

# Chicago Architect

**Gensler Chicago Named AIA Chicago's 2025 Firm Award Recipient // 23**

**+ Affordable Housing for the Long Haul // 32**

**+ In Conversation with the Leadership of Chicago's Architecture Schools // 39**



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# Chicago Architect

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



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Dear AIA Chicago Members and Friends,

As we move through 2025, Chicago's architectural community continues to demonstrate its resilience, creativity, and commitment to innovation and equity. This issue of *Chicago Architect* is a powerful reflection of that spirit.

Our cover story shines a spotlight on the **Chicago office of Gensler**, AIA Chicago's 2025 Firm Award recipient. Since opening its office here in 1997, Gensler has cultivated an innovative, people-first practice that blends global design excellence with deep local impact. The firm's Chicago team is known not only for shaping some of the city's most dynamic spaces but also for nurturing the next generation of architects through mentorship, collaboration, and a culture that values design thinking at every level. Congratulations to the entire team — we're proud to celebrate your well-earned recognition.

Also in this issue, an article by journalist Zach Mortice focuses on three affordable housing and adaptive reuse projects, highlighting how design can be both visionary and responsive to the local community's needs. **Farr Associates'** sensitive transformation of the historic Lawson House reimagines a former YMCA building with ultra-efficient dwelling units while staying within the neighborhood's sensitive historical context. The second featured project is **Canopy's** Casa Veracruz, which is not one building but a scattered-site project that breathes new life into 15 existing buildings across a landmark district. Finally, we feature something near and dear to my heart: **Ware Malcomb's** 79 West Monroe office-to-residential conversion, which represents the first project to break ground under the LaSalle Corridor Revitalization program. Built in the early 1900s, this historic gem is being reimagined as a 14-story luxury multifamily property with seven floors of residential units, including 41 affordable units — 35 percent of the total. These projects exemplify how architecture can preserve the past while addressing the urgent needs of the present.

Further enriching this issue is a timely and thoughtful conversation between **Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA**, our executive director, and the deans/directors of Chicago's three schools of architecture. Their schools are represented by AIAS (American Institute of Architecture Students) representatives who serve as the three voting student directors on our Chapter board. Their conversation underscores the importance of bridging the gap between academia and professional practice — a goal we know is vital to the future strength of the profession and its people.

We are also pleased to share a behind-the-scenes look at the Practice Management Knowledge Community (KC), led by **Scott Steffes, AIA**, and **Sheri Andrews, AIA**. As a former co-chair of this KC, I am delighted to see their persistent work in reinvigorating this KC and expanding its reach to serve professionals at all stages of their careers. This truly is a testament to the strength of our peer-to-peer learning networks. Our KCs are at the heart of our member engagement, and their vitality is more important than ever.

Before closing, I'm thrilled to announce that *Chicago Architect* has been honored with two ASBPE Awards of Excellence. The "Azbees," now in their 47th year, recognize editorial excellence in B2B media. Our publication received a Gold Regional Award and a Silver National Award in the highly competitive Design in Publication Design. Congratulations to editors **David Chase, Assoc. AIA**, and **Dillon Goodson, Affil. AIA Chicago**, and heartfelt thanks to our publishing partner, Innovative Publishing.

Thank you for reading — and for your continued dedication to our profession and to one another. Let's keep building a more inclusive, sustainable, and inspired Chicago — together.

Jason Golub, AIA  
2025 AIA Chicago President  
president@aiachicago.org



Jason Golub, AIA  
2025 AIA Chicago President

# Horizontal Flow



Photo: jmaconochie.com



“ The HWP metal wall system over a deep furring system created an efficient, insulated wrapper for the existing masonry building. The ribbed metal wall panels were used to create texture and shadow for the façade while subtly reinforcing the horizontality of the building.”

— Randy Pease, AIA, Integrated Architecture, principal, director of design



View the case study and video



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The Hub at Prairie Shores brings modern amenities to the ever-evolving residential community at the Bronzeville neighborhood's Prairie Shores housing complex. Designed by Gensler Chicago, the 17,150-square-foot amenity building provides a much-needed "third place" in a neighborhood without easy access to communal space or retail.

© KENDALL MCCAUGHERTY, DESIGN BY GENSLER

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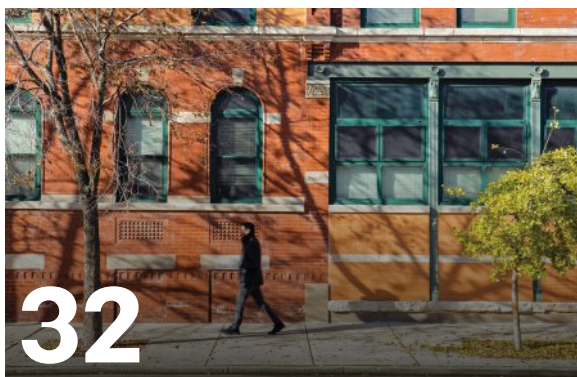
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### Affordable Housing for the Long Haul

► **Correction**

In a recent article, "Beyond Buildings: Linda Searl, FAIA, Celebrated for a Career of Civic and Architectural Impact," we mistakenly stated that Kathryn Quinn was a partner at the outset of the 55 East Erie project. In fact, she joined the project at a later stage. We regret the error and are happy to provide this clarification.



