie Koo, AIA**. **Dan Rappel, AIA**, KOO's director of sustainable design, became a partner at KOO in 2015, and today, the firm works primarily in the hospitality and civic sectors, leaning on every member of the team to contribute to a given project.

The AIA Chicago Firm Award, first established in 1991, recognizes the outstanding achievements and excellence in the body of work produced by a firm over a period of time, the distinctive characteristics of a firm and its operations, and the ongoing contributions of the firm to the advancement of the architectural profession. Many thanks to the five AIA members of the 2023 jury, representing previous Firm Award winners: **Paul De Santis, Assoc. AIA** (Goettsch Partners); **Peter Exley, FAIA, RIBA** (Architecture Is Fun Inc.); **Doug Farr, FAIA** (Farr Associates); **Debbie Saad, AIA** (bKL Architecture); and **Chris-Annmarie Spencer, AIA, NOMA** (Wheeler Kearns Architects).

Mindy Viamontes, AIA, 2023 AIA Chicago President

In our second feature article, **Thomas Leslie, FAIA** — architect, author, construction historian, and newly named University of Illinois professor — examines the current state of Chicago skyscrapers. From emerging technologies to the economics of real estate to the changing ways in which we work together, it's an interesting time for tall buildings as well as those who design and build them. We also take a look at several new towers to emerge from local firms in the past five years — both here and abroad.

In our third feature article, managing editor **Dillon Goodson, Affil. AIA Chicago**, explores sustainability from a practice management perspective. We hear from several members how their small, medium, and large firms are leading these complex conversations and the design process with their clients. As we work toward the shared goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2030 through the AIA 2030 Commitment, architects have a unique obligation in achieving a more sustainable future.

I look forward to seeing you at one of the upcoming autumn Third Thursday programs.

Mindy Viamontes, AIA
2023 AIA Chicago President
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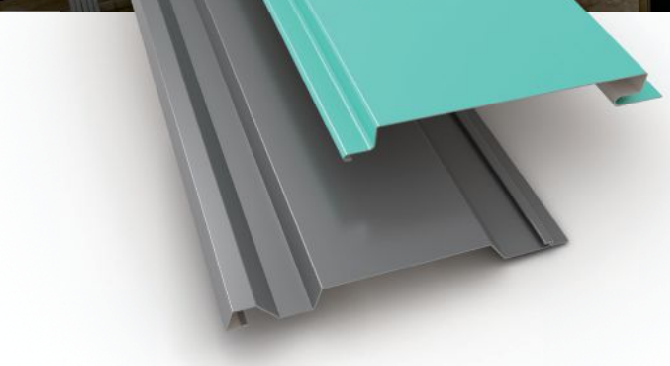
Industrial Chic

Photo: alanblakely.com



Colorful metal panels mimic signature sculpture

Parc Haven features industrial-style PAC-CLAD Highline B2 metal cladding that references the adjoining train tracks. A punch of colorful Flush panel highlights nod to Symphony Park's Pipe Dream sculpture sited directly across the street.

View the case study and video

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Parc Haven, Las Vegas Installer: TLC Roof Services Architect: CallisonRTKL Profiles: Highline B2, Flush, 7.2, Snap-Clad Colors: Musket Gray, Berkshire Blue, Patina Green

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IMAGE BY STEPHANIE JENSEN PHOTOGRAPHY

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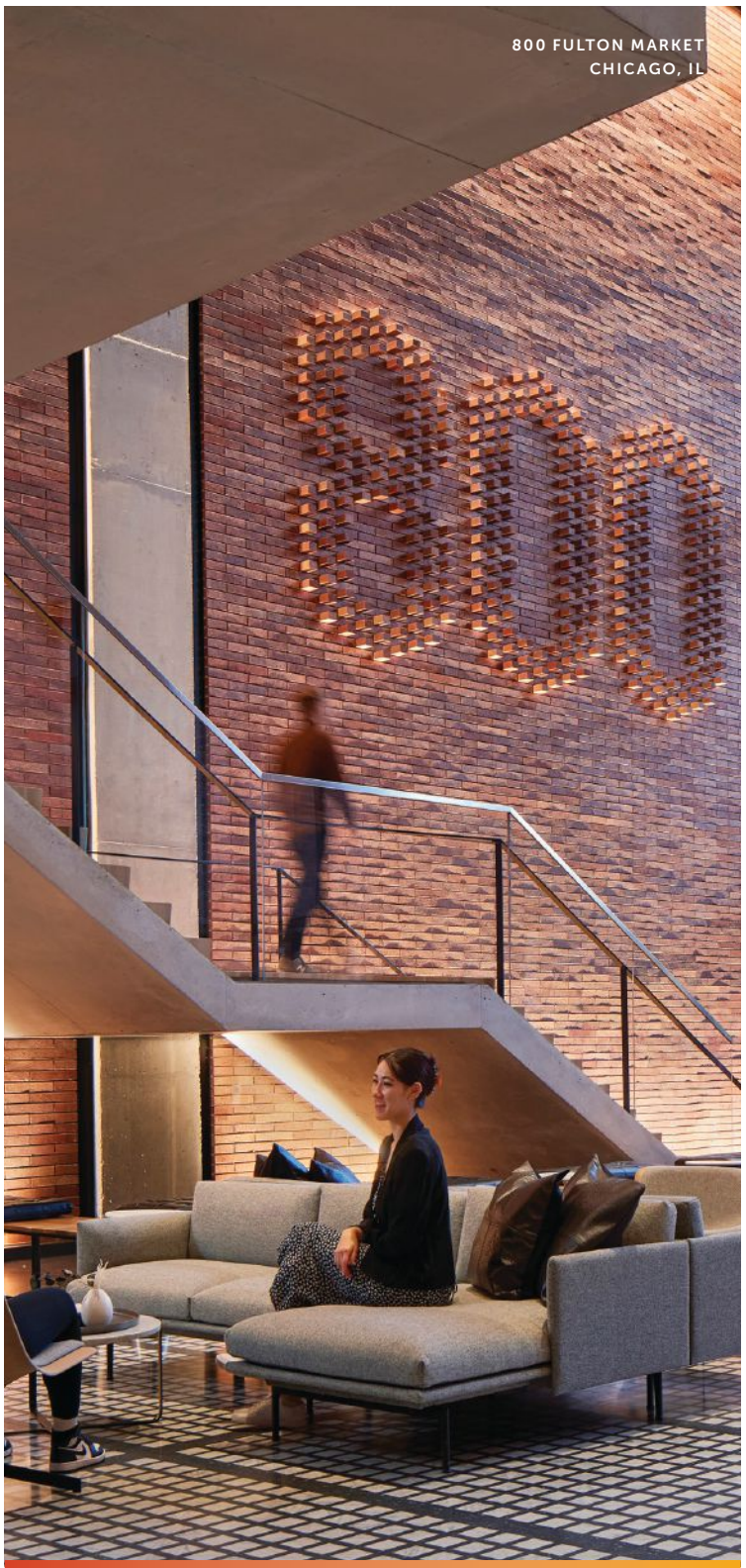
ON THE COVER
Hotel EMC2, designed by 2023 AIA Chicago Firm Award recipient KOO. Image by Tom Rossiter



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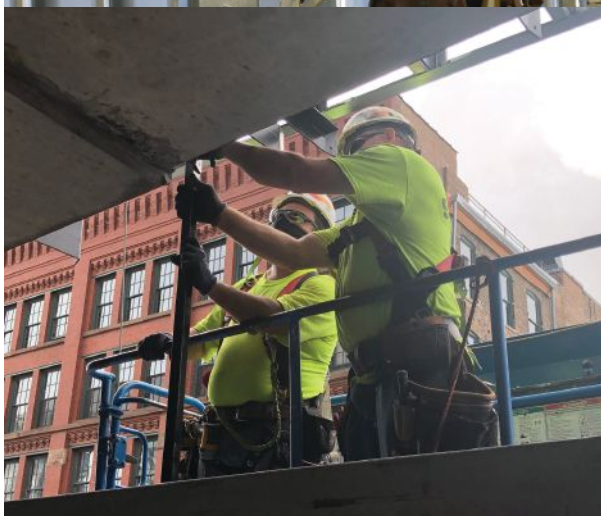

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MARCH: Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA; **Elizabeth Schneider, AIA**; **Rana Lee**; and **Alicia Ponce, AIA**, in conversation at AIA Chicago's inaugural Third Thursdays program "Architecture: Building a Community," featuring female leaders of organizations looking to diversify the profession.

APRIL: Ralph Johnson, FAIA, 2022 AIA Chicago Lifetime Achievement Award recipient and 1983 AIA Chicago Young Architect Award recipient, with **Breah Page, AIA**, 2023 AIA Chicago Foundation Dubin Family Young Architect Award recipient.

MAY: KOO Architecture at their open house celebration.

JUNE: AIA Chicago Executive Director **Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA**, welcoming guests to the Equity in Architecture Volunteer Fair and Mixer.

Third Thursdays

After the isolation of the pandemic and a craving for more in-person social events, AIA Chicago developed the monthly Third Thursdays program. The series of events provides lots of opportunities for networking. Each one is themed around an innovative and groundbreaking project or initiative of AIA Chicago's members.

Third Thursday events to date included:

- **March:** Architecture: Building a Community
- **April:** Bookends: Stories from the Lifetime Achievement and Dubin Family Young Architect Award Recipients
- **May:** Celebrating the Firm Award Winner of 2023: KOO
- **June:** Equity in Architecture + Youth Education: Volunteer Fair and Mixer
- **July:** Guess-a-Sketch
- **August:** In Conversation: Carol Ross Barney on Architecture

To sign up for the next Third Thursday, visit www.aiachicago.org/thirdthursday.

ALL PHOTOS BY EVENING CUE

At top left: Guess-a-Sketch. **At top right:** 2023 Champions — the collaborative team from Big Construction and Perkins&Will. **At middle, right: Carol Ross Barney, FAIA**, sketching 520 West 28th Street by Zaha Hadid. **At bottom left:** Team camaraderie. **At bottom right:** From left to right: AIA Chicago Executive Director **Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA**; honoree sketchers **Dan Wheeler, FAIA**; **Joe Valerio, FAIA**; **Linda Searl, FAIA**; **Carol Ross Barney, FAIA**; **Juan Gabriel Moreno, AIA**; and **John Ronan, FAIA**; Guess-a-Sketch Taskforce Chair **Brett Taylor, AIA**; and (front) evening host and emcee **Shawn Waddell, Assoc. AIA, EIT, NOMA**.