▲ **ON THE COVER**

The Hub at Prairie Shores, designed by Gensler Chicago, AIA Chicago's 2025 Firm Award recipient. © KENDALL MCCAUGHERTY, DESIGN BY GENSLER

► **OUR PREVIOUS ISSUE**

is available to view digitally at [AIAChicago.org/ChicagoArchitect](http://AIAChicago.org/ChicagoArchitect)

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**Dillon Goodson, Affil. AIA Chicago**, is the managing editor of *Chicago Architect* and advises AIA Chicago's signature award programs. He has spent more than 15 years working to advance places that are more just and joyous, better resourced, and loved.



KRISTEN NORMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

**Zach Mortice** is a Chicago-based design journalist and critic who focuses on architecture and landscape architecture. His work is situated at the intersection of public policy and design. He writes for *Bloomberg CityLab*, *Places Journal*, and *The New York Review of Architecture*, among others.



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## CRAN Symposium Connects Residential Architects with Cutting-Edge Trends

AIA Chicago's Custom Residential Architects Network (CRAN) Knowledge Community recently hosted its annual daylong symposium at THE MART. Co-chaired by **Julie Hacker, FAIA**, and **Bob Zuber, AIA**, the event brought together professionals and emerging talents for a day of immersive learning and networking, exploring cutting-edge design, technology, and residential solutions. Sessions included "Six Lessons Learned on Detailing for Durability from Six Iconic Houses," "Big Tech, Small Firm: How AI Levels the Playing Field in Architecture," and "Edith Farnsworth House: Design and Preservation." An "Emerging Voices" panel concluded the day, featuring prominent residential practitioners. Learn more about CRAN by visiting [AIACHicago.org/kc/CRAN](https://AIACHicago.org/kc/CRAN).

## Chicago Architect Magazine Honored with Two ASBPE Awards of Excellence

AIA Chicago is proud to announce that its signature publication, *Chicago Architect* magazine, has been recognized with two American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE) Awards of Excellence. The prestigious “Azbees,” now in their 47th year, celebrate editorial excellence within B2B media. *Chicago Architect* received a Gold Regional Award and a Silver National Award in the highly competitive Design – Publication Design category, a testament to the magazine’s commitment to outstanding visual presentation and content.



## AIA Chicago Hosted First-Ever Emeriti Member Reunion



In May, AIA Chicago hosted its first-ever gathering for emeriti members, alongside special guests and emeritae members **Cynthia Weese, FAIA**, and **Linda Searl, FAIA**, esteemed recipients of the 2023 and 2024 Lifetime Achievement Awards. The event provided a valuable opportunity for former colleagues and longtime members to reconnect over refreshments and engaging conversation, catch up with peers, and hear the latest updates from the AIA Chicago chapter and the AIA Chicago Foundation. [CA](#)

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EVENING CUE



Honoree sketchers (left to right pictured above, bottom left) **John Ronan, FAIA; Susan King, FAIA; Dan Wheeler, FAIA; Brian Lee, FAIA; Helen J. Kessler, FAIA; Walter Street, AIA, NOMA; Juan Moreno, AIA; and Sara Beardsley, FAIA**, depicted iconic buildings from around the world. The team from **EXP** was crowned the 2025 champion, with seven other teams competing: Cannon Design, Stantec, Perkins&Will, Ratio, Ross Barney Architects, Studio Gang, and TYLin.

## Guess-A-Sketch Delivers Electrifying Night of Architectural Artistry for AIA Chicago Foundation’s Scholarships

“Guess-A-Sketch” returned on Thursday, March 20, 2025, at the Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Tech Entrepreneurship at Illinois Tech for an evening of rapid-fire architectural artistry. Eight sponsored teams from the firms Cannon Design, EXP, Stantec, Perkins&Will, Ratio, Ross Barney Architects, Studio Gang, and TYLin competed. Honoree sketchers: **Sara Beardsley, FAIA; Helen J. Kessler, FAIA; Susan King, FAIA; Brian Lee, FAIA;**

**Juan Moreno, AIA; John Ronan, FAIA; Walter Street, AIA, NOMA; and Dan Wheeler, FAIA**, depicted iconic buildings, with the team from **EXP** crowned the 2025 champion. All proceeds from sketch sales benefited the AIA Chicago Foundation’s scholarships and programs, fostering the next generation of architects. The event, hosted and emceed by **Shawn Waddell, Assoc. AIA, EIT, NOMA**, also featured audience challenges. **CA**

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# Programming Opportunities at AIA Illinois

Education and networking are essential pillars for the growth and success of architects and early professionals (EPs). In a field that is constantly evolving with new technologies, materials, and sustainability standards, continuing education helps professionals stay current and competitive. For EPs, continued learning can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, providing the skills and confidence needed to excel in diverse project environments.

Networking is also crucial for architects and EPs. It provides opportunities to connect with peers, mentors, and industry leaders, fostering the exchange of ideas and best practices. These relationships can lead to valuable collaborations, mentorship, and new career paths, all essential for professional growth.

Together, education and networking create a dynamic foundation for career development. By investing in both, architects and EPs not only enhance their technical and leadership abilities but also build a supportive

professional community. This dual focus ensures they remain adaptable, innovative, and well-prepared to shape the future of the built environment.

AIA Illinois is excited to share the dates of two annual programs, highlighted below, which feature in-person education and networking.

Visit AIA Illinois' new website at [AIAIL.org/Events](http://AIAIL.org/Events) for more details on both of these events. 



**Eric Klinner, CAE**  
AIA Illinois Executive Vice President



## Early Professional Summit

September 20-21, 2025  
Hyde Park, Chicago, Illinois

Early professionals and young architects from across Illinois are invited to attend the EP Summit, which will consist of keynotes, education sessions, and networking opportunities.



## AIA Illinois Annual Conference

October 22-23, 2025  
Champaign I Hotel and Conference Center,  
Champaign, Illinois

The AIA Illinois Annual Conference brings together leading experts, visionary architects, and industry pioneers for a day of learning and celebration.



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JGMA



**JGMA** recently celebrated the grand opening of the Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center, a state-of-the-art facility designed to enhance the generational health of the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago and its surrounding communities, fostering wellness for years to come.

WIGHT & COMPANY



A new crisis recovery center (CRC) designed by **Wight & Company** opened in September at the DuPage County Health Department campus in Wheaton, Illinois, enabling a major expansion of the department's mental health and substance use services. The CRC aims for WELL Building certification.

ANGIE MCMONIGAL PHOTOGRAPHY



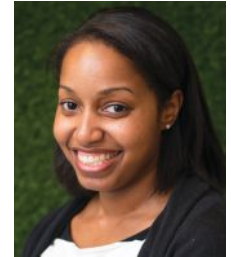
Located in O'Hare's Terminal 5, the new LOT Polish Airlines Lounge, designed by **KOO**, is the airline's first lounge in the U.S. Drawing inspiration from LOT's fleet and Poland's landscape, the design features deep blues, soft lighting, and warm copper tones, highlighted by a suspended copper chain ceiling fixture. The lounge includes reception, seating, a bar, buffet, kitchen, restrooms, showers, a quiet room, and huddle spaces.

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TOM HARRIS

Located inside the historic Chicago Avenue Pumping Station, Lookingglass Theatre — designed in collaboration between **Working Group 1** and **Wheeler Kearns Architects** — expanded its public presence with a new street-facing entrance, lively lobby, café, bar, and flexible spaces for rehearsal and community programs.



Coinciding with the firm's 30th anniversary in Chicago, **HOK** has moved offices into One Prudential Plaza, reinforcing its commitment to design excellence, environmental stewardship, and the historic downtown core of Chicago.



**Ashlen V. Williams, AIA, NOMA; Bruce Roth, AIA, CSI; and Jonathan Skinner, AIA,** were all recently promoted to senior associate at **KOO**.



ANNKATHRIN MURRAY PHOTOGRAPHY

**Janhvi Jakkal, AIA, ACHA, LEED AP,** and **Bernie Woytek, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C,** were recently promoted to partner and shareholder, and **Lauren Stark, AIA,** and **Joy DeWitt, AIA,** were recently promoted to vice president at **HKS**.

PEOPLE + PROJECTS

ERIC LAIGNEL PHOTOGRAPHY



HOK has announced the completion of a new confidential biotechnology company headquarters in Brisbane, California. The design accommodates the company's significant growth with scalable lab and office space that unites their technical and clinical expertise.

LADIE K PRODUCTIONS



HOK is pleased to announce that **Gail Goldstead, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, CCS, CDT**, has been promoted to senior associate; **Nareg Kurtjian, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, CPHC, NCARB**, has been promoted to associate and is starting a new position as project architect; and **Eric Schwartzbach, AIA**, has been promoted to associate.



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GILLIAN GRY/GENSLER



Gensler has named **Meghan Webster, AIA**, the co-managing director of Gensler Chicago. Alongside **Brian Vitale, AIA**, Webster will oversee the office's business, talent, and operations. Webster is a principal and global health sector leader for the firm, supporting the practice area's focus on innovation.



CannonDesign is pleased to announce the promotion of **Abbie Clary, FAIA**, to executive director of market strategies and growth – health for all.

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**Krueck Sexton Partners** is pleased to announce the promotions of **Art Cantwell, Assoc. AIA, NCIDQ, IIDA**, to director of interior planning and **Michael Johnson, AIA**, to technical coordinator.

INGRID BONNE



**Jean Dufresne, AIA, NCARB, RAIC**, recently started a new solo practice, Moth Architects Co., after 21 years as a partner at a previous firm.

ERIC LAIGNEL PHOTOGRAPHY



**Krueck Sexton Partners** has recently completed the United States Attorney's Office – Southern District of New York's 37th and 38th floor renovation in New York, New York. This project is a landmark achievement as the first LEED Platinum Certified Commercial Interiors project within the General Services Administration region.



**David Fleener Architects**, in association with **ICL Architecture**, is pleased to announce the groundbreaking of two new athletic facilities in Florida: Husseini Islamic Center of Florida in Sanford, Florida, and Beacon College's Athletic/Fitness center in Leesburg, Florida.



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**Tilton, Kelly + Bell LLC** has announced that **Michelle K. Bowman, AIA**, a valued member of the firm for more than 12 years, will assume ownership of the woman-owned architecture and interior design practice.



**Perkins&Will** is excited to announce **Margaret Cavenagh, AIA**, as its new managing director. She takes over from **Lindsey Peckinpaugh, AIA**, who has been appointed president.