Guess-a-Sketch Recap

As a part of the Third Thursdays series, Guess-a-Sketch brought together some of Chicago's most well-known architects and eight sponsored teams for a fun competition and fundraiser for the AIA Chicago Foundation's Diversity Scholarship. Like Pictionary, honoree sketchers are given the name of a building to draw while sponsored teams compete to be the first one to correctly guess it. After bracket-style elimination, the winning team was crowned champion and has bragging rights for the next year!

From top left: Panelists from *Chicago at Home, Part 2: Recent Design*: (left to right) **Mindy Viamontes, AIA**; **Annabell Ren**, **AIA**; **Elyse M. Agnello, AIA**; **Danielle Beaulieu, AIA**; **Ellen Whitehead, AIA**; **Alison Von Glinow, AIA**; **Seth Romig, AIA**; **Eric Rothfeder, AIA**; **Ed Deegan, AIA**; and **Heidi Lightner, AIA**. IMAGE BY BEN LIPOWITZ. **Julie Hacker, FAIA**, and **Stuart Cohen, FAIA**. IMAGE BY BEN LIPOWITZ. Presenter **Danielle Beaulieu, AIA**. IMAGE BY BEN LIPOWITZ. **Ron Mescall, Affil. AIA Chicago**, and **Scott Rappe, AIA**. IMAGE BY DAVID CORDARO. 2023 AIA Chicago President **Mindy Viamontes, AIA**, eating lunch with other attendees. IMAGE BY DAVID CORDARO. Attendees of the CRAN Symposium. IMAGE BY BEN LIPOWITZ. 2023 AIA Chicago President **Mindy Viamontes, AIA**. IMAGE BY BEN LIPOWITZ

CRAN Symposium Recap

In May, AIA Chicago's Custom Residential Architects Network (CRAN) 2023 Symposium brought together more than 125 of Chicago's residential architects and designers, as well as numerous product suppliers, for a fun-filled day of educational programming, networking, and mini trade show. Starting the day early, attendees gathered at Meet on 6 at The Mart and learned about sustainable design practices, universal design, and business continuity, and heard from peers working at a variety of scales and budgets. The day concluded with a reception at DesignHQ in The Mart to celebrate the shared achievements of the CRAN community over the past year.

To learn more about CRAN, head to www.aiachicago.org/cran.

Pride Parade

As LGBTQIA+ rights are under a microscope across the country, AIA Chicago members are showing up in solidarity and amplifying the voices of those marginalized in our community. In June, AIA Chicago's LGBTQIA+ Alliance hosted a pride social and networking event and marched in Chicago's Pride Parade with the message of "Open Doors, Open Hearts."

To learn more about AIA Chicago's LGBTQIA+ Alliance, visit www.aiachicago.org/lgbtqia.

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BETTERCONSTRUCTION. BETTERCAREERS. BETTERCOMMUNITIES.

The Board of Trustees of AIA Chicago Foundation, the charitable, independent not-for-profit organization that supports scholarships, grants, awards, and initiatives to strengthen Chicago's architectural community, has announced the recipients of the 2023 Chicago Award in Architecture – Student Award and the Diversity Scholarship.

Chicago Award in Architecture – Student Award

The Chicago Award in Architecture is a juried competition of upper-level student projects completed during the 2022-2023 school year at an accredited architecture school or program. Recognition is given for first, second, and third place, and for honorable mentions. The student or student team awarded first place will receive a cash prize, known as the Benn-Johnck Award, in the amount of $500.

2023 Chicago Award in Architecture Recipients:

1st Place Benn-Johnck Award

The Seam | Trae Horne and Moid Ali

Instructors Gustavo Utrabo and Brianda Mireles, Illinois Institute of Technology

The Seam transitions from the dunes of Lençóis Maranhenses in Brazil to the oasis of nearby Queimada dos Britos. Using bamboo as infrastructure, The Seam invests time in land regeneration. Proposed interventions in tandem with native plantings prevent soil erosions, creating a dormant dune, while giving resources back to the community.

2nd Place

Non-Collapse "Home" Vertical Seasonal Migration Community and Neighborhood in Madagascar | Rui Wang

Instructors Monika Thadhani, Assoc. AIA, Berenika Boberska and Charles Pipal, AIA, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Due to prolonged droughts and food insecurity in the southern region of Madagascar, the country is experiencing a domestic migration into the central region. Building a climate-resistant, sustainable, and self-sufficient community transforms the permanent long-distance horizontal migration into a seasonal vertical migration, bringing new meaning to the term.

3rd Place

When we Live Alone – Spatial Prototype for Single Urban Living | Ziqi Huang

Instructor Monika Thadhani, Assoc. AIA, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

According to the National Census, there are 125,490,007 "one-person households" in China. To solve this problem and create communities for individuals who live alone, this community is designed to integrate single dwellings into the public space of the city.

Honorable Mention

Stitching Networks: Transitioning 'Scapes | Bryan Cruz López and Tasmia Kamal

Instructor Sara Bartumeus, The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Seeking new public space and landacape models for the city of Montcada i Reixac, located within the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (AMB), "Stitching Networks" reinvigorates mobility infrastructures to serve as connections between disjointed urban centers.

AIA Chicago Foundation Diversity Scholarship

The AIA Chicago Foundation Diversity Scholarship is an opportunity to attract and retain diverse, talented young professionals in Chicago. It recognizes the value of new and unique voices in the profession, with students selected from the Illinois Institute of Technology, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and University of Illinois Chicago. Up to two $10,000 scholarships are awarded each year. Each $10,000 scholarship will be awarded over two years, $5,000 per year, per recipient. Each awardee is paired with a mentor from the AIA Chicago membership to receive ongoing guidance throughout their educational tenure.

2023 Diversity Scholarship Recipients

The AIA Chicago Foundation is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2023 Diversity Scholarship.

Jocelyn Hernandez
University of Illinois Chicago
Graduate Student

Joceyln aims to use her unique perspectives as a first-generation Mexican American to bring new ideas and questions to design spaces in Chicago. She is pursuing her M.Arch. at the University of Illinois Chicago.

Jamia Smith
University of Illinois Chicago
Graduate Student

Jamia is a passionate advocate for diversity in the profession and plans to continue introducing architecture to the young people in her community. She is pursuing her M.Arch. at the University of Illinois Chicago.

Donate to the AIA Chicago Foundation Diversity Scholarship. Donations are tax deductible.

www.aiachicago.org/donate

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IMAGE BY JAMES STEINKAMP

Perkins&Will opened Oak Park Community Recreation Center, a net-zero facility designed for all ages as "A Place to Belong."

STL Architects has been awarded the first-place prize in the International Design Competition for the new National Museum in Jinju, South Korea. STL Architects partnered with Korean firm BAUM as local architect.

IMAGE BY TOM HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Media–Objectives (M–O), an experiential design studio housed within architecture firm **Valerio Dewalt Train**, is celebrating their 10th anniversary with the launch of their new website, www.media-objectives.com. M–O has a multidisciplinary focus with designers from various backgrounds working on a range of projects including brand identity, placemaking, wayfinding, exhibition, and print and digital design.

Krueck Sexton Partners is pleased to announce new firm promotions: **Gabriel Wilcox, AIA, LEED AP, CPHC, NCARB**, to director of sustainable design; **Marilia Sá Ribeiro, Assoc. AIA, LEED Green Associate**, to senior design associate; **Ryan Treacy, AIA**, to project leader; and **Mariusz Klemens, AIA**, to senior associate principal.

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RENDERING BY GENSLER WITH MOODY NOLAN

Gensler, with **Moody Nolan**, unveiled renderings of the new Midfield Terminal at John Glenn Columbus International Airport in Ohio. The project is more than 1 million square feet and anticipated to open in late 2028.

IMAGES BY JAMES FLORIO

The new Chicago Park District Headquarters, designed by **John Ronan Architects**, opened earlier this summer. The 80,000-square-foot building sits in a new 17-acre park on a former brownfield site in the Brighton Park neighborhood of Chicago.

ParkFowler Plus is pleased to announce the recent hires of (from top to bottom): **Katie Hart, Assoc. AIA, SEED**, as an associate; **Keith Wiley, Assoc. AIA**, and **Mouna Chahin, Assoc. AIA**, as designers; the promotion of **Mark Szostak, AIA, LEED GA**, to associate; and the news of **Daley Wilson-Rarus, AIA**, becoming a newly licensed architect.

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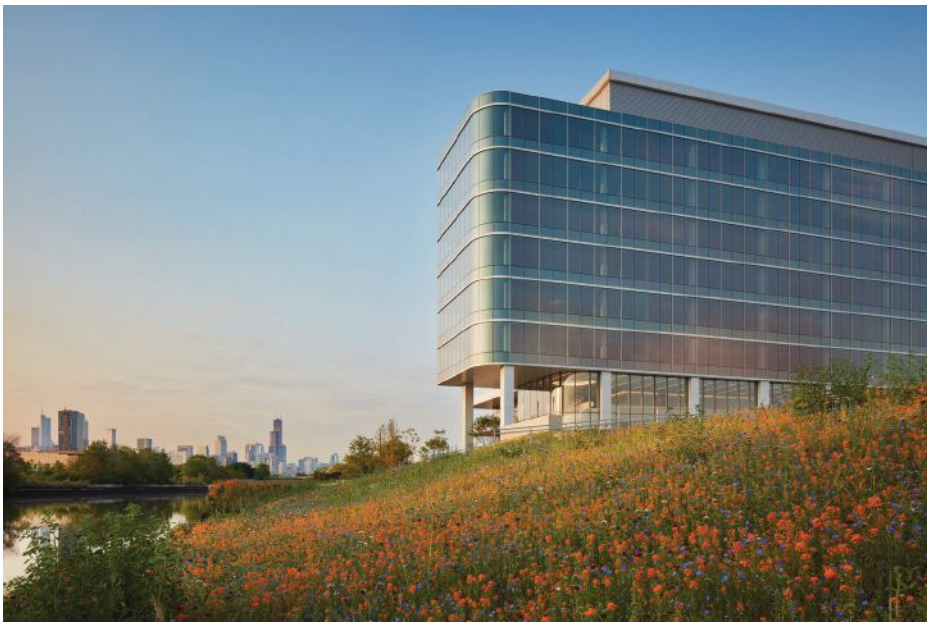
IMAGE BY SARAH CROWLEY

Josh Mings, AIA, is excited to announce the founding of **Aggregate Studio**, which will specialize in residential and community-based design. The name "Aggregate" reflects the studio's design process: linking separate and disparate elements, inspirations, and ideas to cultivate cohesive, innovative, and effective projects.

IMAGE BY KENDALL MCCAUGHERTY

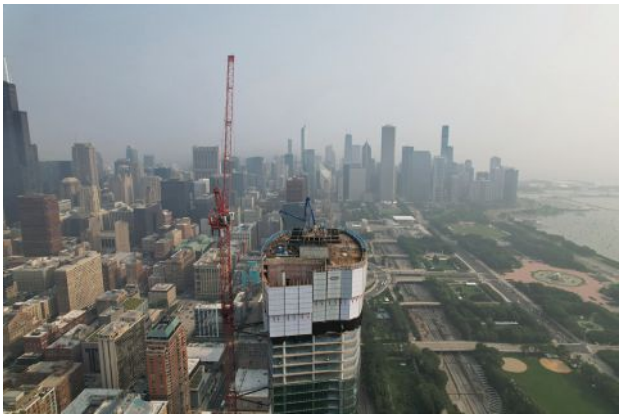


Connecting Chicagoans to the riverfront, 1229 West Concord, designed by **Gensler** and developed by Sterling Bay, is a Class A office building designed with life science laboratory flexibilities for Chicago's growing science community.

IMAGE BY TOM HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

MKB Architects is the first-place recipient of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design for the Auburn Gresham Healthy Lifestyle Hub. As the first INVEST South/West project to be completed, the fully transformed, mixed-use development serves thousands of Auburn Gresham residents who now have access to 100 living-wage job opportunities and health services to support youth, seniors, and families.

IMAGE BY NICK ULIVIERI PHOTOGRAPHY



Luxury rental tower 1000M, designed by **Jahn/** and constructed by McHugh Construction, has topped off. The 73-story luxury rental tower, located at the western edge of Grant Park, rises 788 feet above Michigan Avenue.

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IMAGE BY KENDALL MCCAUGHERTY | HALL + MERRICK + MCCAUGHERTY

IMAGE BY JAMES STEINKAMP PHOTOGRAPHY

The 2023 AIA Healthcare Design Awards include two projects designed by Chicago architects: the Broadway Youth Center by **Wheeler Kearns Architects** and the OhioHealth Neuroscience Wellness Center by **Gensler** in Columbus, Ohio.

IMAGE BY AJ BROWN IMAGING

Legat Architects designed a retrofit that transformed a department store-turned-church into the 28,000-square-foot Bright Futures Preschool in Galesburg, Illinois.

ornament IS

Arguments on Ornament in Architecture and Design

Curated by **Stephen Wierzbowski, FAIA**, and **Josh Mings, AIA**, *ornament IS* will document the dominant and discarded movements of architecture and design through drawings, paintings, essays, and artifacts. The exhibit will be on display September 15 through November 3, 2023, at the Bridgeport Art Center in Chicago. Several AIA Chicago members will be featured: **Darcy Bonner, AIA; Jonathan Boyer, FAIA; Thomas Boyster, AIA; John Clark, AIA; Drew Deering, AIA; Phil Enquist, FAIA; Peter Exley, FAIA; Margaret Fitzpatrick, Assoc. AIA; Michael Henning, AIA; Mark Jones, AIA; Helen Kessler, FAIA; Peter Landon, FAIA; Sifan Lydia Cheng, AIA; Kenneth Schroeder, FAIA; Tom Rossiter, FAIA; Lenore Weiss, AIA; Dan Wheeler, FAIA;** and **Ross Wimer, FAIA**.

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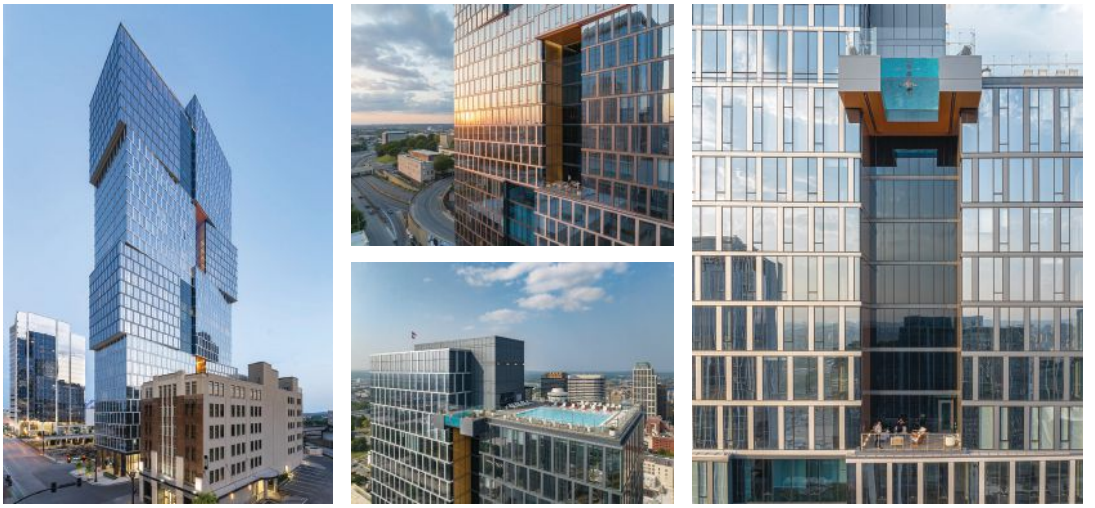
Ware Malcomb, an award-winning international design firm, announced **Jason Golub, AIA**, has been named regional director in the firm's Oak Brook office. Jason also serves as the VP of membership on the AIA Chicago Board of Directors.

Legat Architects celebrated the 30th work anniversary of **Rob Wroble, AIA**, one of the firm's most prolific pre-K-12 education designers.

MAP Strategies (MAPS) is excited to expand **MAP Studio**, a women-owned architecture and design firm. **Emma Cline, AIA, NCARB**, joins as a partner/director of architecture and will oversee the firm's architectural design, architect of record, self-certification, structural peer review, and technical review services.

SCB's Brunswick's St. John campus in Canada has broken ground. The highly flexible and sustainable building will house a suite of new academic programs, applied research opportunities, and a policy hub.

IMAGES BY JAMES STEINKAMP PHOTOGRAPHY



Goettsch Partners has completed a new residential tower in Nashville, Tennessee. Located at 900 Church Street, the new 34-story, 419-foot-tall apartment tower includes 356 units. The building also offers connections to greater downtown Nashville through public transit and bike access and has a Walk Score of 98.

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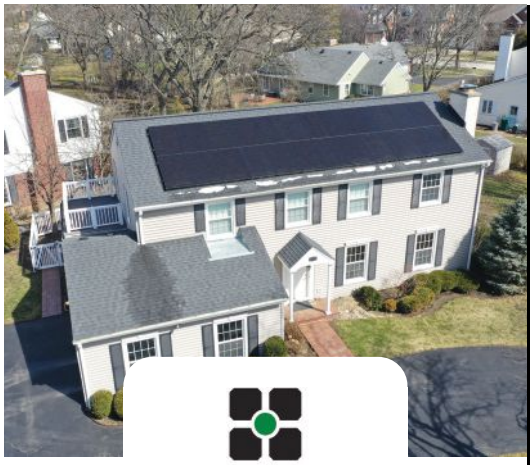

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Illinois Welcomes Six New Fellows

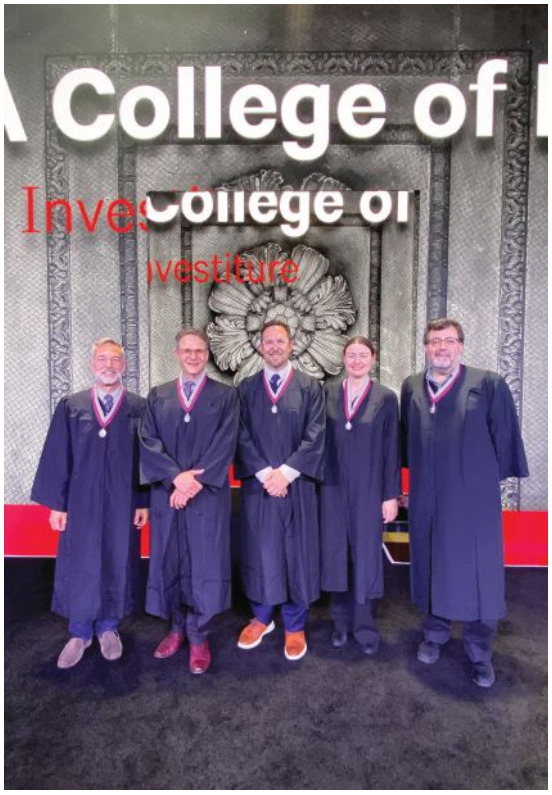
The AIA College of Fellows is composed of 3 percent of the Institute's members who have demonstrated a high level of success in the industry as judged by a national jury of their peers. Each has exhibited their achievements under one of six "Objects," or categories of the profession that include design, practice management, leading the institute, public service, alternative career, or education. Fellowship means the individual has and continues to give something back to the profession through innovative design, technical achievement, sociocultural advancement, volunteer work, or educating the next generation of architects/leaders. Many of our Fellows continue to volunteer their time and talent, fostering important initiatives and furthering causes related to the architecture and design professions, from equity and diversity to sustainability and climate impact.

As chair of the AIA Chicago Fellowship Committee, I, and the committee, recruit and guide potential candidates on the path toward Fellowship. We conduct reviews of potential submissions, offer suggestions for improvement, and provide direct one-on-one mentoring to candidates. We also set up and conduct seminars during the year on *Demystifying Fellowship* and a *Storytelling/Writing Workshop*.

The AIA Chicago Chapter is very proactive in seeking highly qualified candidates for Fellowship and consistently sees a significant number of our own elevated annually. This year's class of 2023 from Illinois represents more than 8 percent of all Fellows elevated in the nation this year.