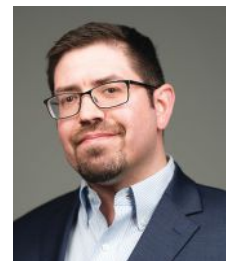


© CREATAR

**Goettsch Partners (GP)** has completed the COFCO Qianhai Innovation Center, a state-of-the-art headquarters and multitenant office complex located in Shenzhen, China.



**AltusWorks Inc.** is pleased to announce the recent licensure of **Carolyn Isaacson, AIA**.



**Goettsch Partners (GP)** is pleased to announce the recent staff promotions of **John Campbell, AIA**, to senior associate, and **Andrew Fox, AIA**, to senior associate.

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TY COLE



**dSPACE Studio** and **Kipnis Architecture + Planning** have each won a 2025 Green Good Design™ international sustainability design award. dSPACE's winning entry, the Silver Lake residence, is embedded into a hill — using the earth as a thermal mass to regulate indoor temperatures — and includes a high-performance thermal envelope and a PV solar array with a battery storage system. Kipnis Architecture + Planning's winning entry was "Evanston's First Passive House," a modern design carefully integrated into one of Evanston's historic districts. The home is certified to the stringent performance standards of both Passive House and PHIUS ZERO 2021.

ANGIE MCMONIGAL



**Perkins&Will** is pleased to headline ART on THE MART's summer season with *Currents of Chicago – A Moving Artwork*. The piece debuted June 5 and journeys through Chicago's natural, human, and technological streams, set to the pulse of Chicago house music by West Side producer Aniko Thomas.

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**Firmly Rooted:**

# **Gensler Chicago Named AIA Chicago's 2025 Firm Award Recipient**

by Dillon Goodson, Affil. AIA Chicago



The Gensler Chicago team gathers for a photo in their office, located in the historic Sullivan Center at the intersection of State and Madison in the heart of the Loop. Since relocating to the space in 2008, the office has grown from about 150 to approximately 260 team members. EVENING CUE LLC

Chicago was a different city in 1997: the year global architecture firm Gensler opened its local office.

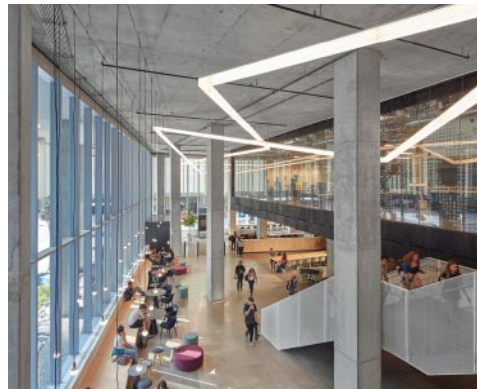
From the industrial corners of the Near West Side, Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey were busy building their global empires, catapulting Chicago onto the world stage. At the edges of the Chicago River, the Sears Tower still held its title as the world's tallest skyscraper, while the Old Post Office — originally built to handle the booming catalog business of the tower's namesake — continued to hum along, months away from being shuttered in favor of its modern replacement. Meanwhile, up and down a freshly revamped State Street, pedestrians found comfort in the familiar brands that still occupied the hallowed halls of retail.

Nearly three decades later, it's hard to imagine Chicago without Gensler.

In the shadow of giants, the firm has helped usher in the rise of the West Loop, reshaping the Fulton Market District into a bustling neighborhood outfitted for a new era of work and innovation. After the Sears Tower surrendered both its name and its world record status, Gensler reintroduced it to Chicagoans and visitors alike by breathing new life into Willis Tower's base. And when online shopping rendered department stores obsolete, it was Gensler that was called upon to reimagine the spaces once built to support them — from the Old Post Office to the Merchandise Mart and even a floor of the Louis Sullivan-designed Carson Pirie Scott building, which the firm has occupied for more than 15 years.

Along the way, they've designed something that's all too rarely taught in architecture school: a culture where good ideas can rise from anywhere — where everyone is invited to shape what's next.

For these contributions, AIA Chicago named the Chicago office of Gensler as the 2025 recipient of its Firm Award. The award recognizes 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



Columbia College Chicago's first-ever student center brings vibrant student life to the forefront, flipping the traditional atrium inside-out to showcase creativity, connection, and activity to the surrounding campus and city. © TOM HARRIS, DESIGN BY GENSLER

profession. It is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a firm by the local chapter.

The Firm Award is selected by a jury of leaders and principals of previous AIA Chicago Firm Award recipient firms and representatives from recent AIA National Firm Award recipients. This year's jury was chaired by **Roderic Walton, FAIA, NCARB, NOMA**, principal at Moody Nolan, recipient of the 2024 award. He was joined by **Pedram Farashbandi, AIA**, principal at David Baker Architects; **Brad Fowler, AIA**, founding principal at ParkFowler Plus; Casey Huang, AIA, partner at Mithun; and **Ellen Mitchell, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, WELL AP**, director of sustainability and applied research at LPA Design Studios.

In selecting Gensler, the jury recognized the firm's exceptional design achievements — both globally and in Chicago — highlighting how deep local roots can translate mission

and vision into meaningful, place-based design excellence.

"What's remarkable about Gensler's Chicago office is that despite being part of a global practice, it has a strong, independent identity," said Walton. "Their 'Chicago-driven' approach speaks to a deep commitment to the city and its neighborhoods."