I wish to thank my committee and to bestow well-deserved congratulations to the six newest members of the College of Fellows! Congratulations to **Sara Beardsley, FAIA**; **David Block, FAIA**; **Xuan Fu, FAIA**; **Mark Schwamel, FAIA**; **Mark Walsh, FAIA**; and **Robin Whitehurst, FAIA**. Well done!

Robert P. Theel, FAIA
AIA Chicago Fellowship Committee Chair

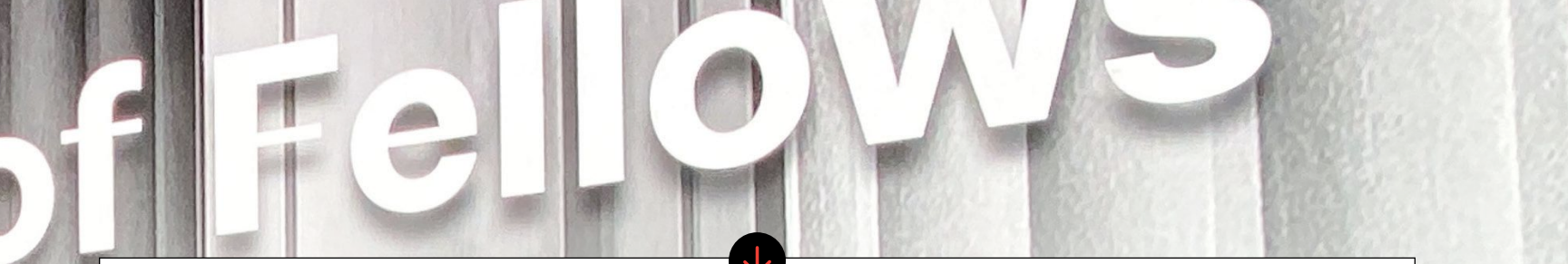


Sara Beardsley, FAIA
Associate Principal, SCB
Object 2, Practice (Technical Advancement)

Early on in my career, I began to focus on the technical side of architecture with a special interest in tall buildings, which has continued into my work today. I have been fortunate to work on some amazing projects and contribute to publications to expand research about tall buildings and sustainability. One project that I am most proud to be involved with is the 50-story FKI Headquarters in Korea by AS+GG, which achieved a lot of technical innovation, including façade integrated solar panels. The 95-story 401 North Wabash and the 1,000-meter Jeddah Tower were also remarkable projects that pushed the envelope of "building tall."

David Block, FAIA
Director of Development, Evergreen Real Estate Group
Object 5, Alternative Career

For over 20 years, I have been a real estate developer specializing in affordable housing and community facilities. It's important to show young architects that there are many ways to influence the built environment, not just through conventional practice. Two projects that best embody the potential to create great architecture as a developer client are the library-housing projects I developed in Chicago. I worked with two phenomenally talented firms using an identical building program on similar sites, yielding two very different but quite wonderful buildings.



Objects of Fellowship Nomination

Object One:
Design, Urban Design, or Preservation
To promote the aesthetic, scientific, and practical efficiency of the profession.

Object Two:
Practice Management or Practice Technical Advancement
To advance the science and art of planning and building by advancing the standards of practice.

Object Three:
Led the Institute or a Related Organization
To coordinate the building industry and the profession of architecture.

Object Four:
Public Service, Government, Industry, or Organization
To ensure the advancement of the living standards of people through their improved environment.

Object Five:
Alternative Career, Volunteer Work with Organizations Not Directly Connected with the Built Environment or Service to Society
To make the profession of ever-increasing service to society.

Object Six:
Education, Research, Literature
To advance the science and art of planning and building by advancing the standards of architectural education and training.

Xuan Fu, FAIA
Managing Partner, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill
Object 2, Practice (Management)

I'm thankful to have spent my career working on a global scale. My passion is to mentor and advance young designers, and as an interdisciplinary practice leader, I cultivate cross-cultural collaboration, advancing design excellence, innovation, and sustainability through architecture and planning. One project that advances sustainability and innovation is the Shenzhen WeBank Headquarters. The project creates a healthy, collaborative, and amenity-rich indoor-outdoor working environment. Under my management, the design team convinced project stakeholders to make breakthroughs within the local codes, overcoming challenges to "make the impossible, possible."

Mark Schwamel, FAIA
Director of Interior Architecture and Design, Ware Malcomb
Object 3, Led the Institute

I believe our association has so much to offer. My passion has been focused on programming that empowers and advances our emerging professionals and builds our next generation of leaders. Leveraging all of my AIA leadership positions, I have focused on growing member value and member experiences. First, I am proud of creating the AIA Chicago Bridge program, now entering its 13th year, and watching it continue to flourish. Second, I am happy to have been a founding member of NEXUS, a virtual mentorship program for architects created during the pandemic, now in year three. The program has had over 300 participants from six countries in seven different time zones since its inception.

Mark Walsh, FAIA
Global Director of Tech Design, Principal, Perkins&Will
Object 2, Practice (Technical Advancement)

I'm a detail-focused person and, what I call, a "small picture" designer. To me, it doesn't matter how strong a design concept is; it won't achieve its highest success if it is not executed consistently throughout. How elements come together, the interplay of details and the search for the elegant solution — that's my passion! One project started with an exceptional client and a brilliant design concept is the Case Western Reserve University, Tinkham Veale University Center. With a strong foundation, I had the opportunity to dig deep into the details, systems and overall building expression so that no corner, transition or intersection was unconsidered. The consistency of detail, quality, and the care in execution makes me smile every time I see it.

Robin Whitehurst, FAIA
Managing Principal, Bailey Edwards
Object 2, Practice (Technical Advancement)

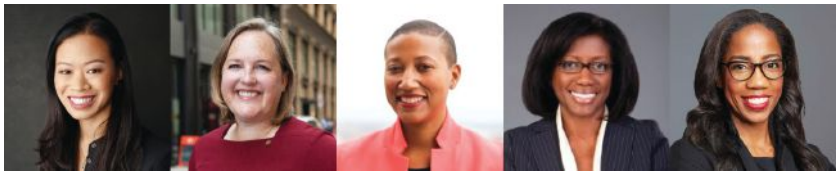
I have had the privilege of designing for a wide variety of clients and project types in my career, with the most rewarding work to be for clients whose mission is to serve others. I selected Object 2, as this category recognizes my design work as an architect with my advocacy efforts for historic preservation and community serving. The First United Methodist Church Chicago Temple building master planning reflects my approach to creating adaptable, community focused spaces within existing buildings and historic spaces. The design for both Pearce Hall and the sanctuary space addresses accessibility so all will feel welcome.

A’23 Recap

“Design is our superpower to create the equity our society demands.”

– CAROL ROSS BARNEY, FAIA, 2023 AIA GOLD MEDAL RECIPIENT

This past June in San Francisco at the AIA Conference on Architecture (A’23) — in front of a crowd of 15,000 architects and a large cheering section of more than 125 AIA Chicago members — **Carol Ross Barney, FAIA**, received the 2023 AIA Gold Medal Award, the Institute’s highest honor. In 2017, Carol also received AIA Chicago’s Lifetime Achievement Award.



Recently elected AIA leadership, from left to right: **Evelyn Lee, FAIA**; **Emily Grandstaff-Rice, FAIA**; **Kimberly Dowdell, AIA**; **Heather Philip-O'Neal, FAIA**; and **Latoya Kamdang, AIA**.

Above: Jeremy Gentile, Assoc. AIA, recipient of the 2023 Associates Award. **At middle:** AIA Chicago and Arquitectos members at A'23. **At left:** Associate Director of the AIA Chicago Board of Directors **Richie Hands, AIA**, with Executive Director **Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA**.

Carol is the first individual living woman to receive the Gold Medal Award.

In her acceptance speech during A'23, she noted, "No architect wants to be known first as a woman architect. But the fact is that the Gold Medal has been awarded 78 times and 75 of those times to individual male architects. Until today, not one living woman sole practitioner had received this award. I'm immensely proud and happy to break that barrier. But beyond that, I'm completely confident that I won't be alone for long. There are many, many more to come."

The A'23 conference also saw another historic first. **Evelyn Lee, FAIA**, was elected as the 2025 AIA president. She will become the first Asian American and the third consecutive woman to serve as AIA president, following **Emily Grandstaff-Rice, FAIA** (2023), and **Kimberly Dowdell, AIA** (2024).

Heather Philip-O'Neal, FAIA, and Latoya Kamding, AIA, both from the AIA New York chapter, were elected as the Institute's treasurer and an at-large director, respectively.

The conference was filled with AIA Chicago members, including those who presented their work or served on a panel discussion: **Sara Beardsley, FAIA**; **Craig Brandt, FAIA**; **Joe Burns, FAIA, PE, SE**; **Drew Clausen, Affiliate AIA Chicago**; **Ryan Giblin, AIA; Thomas Hoepf, FAIA**; **Sara Lundgren, AIA**; **Jason Pugh, AIA, NOMA**; **Carol Ross Barney, FAIA**; **Patricia Saldaña Natke, FAIA**; **Ingedia Sanchez, AIA**; **Wade Splinter, AIA**; **RaMona Westbrook, AIA**; and **Juliane Wolf, AIA**. **Jeremy Gentile, Assoc. AIA**, a fierce champion for the profession whose unwavering focus is trained on elevating students and emerging professionals, received the **2023 Associates Award** at A'23. His advocacy efforts parallel his design aptitude, evident across different project types, from large-scale infrastructure and master planning to hospitality interiors and designed objects.

Congratulations to the project teams who have won an AIA award in the past year and were exhibited at A'23: Gensler (alongside SkB Architects and OLIN) for the Willis Tower Repositioning, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill for 800 Fulton Market, both in the Interior Architecture Awards category; and Solomon Cordwell Buenz (SCB) for the University of Illinois Chicago Academic and Residential Complex in the Education Facility Design Awards category. CA

Linda Lee; Przemyslaw Marcisz; Alyssa Herbst; Megan Walters; Corinna Tabor; Kianna Negron; Tyler Hopwood, AIA; Jackie Koo, AIA; Dan Rappel, AIA; Andrew Buck, AIA; Chen-Han Lu; Ashlen Williams, AIA, NOMA; Jonathan Skinner, AIA; Douglas Tsui; Naya Ganama; and Husna Ozdemir.