### The Developer's Architect

When it comes to real estate, few know Chicago better than Bob Wislow. As co-founder of U.S. Equities Realty — the city's largest privately owned commercial real estate firm, before it was merged into CBRE — he has played a pivotal role in redefining both the skyline and civic landscape. His firm led major developments including the Harold Washington Library Center, One Financial Place, the Spertus Institute, and Comer Children's Hospital. In the late 1990s, Wislow's firm was

entrusted with the opportunity of a lifetime: overseeing the design and construction of Millennium Park's most iconic features, including Frank Gehry's Pritzker Pavilion, Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate, and Jaume Plensa's Crown Fountain.

It was around this time that Wislow first encountered Gensler while developing a pair of international projects for BankBoston in Brazil and Argentina. Gensler served as the interior architect, and Wislow was introduced to **Walter Hunt, FAIA** — a founding figure at the firm who was based in its New York City office.

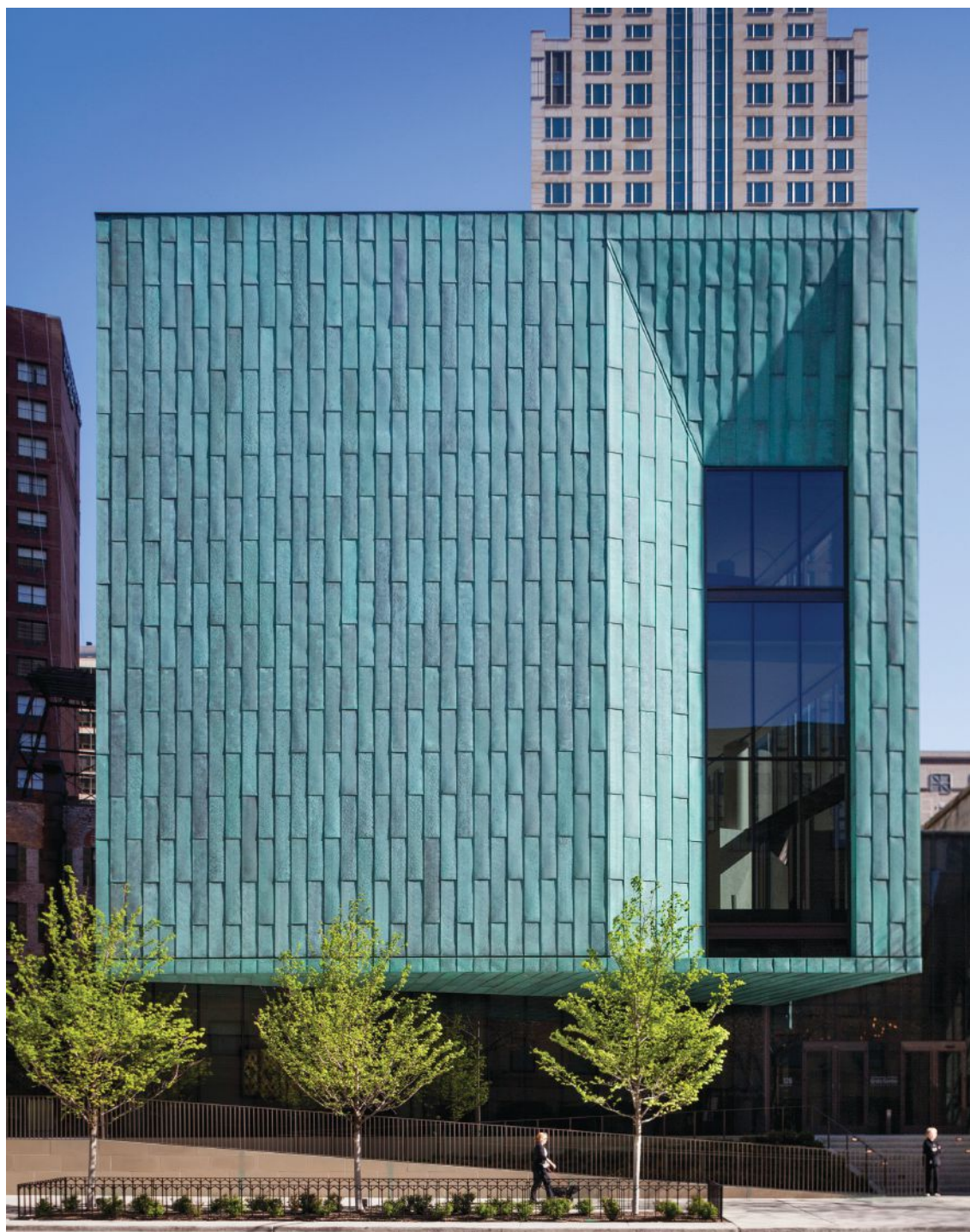
"I was so blown away and impressed," he recalled of working with Hunt and experiencing Gensler's approach firsthand.

So, when Hunt reached out to share that his protégé, **Lamar Johnson, FAIA**, would be opening Gensler's new Chicago office, Wislow was all in. Wislow said he and Johnson quickly found themselves "bumping elbows" on a range of nonprofit and civic initiatives, often joining forces to push city officials toward bolder ideas. A working rapport had already been established long before a project materialized.