IMAGE BY STEPHANIE JENSEN PHOTOGRAPHY

KOO: Small Firm, Towering Impact

Celebrating AIA Chicago's 2023 Firm Award Winner

by Taylor Moore

IMAGE BY MIKE SCHWARTZ

When architects start their own firms, they often start out small — a renovation or maybe a small-scale mixed-use development. But not **Jackie Koo, AIA**, whose first project for the firm in 2005 came to define the social landscape of the Loop.

IMAGE BY MIKE SCHWARTZ

IMAGE BY JAMES STEINKAMP

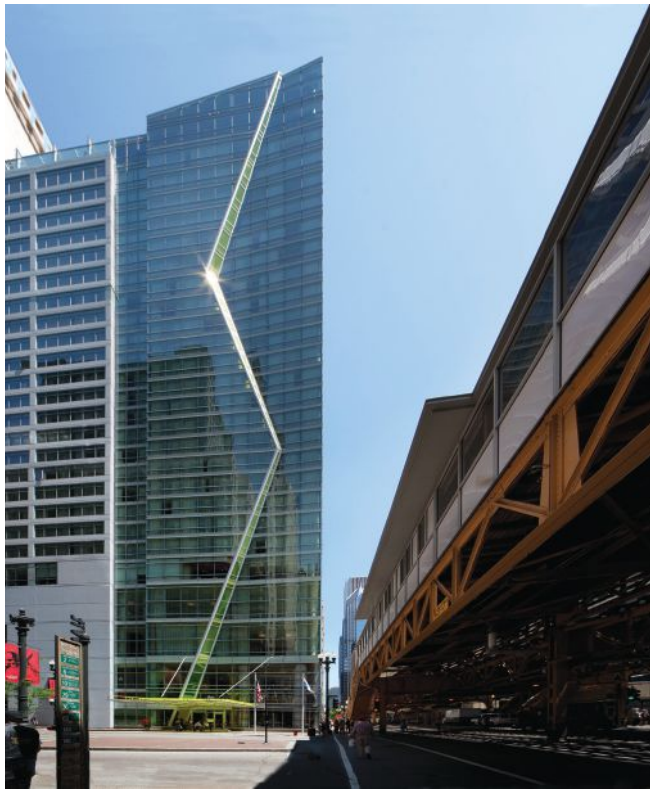


IMAGE BY ANTHONY TAHLIER

At top: Nestled against the State/Lake "L" station, theWit, a Hilton hotel, has a boutique hotel feel, boasting a distinct green zigzag pattern across the glass façade. **At bottom:** Offshore Rooftop, located at Navy Pier, won the designation of "world's largest rooftop bar" from the Guinness Book of World Records.

Nestled against the State/Lake "L" station, theWit, a Hilton hotel, has a boutique hotel feel, boasting a distinct green zigzag pattern across the glass façade. The hotel is home to one of the first rooftop bars in the downtown area and has since spawned dozens of copycats for those seeking a martini with a view.

"As you can imagine, when your first project is a 27-story building and you just started your firm, people tend to really underestimate you and your capabilities," said Koo. "And I think I have settled into that as an OK position. I don't actually mind it when people underestimate us and then we exceed expectations."

Her eponymous firm KOO is the 2023 winner of AIA Chicago's Firm Award, which for more than 30 years has recognized the projects, innovation, and institutional prowess of firms across the city. "Their ability to design large buildings at the human scale is very admirable," the jury said. "The body of work produced by this small firm is very impressive."

For being a 19-person firm, KOO "punches above its weight class," said **Dan Rappel, AIA**, principal and director of sustainable design. While many of its better-known projects are in the hospitality realm — including the Sable Hotel at Navy Pier and Hotel EMC2, in addition to theWit — KOO has expertise in residential, educational and civic buildings and operates its own interiors practice.

When **Andrew Buck, AIA**, associate principal, first joined KOO in 2014, he was drawn in by the opportunity to learn new skills quickly. "We're a project architect-based office, meaning that employees are encouraged and given the opportunity to take a project from the conceptual or schematic design level all the way through to construction and administration, so they're seeing all of the different phases. I really liked that versus a larger firm, where you don't always have that opportunity."

Workplace culture is one of the factors that sets KOO apart. From the start, the firm has prioritized diversity and inclusion, says Koo, who is Korean American. "We find it important and beneficial, not just something to check a box." A part of that initiative is encouraging mentorship within the firm and the broader industry and supporting employees to obtain their licensure. KOO provides paid time off for taking licensing exams, reimbursement for all passed exams, and payment for membership to one professional organization.

"It is not hierarchical — and really, you can succeed as much as your ability will allow you," said Koo. "We have had extremely talented people who, at the end of three years, are doing a 15-story building."

KOO has designed two high-profile projects at Navy Pier: the Sable Hotel, which boasts 223 rooms with an upscale design, and Offshore, which won the designation of "world's largest rooftop bar" from the Guinness Book of World Records. Offshore was a challenge to build due to the weight limits imposed by the building's original foundation. The firm had to choose the lightest possible material for the roof to accommodate the site limits, but the silver lining of such a design choice is simulating the feeling of being on a boat on Lake Michigan.

KOO works with the City of Chicago on various municipal and privately owned buildings, including a mixed-use development called Thrive Exchange, which is an INVEST South/West project to be built at 79th Street and South Exchange Avenue in South Shore.

Project Manager **Ashlen Williams, AIA, NOMA**, who serves as a Board member of AIA Chicago and president of I-NOMA, the Illinois Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects, says KOO's institutional work is what distinguishes the firm from others. "We may be limited by budget or standards, but we're still

IMAGE BY MICHAEL KLEINBERG

IMAGE BY MICHAEL KLEINBERG

IMAGE BY TOM ROSSITER

Part of the Marriott Autograph Collection, Hotel EMC2 celebrates the intersection of art and science and reflects KOO's interest in the graphic qualities of the skin. KOO developed the interiors of Hotel EMC2 in conjunction with interior designers at Rockwell Group.

IMAGES BY MIKE SCHWARTZ

At top: Built in 2020, Altgeld Family Resource Center's curved brick façade combines a public library, childcare center, and community center into a 40,000-square-foot facility.
At bottom: The Sable Hotel at Navy Pier boasts 223 rooms with an upscale design.

able to find ways to give [the projects] really special details, be it custom wall coverings or playful color palettes. You can see where we go above and beyond."

Koo agrees. "Even though, let's say, doing a repair on a chimney at a Chicago Public School may not be the most elevated design opportunity, we feel like we're doing good work and contributing to our community and where we live."

Altgeld Family Resource Center is another such project. Built in 2020, its curved brick façade combines a public library, childcare center, and community center into a 40,000-square-foot facility. The project was doubly important for its impact on Altgeld Gardens, a physically isolated public housing community on the Far South Side once known as the "toxic doughnut" for its proximity to steel mills, factories, and other hazardous waste sites.

RENDERING BY KOO

Thrive Exchange, which is an INVEST South/West project, will be built at 79th Street and South Exchange Avenue in South Shore.

The center sits on land that had been vacant since 1945, intended for a town square that was never built. Even though the center is new, "it feels like it's a part of the community," said Maggie Clemons, deputy commissioner of the Chicago Public Library. "Every inch of space is usable by the public, and it fits in really well with the rest of the design complex and the land surrounding it."

"When you walk into the Harold Washington Library Center, it can be overwhelming, or maybe you don't feel like you know where to go or what to see," Clemons continued. With the Altgeld Family Resource Center, "the community comes in and feels empowered to make it theirs."

"I think it's a really beautiful project in a really underserved community," said Williams, who worked on the project. "It's awesome to be able to provide quality design where previously there's been neglect."

Lately, KOO has expanded the types of projects it's taken on. It was recently contracted to design an airline lounge for LOT Polish Airlines at O'Hare International Airport — the firm's first foray into the aviation sector — and it has also received work in different cities such as Philadelphia and Portsmouth, Virginia.

While the expansion in scope is new and exciting, the changes should come naturally to the team. As Clemons said, KOO "listens more than they talk." CA

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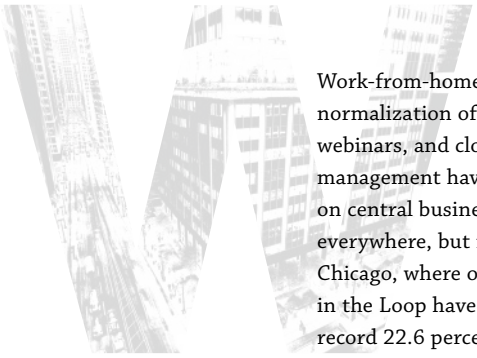
Death or Life?

The skyscraper and the Loop have always come back from predictions of their demise. Facing renewed pressure on central business districts around the globe, architects must focus on innovating toward *better* buildings rather than *larger* ones.

by Thomas Leslie, FAIA



Work-from-home and the normalization of online meetings, webinars, and cloud-based management have put pressure on central business districts everywhere, but notably in Chicago, where office vacancies in the Loop have surged to a record 22.6 percent. Arguably, the last time the city's commercial market faced such drastic figures was during the Great Depression, when the lack of demand for new office space halted skyscraper construction for two decades. Seeing no market for tall buildings, the city council passed draconian zoning laws in 1942 that limited high-rise construction downtown to 12 stories while developers demolished 19th-century skyscrapers in favor of two to three-story "taxpayers."

The skyscraper and the Loop have always come back, however, from predictions of their demise. The Marshall Field Estate, for instance, began work on the Field Building at LaSalle and Adams in the depths of the Depression in 1931. Their bet — that bottomed-out material and labor costs could be paid back by the few tenants seeking new construction — paid off. Similar claims about the "end of the skyscraper" came during the energy crises in the 1970s, after the terrorist attacks of 2001 and in the wake of 2008's Great Recession. Each time, skyscrapers and the cities around them have bounced back. The 15 years since the financial crisis have seen an unparalleled volume of high-rise work in Chicago itself alongside projects of unprecedented scale and ingenuity built throughout the world but designed here.

Is the skyscraper "obsolete" in a work-from-home era, as **Carol Ross Barney, FAIA**, suggested in her recent widely quoted *Dezeen* interview? Or is the type enjoying yet another renaissance? For all of the headwinds facing tall building construction — an uncertain market, vastly changed work patterns, and growing concern about the ecological impacts of density — practitioners and developers continue to propose and build skyscrapers in Chicago and farther afield. Seven of the city's tallest 20 buildings have been built since 2018 and new technologies, from higher-performance glazing to mass timber, have energized the field. Urban density has gained renewed momentum, too, as planners seek ways to reduce reliance on automobiles.

"Cautiously optimistic," said **David Eckmann, FAIA**, president of Magnusson Klemencic Associates, when asked about the future of high-rise building in Chicago and beyond. "Developers are still driving the discussion, and they are going to build as tall as they can for what they can afford while making their pro formas work." Speculative office development — long the Loop's signature — remains on pause while the industry waits to see just how much has changed post-pandemic, but corporate clients see new buildings and the amenities that come with them as levers to bring people back to the workplace. Newness, too, is a factor. **James Goettsch, FAIA**, chairman and co-design director of Goettsch Partnership, notes that new construction consistently attracts tenants, but that "old" buildings constructed prior to 2000 are tougher sells for their lack of amenities and outdated data infrastructures. Other factors — national or corporate pride, marketing, or government subsidies — can change the formula enough that supertalls that would be economically infeasible in the Loop are the stock-in-trade elsewhere overseas.

Technologically, this should be a golden era for tall building construction. Digital tools that provide exponentially greater computing power allow more accurate and precise simulations of structural and aerodynamic behavior. Paired with higher strength concrete, this fueled the jump in the heights of supertalls in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and China — many of them relying on expertise that remains centered in Chicago. Closer links between design software and production tools have sped fabrication processes and produced ever more striking, functional forms and components. Mass timber has aligned height and sustainability in a way few could have predicted 10 years ago.

Greater electrification of buildings, coupled with renewable energy sources that are finally competitive with fossil fuels, is also cause for optimism. Chicago, SOM's Luke Leung points out, has been ahead of most other cities on this, with more than 50 percent of its downtown buildings estimated to be all-electric as early as the 1970s, partially due to the city's "Heat by Light" program. Artificial intelligence and the proliferation of fine-grained interior sensors promises smarter use of energy, alongside better storage that will further enable thermal, solar, and wind-generated power to run high-rise buildings. Nature is playing a greater role as a membrane between outside and in — SOM's Urban Sequoia project proposes that building skins might not only filter air using plants, algae and biomass but that they might also harvest and sequester carbon from the air.

"Carbon neutral won't be enough," Leung said. With the World Green Building Council's goal of net-zero by 2050, high-rises beyond that might well be held to a "beyond carbon" standard. Still, Leung points out, even the most energy-efficient high-rise incurs a tremendous carbon debt just by its construction and its staying power. 270 Park Avenue in New York remains the tallest skyscraper to be demolished intentionally, leaving a worldwide inventory of more than 1,600 towers over 200 meters as of 2019. The costs and difficulties of replacement at that scale are formidable, meaning that we're stuck with the tall buildings we build, whether they work well under changing global, climate, and economic conditions or not. "What do you do with an empty building?" Leung wondered. "Food production? Data centers?" Conversions to residential programs work for narrow, pre-WWII floor plates, but larger, deeper plans present a seemingly intractable problem.

Still, some see optimism even here. **Ken DeMuth, AIA**, partner at Pappageorge Haymes Partners, thinks data centers could take advantage of the Loop's concentrated dense electrical and data cabling. "The Loop's got infrastructure," he noted. "How do you leverage that?" Renovations could pair residences along building street façades with mechanical and digital functions that fill out the remainder of postwar skyscrapers' deep floor plates. Vastly lower occupancy densities that come with residential construction should give architects and developers plenty of room to rethink otherwise challenging skyscraper renovations. Preservationists will argue, with some merit, that the most sustainable buildings are the ones we don't need to build. DeMuth's vision of a radically mixed-use re-inhabitation of the building stock we already have resonates with the successful renovation, a generation ago, of many 19th-century structures into hotels, apartments, and condominiums.

There are, however, limits to even the most promising technologies. Eckmann points out that, as great as the interest in

RENDERING BY PICTURY

1000M

Jahn/

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Time Equities Inc.; JK Equities; Oak Capitals

Structural Engineer: Magnusson Klemencic Associates

Contractor: James McHugh Construction Co.

Height: 245.4 meters/805 feet

Status: Expected completion 2024

1000M, a dramatic residential tower under construction in Chicago's South Loop, features a striking cantilever that maximizes space and offers expansive views of Lake Michigan and Grant Park. After adapting its design from condos to apartments due to the post-COVID-19 real estate market, the 74-story building, now standing at 805 feet, encompasses 738 luxury apartments and 70,000 square feet of amenities, including indoor and outdoor swimming pools. It is set to partially open in early 2024 with full completion by late summer.

RENDERING BY SOLOMON CORDWELL BUENZ (SCB)

30 North LaSalle

Solomon Cordwell Buenz (SCB)

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Golub & Company

Height: 168.6 meters/553 feet

Status: Proposed redevelopment

Golub & Company plans to revitalize the existing 30 North LaSalle tower by converting its lower 22 floors into 432 apartments, with 30 percent set as affordable housing, while retaining the top 20 floors for office use. Designed by Solomon Cordwell Buenz (SCB), the project, which is a part of the City of Chicago's LaSalle Street Reimagined program, features new amenities like a projecting terrace on the 11th floor and an enhanced streetscape by Confluence.

IMAGE BY GENSLER

360 North Green

Gensler

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Sterling Bay

Structural Engineer: Magnusson Klemencic Associates

Contractor: Power Construction Company

Height: 121.6 meters/399 feet

Status: Expected completion 2024

360 North Green, situated in Chicago's rapidly evolving Fulton Market, is a top-tier development designed by Gensler with nearly 500,000 RSF of innovative amenities, retail and office spaces. Its spacious interiors, high ceilings, and full-service amenities — like an extensive fitness deck and indoor/outdoor lounges — offer tenants a premium experience. Elevated air quality standards, outdoor tenant areas, and a dedicated bike room are all a part of an overall focus on tenant wellness.

IMAGE BY JOE ZEKAS

465 North Park

Pappageorge Haymes Partners

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Jupiter Realty Company LLC; MetLife Investment Management

Structural Engineer: Halvorson and Partners; Sowlat Structural Engineers

MEP Engineers: Cosentini Associates

Contractor: Power Construction Company

Interior Design Consultant: Solomon Cordwell Buenz (SCB)

Civil Engineer: Eriksson Engineering Associates

Height: 159.9 meters/525 feet

Status: Completed 2018

465 North Park is a 48-story, 444-unit LEED Gold residential tower anchoring a corner in Streeterville with its unique elliptical form. The project features sweeping views, a parking garage concealed by laminated residential units that also activate the street, nearly an acre of amenity space including two outdoor terraces, and a tuned sloshing damper that permitted the tower's slender profile.

IMAGE BY ADRIAN SMITH + GORDON GILL ARCHITECTURE

Central Park Tower

Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture

Location: New York, New York

Client: Extell Development Company

Associate Architect: Adamson Associates Architects

Structural Engineer: WSP

Contractor: Lendlease

Height: 472.4 meters/1,550 feet

Status: Completed 2020

Central Park Tower, the world's tallest residential building at 472 meters, designed by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture, features a slender profile with defining vertical ribs and a notable cantilever, all meticulously planned to ensure comfort and quality interiors with stunning views. Considerable attention was given to its integration with the surroundings, especially in meeting the requirements for an adjacent art school.

IMAGE BY TOM ROSSITER

Cirrus and Cascade Chicago

bKL Architecture

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Lendlease Corporation; Magellan Development Group

Structural Engineer: Thornton Tomasetti

MEP Engineer: Salas O'Brien

Contractor: Lendlease Corporation

Height: Cirrus: 150 meters/492 feet (from street level at North Harbor to roof)

Cascade: 119.2 meters/391 feet (from street level at North Harbor to top of elevator penthouse)

Status: Completed 2021

Cirrus, a 47-story condo tower with 363 units, features golden brass panels, elegant interiors and amenities like an outdoor pool, indoor spa, and terraces overlooking Lake Michigan. Cascade, a 37-story rental tower with 503 units, distinguishes itself with copper panels, a community-focused design, and amenities like a raised pool deck offering skyline views and communal lounges for enhanced resident interaction.

Unless otherwise noted, project data sourced from the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat and vetted by the firms.

RENDERING BY PERKINS&WILL

Iconic Tower

Perkins&Will

Dar al-Handasah Shair & Partners

Location: Cairo, Egypt

Client: Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities of Egypt

Design Architect: Perkins&Will

Architect of Record: Dar al-Handasah Shair & Partners

Structural Engineer: Dar al-Handasah Shair & Partners

MEP Engineer: Dar al-Handasah Shair & Partners

Contractor: China State Construction Engineering Corporation

Height: 393.8 meters/1,292 feet

Status: Expected completion 2024

With a 77-story mix of office, residential, hotel and retail spaces, and an observation deck, Iconic Tower is set to be Africa's tallest building upon completion, sitting in Cairo's new Central Business District East. Its design features a sloping façade and an illuminated crown inspired by an obelisk.

IMAGE BY NICK ULIVERI PHOTOGRAPHY

One Chicago

Goettsch Partners

Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: JDL Development

Structural Engineer: Magnusson Klemencic Associates

MEP Engineer: Salas O'Brien

Contractor: Power Construction Company

Landscape Architect: Site Design Group

Height: 295.8 meters/971 feet

Status: Completed 2022

One Chicago, situated in Chicago's River North area, is a luxury mixed-use development with two residential towers and numerous amenities, including a flagship Whole Foods Market and a premier Life Time fitness center. Designed by Goettsch Partners and Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture, it encompasses about 2.2 million square feet with 812 residential units and vast retail and office spaces.

IMAGE BY SETH POWERS PHOTOGRAPHY

Shenzhen Rural Commercial Bank Headquarters

SOM

Location: Shenzhen, China

Client: Shenzhen Rural Commercial Bank

Architect of Record: Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD)

Structural Engineer: SOM

MEP Engineer: SOM

Contractor: Jangho Group Co. Ltd.

Height: 158 meters/518 feet

Status: Completed 2020

The Shenzhen Rural Commercial Bank headquarters, a 33-story tower in a key Shenzhen business district, boasts biophilic and sustainable designs like a water wall, natural ventilation, and a solar shading diagrid that reduces solar gain by 34 percent. Designed by SOM, the building features column-free floor plans, a private banking pavilion with a double-skin wall, and landscaped entrance spaces, and is aiming for LEED Platinum and China Green Star certification.