Their first major collaboration in Chicago marked a pivotal chapter for both U.S. Equities and Gensler: the development of a new chapel for Fourth Presbyterian Church at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Chestnut Street along the Magnificent Mile. For Wislow, it was an opportunity in waiting — his firm had already played a role in redeveloping two of the other three corners of that same intersection, including the John Hancock Center. For Gensler, the project marked a turning point for its young Chicago office: the chance to design for one of the city's most visible religious institutions, whose roots date back to the Great Chicago Fire.

**Brian Vitale, AIA, LEED AP**, principal and co-managing director of Gensler's Chicago office, recalled the high-stakes competition that led to the win. "We had a moment after we got the call, like, 'Wow, now we really have to deliver,'" he said. "It was validation for everything we'd been talking about. We took some real risks in how we presented the design, but they were risks we believed in."

The result — the Genevieve and Wayne Gratz Center — is a striking example of contemporary



The iconic weathered copper façade of the Genevieve and Wayne Gratz Center at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago takes cues from the historic structure's art installations, ornate lanterns, and decorative downspouts and dormers, offering a contemporary contrast to the gothic sanctuary's intricate Indiana limestone.

© RICHARD BARNES, DESIGN BY GENSLER

architecture. Wrapped in copper inside and out, the addition reflects the weathered beauty of the original church while offering a forward-looking design that signals the congregation's continued evolution. Created to support the church's outreach and programming, the LEED® Silver-certified, five-story center includes classrooms, a day school, library, dining space, flexible gathering rooms, a 350-seat chapel, and a double-height gallery that connects the center to the original building.

The project helped cement Gensler's modern-day reputation as a trusted partner to developers and city leaders alike. "There was never a doubt that we were going to pull it off — and we did," said Vitale. "We grew so much from that."

### 'The Biggest Boutique in the City'

2025 marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of Gensler's global practice. In that time, the firm has expanded to 6,000 professionals partnering with clients in more than 100 countries each year. Today, there are roughly 260 people working in the firm's Chicago office — up from around 150 when the firm relocated to its current office in 2008.

Research has become central to this growth — and a hallmark of the firm's identity — elevating Gensler's profile and positioning the office as a team of highly sought-after experts. The Gensler Research Institute, established in 2005, was created for this purpose. Through global and local research grants, as well as partnerships with external organizations, the firm pursues ideas that address the world's most urgent challenges, working closely with practitioners to develop solutions that will shape the future of design. Today, Gensler estimates that more than 1,500 team members across its 57 global offices are engaged in research. In 2024 alone, the firm funded more than 50 research projects out of these offices.

Gensler's Chicago office is a leading contributor to this effort. Locally, team members have studied everything from transforming aging office buildings into housing to reimagining shelter design through a trauma-informed lens. Their research spans a wide range of topics — from prototyping next-generation health care environments to analyzing shifting workplace dynamics and creating digital tools that enhance design performance. Grounded in real-world data and community needs, this work positions

research not as a separate pursuit but as a central driver of more equitable, sustainable, and human-centered design.

"It's common for large firms to engage in research and author think-pieces, but because of the breadth of Gensler's knowledge ecosystem, they are in a category of their own," said **Eleanor Esser Gorski, AIA**, CEO and president of the Chicago Architecture Center, reflecting on Gensler's impact. Gorski first became familiar with Gensler during her time at the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, where she was involved in several major projects led by the firm, including 167 Green — a 17-story, more than 750,000-square-foot office building in the historic Fulton Market District. She collaborated with the team

on everything from zoning and design review to guiding the project through the city's public approval process.

"What stands out to me is the size of their projects, how much they've grown, and that they've grown into a firm that rivals ... large Chicago firms so quickly," she said. She cited the Gensler Design Forecast, an annual report that consolidates the firm's research and thought leadership on design trends within sectors, such as education, office, residential, and hospitality. It is just one research effort that has contributed to the firm's visibility and growth within Chicago.

That growth, however, hasn't come at the expense of culture. As the Chicago office has expanded, maintaining a sense of scale and



TOP: Design Director Anna Nelson and Brand Designer Franklin Guttman collaborate on an animation for Building Light, a 2.5 acre projection that was featured as part of Art on the Mart's programming. BOTTOM LEFT: Founded by **Kelly Westwood, AIA, NCARB, NOMA**, the Gensler Apprentice Program (GAP) is a paid apprenticeship focused on experiential learning to train aspiring architects. BOTTOM RIGHT: Principal and Global Cities Sector Leader **Andre Brumfield, Assoc. AIA**, at a community meeting for the Englewood Nature Trail, which will repurpose 1.75 miles of an abandoned railroad to create a natural recreation trail on the city's South Side. © GENSLER/GILLIAN FRY

connection to the city has been critical. For Vitale and fellow co-managing director **Meghan Webster, AIA**, that has meant operating in a true studio environment, where people are accustomed to working in groups of 30 to 40 to solve complex design challenges. To capture this ethos, they often describe Gensler as the “biggest boutique in the city” — a place defined not by hierarchy but by the belief that anyone, at any level, can shape the work.

“Some of our best ideas come from the early career talent coming out of school because they are at the forefront of where our practice is going — where our industry is going,” said Webster. She believes that creating space for meaningful connection is essential to the firm’s success. “How are we creating the environment for those interactions that are so pivotal for everyone in their careers? How do we make a place for those to happen organically — whether it’s mentorship or championship of different individuals?”

Ashley Rogow is just one of the many Gensler associates who have thrived under this philosophy. A lifelong artist, she always knew she wanted to pursue architecture. After earning her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she went on to complete her Master of Architecture at the University of Illinois Chicago in 2016.

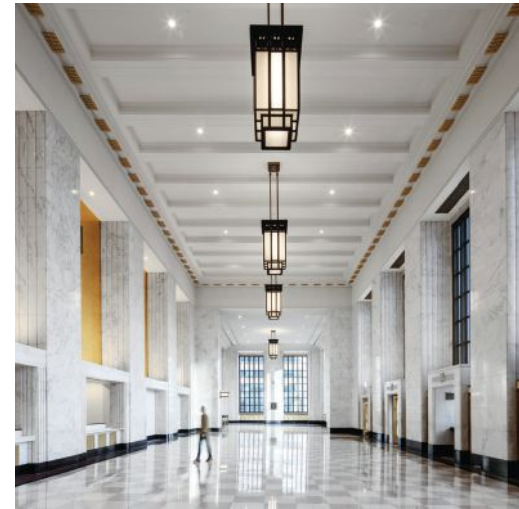
“The irony is that I did not think that I would work for a big firm,” she said. “I’m a creative person, so I always thought big firms wouldn’t want to hire me.” Encouraged by her professors to cast a wide net, she applied to firms both small and large — including Gensler.

When the offer came, she wasn’t sure what she should do next. UIC’s Paul Preissner, then-interim director of the School of Architecture, offered some pragmatic advice: “Even if you don’t think you like it, do it for a year. Learn some stuff,” she recalled him saying at the time. “And then you’ll know better what you want to do.”

Rogow joined Gensler in June 2016, just as the firm was ramping up its restoration and repositioning of the 2.8-million-square-foot Old Post Office — now vacant since 1997 and poised for a dramatic comeback. Within two weeks, she was brought onto the project team. It was her first real-world project experience, and one of her earliest contributions involved redesigning a back-of-house façade, transforming an old loading dock with new walls, doors, and



Gensler transformed Chicago’s Old Post Office into a next-generation workplace, complete with restored architectural details and expansive tenant amenities. © ERIC LAIGNEL, DESIGN BY GENSLER



louvers. “It wasn’t even supposed to be anything exciting,” she recalled. “But [years later], I remember standing in an alley, overwhelmed with emotion, just thinking, ‘I did this—and this is going to make a difference.’”

That moment shifted her understanding of the power of design. While she had once been skeptical of office projects as interesting architecture, Rogow came to appreciate the scale of their impact. “That’s a much bigger impact than designing something pretty they’re only going to visit once,” she reflected.

The post office project didn’t just launch Rogow’s career — it cemented Gensler’s reputation in Chicago. The historic structure has been brought back to life as a hub for business and commerce, with restored façades, windows, corridors, and public spaces, along with world-class tenant amenities. Beyond transformation, the project also involved meticulous documentation of the building’s architecture, including original mail chutes, mosaic tile floors, plaster ceilings, and mechanical equipment.

That commitment to both history and mentorship shaped Rogow’s experience from the start. She stayed with the project from schematic design all the way through construction administration, gaining confidence with each phase. “I’m very much a jump-into-the-deep-end kind of person,” she reflected. “And [Gensler]

really believed in me. ... My confidence just got better and better and better in that first year, and I started to take on more different roles throughout the project and try different things.”

Nearly a decade into her career at Gensler, Rogow now finds herself in a position to pay it forward: “All the people who helped me get to where I am — I want to be that person for not just one other person; I want to be that person for tons of other people to really help lift them up.”

### **In Good Company**

Architecture is inherently forward-looking — a discipline driven by innovation and creative problem-solving. Yet, a tension can exist between architects and their clients, who may be more risk-averse or focused on immediate constraints such as budget limitations, regulatory requirements, or competing priorities among those the project must serve.

In many ways, a firm’s success is as much about its design approach as the company it keeps. And by this measure, Gensler is in good company. Its clients span developers, nonprofits, universities, and cultural institutions. Its designs benefit a whole host of partners who return not just for the firm’s vision but also for its ability to listen, adapt, and find practical solutions in real-time.