IMAGE BY TOM HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

The St. Regis Chicago

Studio Gang

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Magellan Development Group

Architect of Record: bKL Architecture

Structural Engineer: Magnusson Klemencic Associates

Contractor: James McHugh Construction Co.

Height: 362.9 meters/1,191 feet

Status: Completed 2021 (residential tower)

The St. Regis Chicago, now Chicago's third-tallest building, integrates into the Lakeshore East community with enhanced public access to the Chicago River, housing condominiums, a five-star hotel, and shared spaces. With a unique design featuring interconnected volumes, an innovative structural system, and a primary architectural element called a frustum, the tower offers inhabitants ample daylight, fresh air, and green spaces atop its varying heights. A ground level connection to the Riverwalk ties the tower into the Loop's pedestrian and bike circulation.

mass timber has become, it has many of the same limitations that it did a century-and-a-half ago, when iron and steel replaced it entirely in commercial construction. "It can't economically span the 40- to-45-foot core-to-glass dimensions like steel can," he said. Beyond the 20 stories or so that mass timber structures are now reaching, "the column sizes become significant." 20-story buildings can work outside the Loop, but both Eckmann and Goettsch argue for the efficiency and logic of the standard commercial tower in 21st-century Chicago. 40 to 50 stories serviced by three eight-car elevator banks, clad in high-performance skins and sculpted at their base to provide amenities to make the building — and the city — a more desirable place to work.

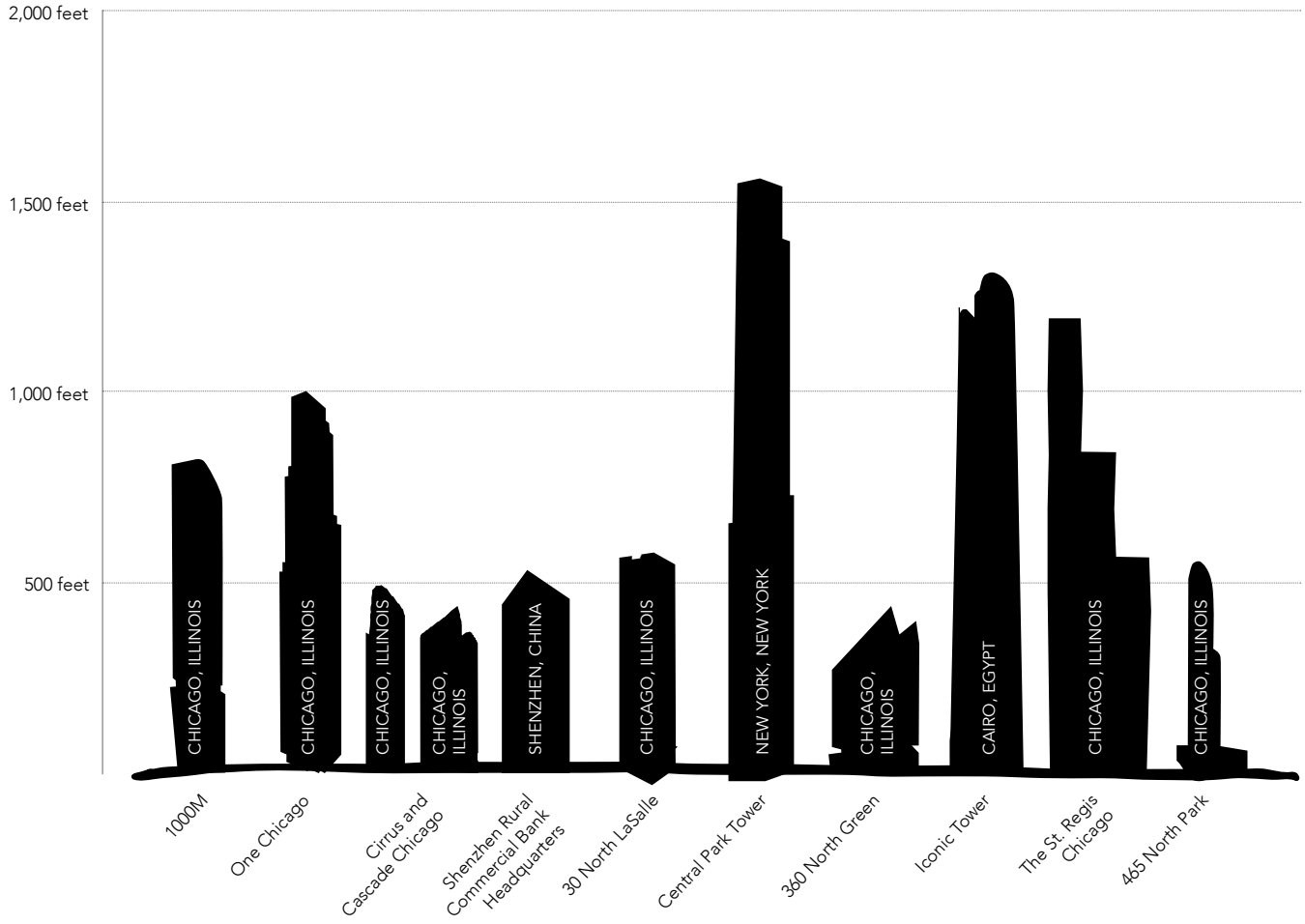
Harnessing new technologies to a clear-minded understanding of how and why residential and commercial density remain appealing suggests yet another skyscraper renaissance. Goettsch's point — that class-A commercial space continues to enjoy a robust market — is echoed by Related Midwest's **Ann Thompson, AIA**, who points out a shift from quantity to quality in high-rise design across market sectors. "There's interest in a richer, more intentional approach," she said. More meaningful experiences, amenities that enhance daily routines and a broader sense of how high-rises can better support positive social and civic goals will all play a role in revitalizing the high-rise as an urban type.

As markets farther afield — Miami, Austin, Shenzhen, and others — claim the title of "skyscraper cities," developers and designers here continue to lend expertise to some of the tallest projects on the planet while rethinking what a "Chicago skyscraper" is here at home. Despite the financial and social headwinds facing the post-pandemic Loop, Thompson says she has faith in the skyscraper. "I don't think it's going anywhere in the same way I don't think *cities* are going anywhere. We're doubling down on cities and high-rise density, exploring what all that means for the way people live and the way people work."

Innovating toward *better* buildings rather than *larger* ones seems likely to reshape Chicago's skyscraper design culture — along with its skyline. CA

Thomas Leslie, FAIA, is an architect, author, construction historian, and a newly named University of Illinois professor. He is the author of "Chicago Skyscrapers, 1934-1986: How Technology, Politics, Finance, and Race Reshaped the City," published 2023.

Join AIA Chicago for Third Thursdays on November 16: Celebrating Tall Buildings featuring Leslie, tall building trivia from CTBUH, and hosted at SOM. Register at www.aiachicago.org/thirdthursday.



Turning Up the Heat

A summer of extreme weather underscored the urgency of climate change. How are firms — and their clients — responding?

by Dillon Goodson, Affil. AIA Chicago

On a Sunday afternoon in mid-July, a pair of National Park Service rangers in California's Death Valley National Park stood smiling ear to ear next to a digital display of unofficial temperature readings from the hottest place on Earth. Meanwhile, the mercury inched ominously close to an all-time high of 134 degrees Fahrenheit. Bystanders gathered and snapped pictures that quickly circulated across social media channels, fueling apocalyptic comparisons likening the rangers to dinosaurs grinning in the foreground of the comet moments before it sealed their fate.

Unofficially, July was Earth's hottest month on record. In Phoenix, the temperature hit 110 degrees Fahrenheit for 31 days in a row, nearly twice as many consecutive days as the previous record. Off the coast of Florida, water temperatures reached hot tub levels as scientists warned that nearly all of North America's coral reefs could face bleaching by the end of the summer. And in Chicago, the reality of climate change hit close to home, with heat-fueled Canadian wildfires blanketing the city in a thick cloud of smoke that public health experts warned was like smoking half a pack of cigarettes in a day.

It was hot. It was hard to breathe. And it just might have been the wake-up call our world needed.

Nathan Kipnis, FAIA, was just 12 years old when his environmental wake-up call came ringing. It was 1973, and OPEC proclaimed an oil embargo against the United States and its allies, sending the price of oil sky-high. He remembers the long lines at gas stations and the feeling of panic that permeated throughout every corner of his hometown of Highland Park. At the nation's capital, even the White House Christmas Tree went dark as a desperate President Nixon hit the airwaves, temporarily lowering speed limits nationwide and pleading with Americans to cut back their energy use.

"That was the first time I had ever seen a bunch of adults get freaked out," recalled Kipnis. "And when you're a little kid, it really has an impact on you."

The impact was swift, materializing a fundamental shift in Kipnis' understanding of the world. Recognizing that our reliance on fossil fuels was, at best, impractical, he designed his first solar home at the age of 22. Soon after, he launched a sustainable architecture practice, Kipnis Architecture + Planning (KAP), with an explicit focus on helping clients heal the environment. Thirty years later — and with at least 100 green projects to show for it — business is booming at the small five-person firm.

National Park Service rangers are photographed next to a digital display of an unofficial heat reading at Furnace Creek Visitor Center in Death Valley, California, in July. IMAGE BY RONDA CHURCHILL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

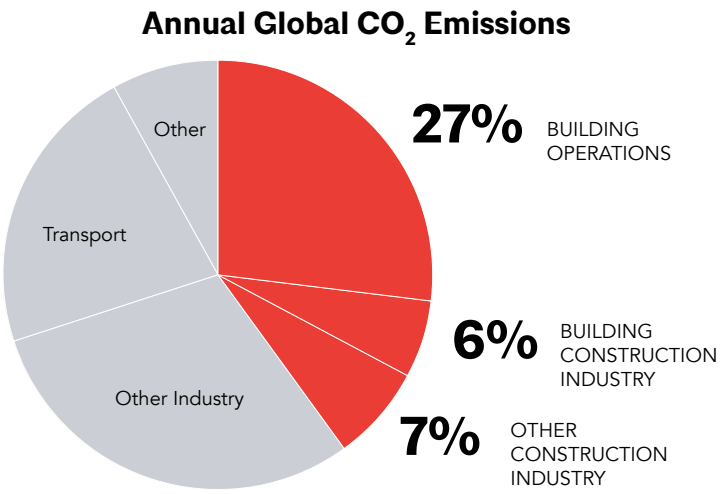
"[Climate change] has finally impacted people directly, so the calls have changed, too." This is reflected not only in the sheer volume of calls but in the tone and content of the conversations he is having with clients, explained Kipnis. For example, he recently fielded an inquiry about an air source heat pump, a highly technical system that doesn't rely on fossil fuels to heat and cool a home. "People realize if you design a home, which is your biggest investment you're ever going to do, why would you make it obsolete from day one?"

Architects, and the clients for whom they design, have a unique obligation to achieve a more sustainable future. The built environment is responsible for generating as much as 40 percent of annual carbon dioxide emissions. Following decades of progress that has led to reductions in operational energy usage, architects have turned their attention to embodied carbon, which accounts for building and infrastructure materials and construction. This is especially important, says Marzia Sedino, PE — an environmental engineer by training, who serves as senior associate principal and sustainability director at SOM — because emissions from embodied carbon cannot be rectified once a building's construction is completed.

"By looking at all of those aspects of the building's life — beginning to the very end, until it's decommissioned — we have a way to assess it," said Sedino. This process allows investors, property owners, and developers to make informed decisions from the outset of a project that can ultimately reduce a building's environmental impact. It's a part of a new service SOM is advertising as whole life carbon accounting.

Sedino is a part of a roughly 25-member team of sustainability specialists at the large, multinational architecture practice. They collaborate in a studio environment that unites many of the roles typically associated with the design of sustainable buildings: MEP, environmental, and façade engineers; landscape and health experts; and sustainability certifiers, among others. Long before pencil meets paper, Sedino and her team are called upon to listen to a client's goals and identify a set of objectives that align with sustainability best practices. This process of intentional collaboration from the outset of a project is beneficial for both clients and the environment.

"I remember working on a project where our priority was to



Source: IEA Tracking Report – Buildings (2022)

reduce energy consumption, but the client's priority was actually to have a better-integrated ecology system. And they're both very important," explained Sedino, "but the way that we were able to shift our priorities to meet their priorities, and at the same time achieve something that perhaps was greater than we had envisioned before, was very illuminating."

The benefits are economic, too. Decades ago, accomplishing net-zero design would have meant paying a premium of 30 percent to 40 percent, according to **Kelly Moynihan, AIA**, principal at HPZS, a medium-sized firm. Since then, demand has driven prices down, enabling architects to focus on more than just the "bells and whistles" of solar panels and rainwater harvesting. This is facilitating real progress in the industry's efforts to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030, a goal known by the AIA as the 2030 Commitment, which has already welcomed 1,200 firm signatories nationwide. HPZS, SOM, and KAP have each pledged their commitment to the effort. Kipnis also served as the national co-chair of the 2030 Commitment working group from 2018 to 2019.

Whether the effort is successful or not is personal for Moynihan. In addition to her architectural work at HPZS, she is co-chair of AIA Chicago's Committee on the Environment (COTE), which is focused on equipping architects for conversations with their clients about why sustainability matters — even if those clients deny the existence of climate change. Working alongside architects, allied professionals, and the public, the committee provides resources that practitioners can use to benefit their clients, firms, and the planet.

Moynihan admits not every client is receptive to calls by architects to "be sustainable." Therefore, instead of treating sustainability as something of a novelty, she advocates for firms to approach the topic as a part and parcel of their design process. In the same way architects don't begin a project by debating whether it should incorporate walls, windows, and a roof, she thinks firms should weave in sustainability as a condition of doing business.

"We already know what we have to do. We already have the solutions. It's more about whether or not the architect is willing and able to guide the conversation with their client to express to them why sustainability is so important." CA

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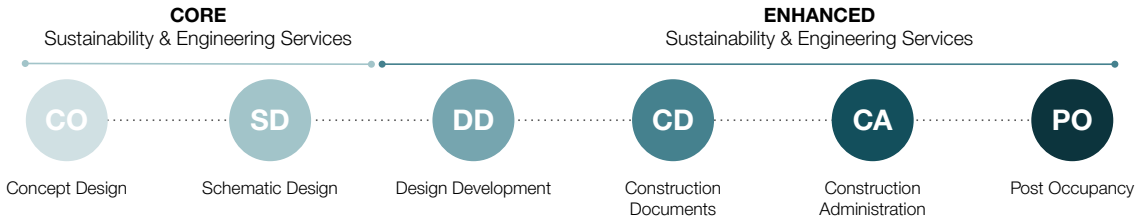
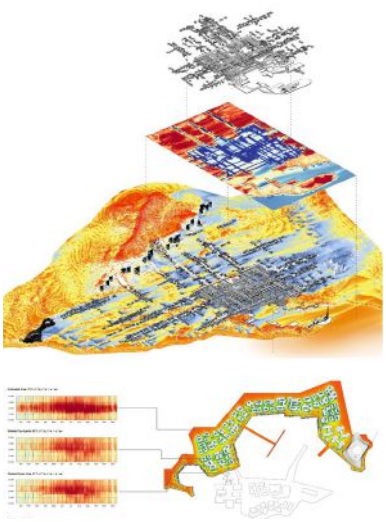
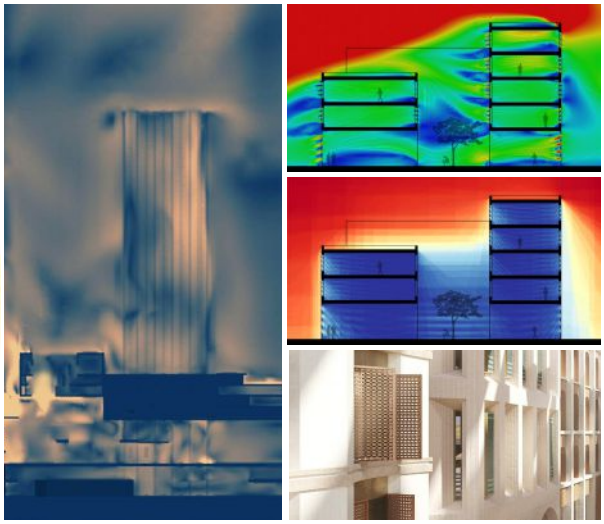
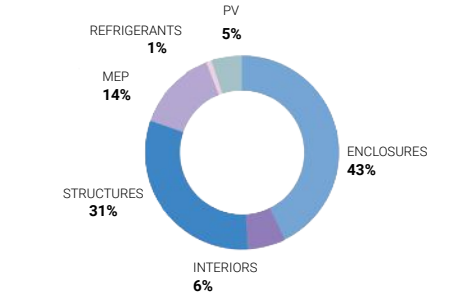




(Above) Urban comfort analysis



(Above) Wind and solar analysis to inform massing and facade design



(Above) Upfront carbon assessment for various building components

(Above) MEP design and BIM

AIA has created resources that can help you communicate the value of sustainable design to your clients.
Climate Action Message Book: bit.ly/AIAclimateaction

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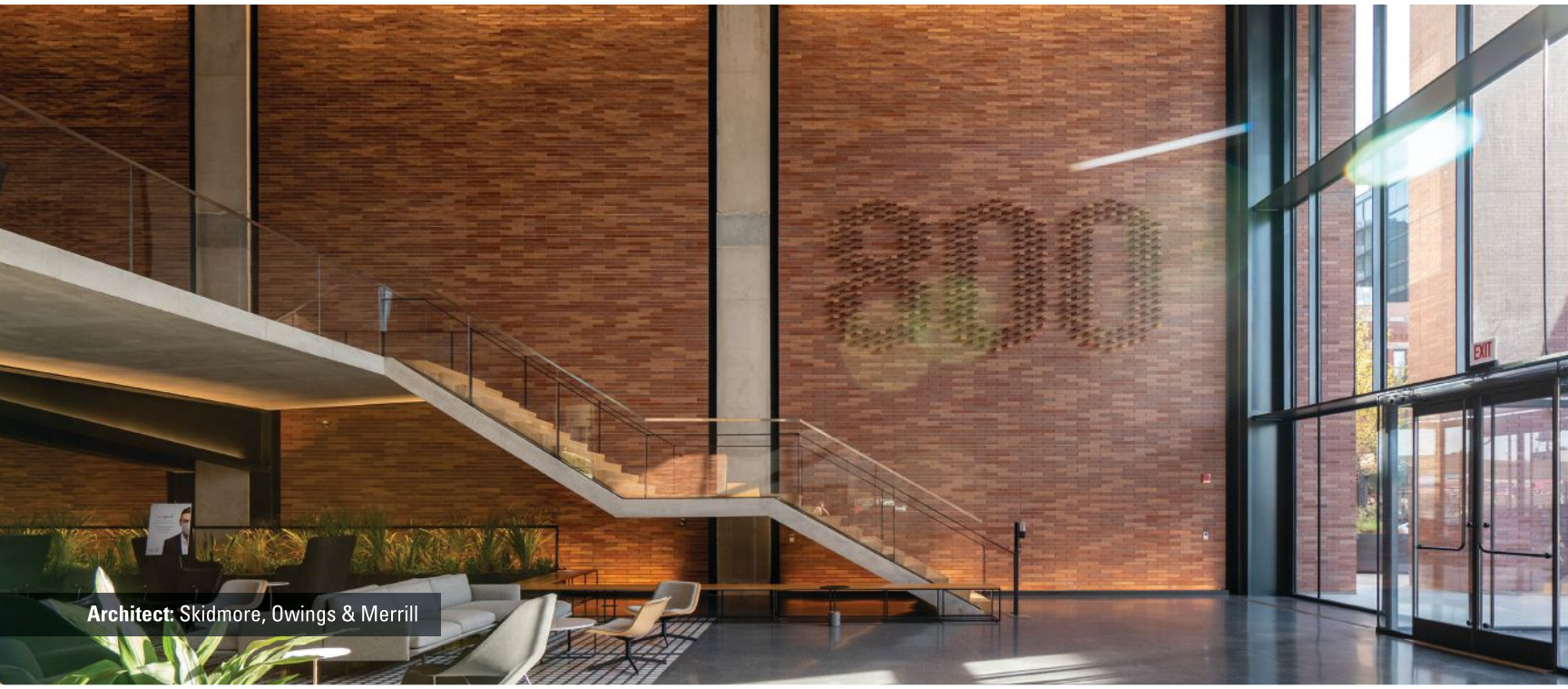

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