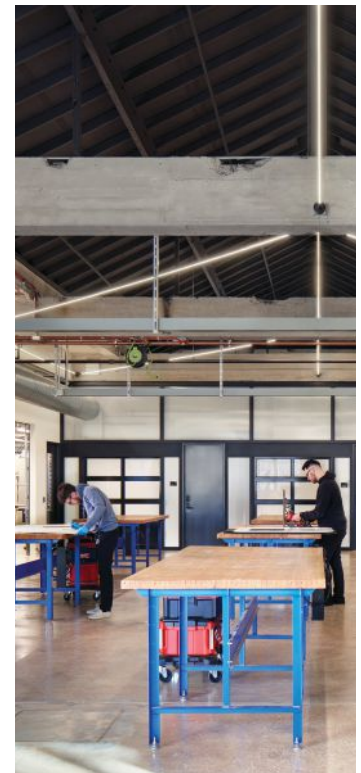
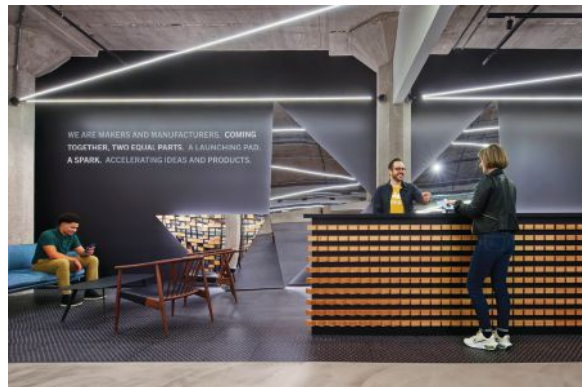
One of those clients is Melissa Lederer, a driving force behind Chicago’s innovation scene and a longtime collaborator with Gensler. As chief experience officer of mHUB — a leading HardTech innovation center — Lederer leads teams in designing spaces and strategies that empower early-stage entrepreneurs to bring physical products to market, from robotics and medical devices to clean energy systems. “We’re focused on manufacturing,” she explained. “We’re all about physical products.” Under her leadership, mHUB has helped more than 1,000 companies generate over \$2 billion in revenue and create thousands of jobs. It’s helped put Chicago back on the map as a global center of innovation.

Lederer’s connection to Gensler began years earlier as a founding team member of 1871, Chicago’s flagship digital tech incubator. She would go on to help launch MATTER, a health care innovation hub, and now mHUB, bringing Gensler along for each transformation. That continuity has bred trust. “They just become part of our team,” she said. Gensler designers regularly embed themselves in workshops and community sessions, gathering insights from entrepreneurs and stakeholders alike. “They help us see how to build something that’s not only beautiful and useful — but that reflects the needs and identity of our community.”

At mHUB’s new location, that meant making the design speak. Lederer described a central corridor that connects Fulton Market — today, a hub for innovation of all kinds — with the Kinzie Industrial Corridor, a historic manufacturing district. That sightline, she said, became a metaphor for the mission. “We are at the intersection of technology and manufacturing,” she said. “The openness, the transparency — that’s all part of our story. Gensler helped us realize that narrative in a physical way.”

What makes the partnership work, she added, is shared DNA. “Collaboration is how you solve big problems,” said Lederer. “That’s true of Gensler, and it’s true of the communities we build.” Whether helping win over funders or translating mission into spatial experience, Gensler has been an ally in telling bold stories about what’s possible. “They’re incredibly curious. They don’t stay in their lane. They push ideas forward, then back them up with a story that makes you believe.”

One of Gensler’s most ambitious recent collaborations represented a full-circle moment — a chance to work together, once again, with



mHUB, the nation’s leading hardtech and manufacturing innovation center, relocated its headquarters to a thoughtfully restored 1926 warehouse bridging the Kinzie Corridor and Fulton Market. Gensler’s design preserves the building’s historic character while creating an open, accessible environment that supports cutting-edge product development and community engagement. © CHRISTOPHER BARRETT, DESIGN BY GENSLER

longtime client and friend Wislow. Only this time, the project emerged not from a formal competition but from a shared commitment to Chicago's future. Wislow had grown increasingly concerned about the northern stretch of North Michigan Avenue — from Chicago Avenue to the lake. With landmark tenants gone and vacancies mounting, the area felt adrift.

"The southern part of Michigan Avenue, in my mind, was world class," he said. "You've got the Tribune [Tower], you've got the Wrigley Building, you've got the Apple Store. ... How could you have a better anchor?" But farther north, he saw trouble. "That whole part of the avenue is challenged," Wislow explained. "We had to come up with some kind of plan to rejuvenate that part of Michigan Avenue."

Rather than wait for a civic solution, Wislow and his partner, Camille Julmy, former chairman of the Magnificent Mile Association, took matters into their own hands. They personally engaged Gensler — funding the effort out of pocket — to explore what might be possible. What they got in return was more than a proposal. Gensler convened design leaders from across the firm for a deep-dive brainstorming session and then tapped its international network to benchmark global precedents. The resulting plan reimaged the corridor as a destination rather than a thoroughfare — one that could rival the great commercial streets of the world.

Central to the vision is a redesigned Jane Byrne Park, reactivated with walkable pathways, flexible seating, vendor kiosks, and a reimaged Water Tower that doubles as a community gathering point. The team even floated the idea of an interactive fountain that spells out visitor-submitted messages. "They took that idea and blew it up and made it into something truly remarkable," Wislow said.

The proposal included narrowing traffic lanes, creating new pedestrian zones, and transforming underutilized streets into hubs of activity, with kiosks, movable seating, and interactive design features. "Think about walking through those kiosks that close up so nicely at night but are serving people all day long," Wislow said. "That little park becomes the place that you want to stop for a croissant on the way [to work], and you want to stop for a drink on the way home."

The plan has already made waves. In one presentation to area stakeholders, including

executives now overseeing Water Tower Place, an attendee actually stood up and applauded. "I've never seen this happen in my 54 years," Wislow said. "He stood up and applauded the work [Gensler] did — it's that good."

Gensler's impact is rooted not just in its design expertise but in the very soul of Chicago. The firm shows up early, listens carefully, and stays invested, often going well beyond the original scope. That kind of dedication speaks to something fundamental about how the team works.

"We love what we do, and we love the people that we do it with," said Vitale. "I know a lot of people say they want to know what's going on behind the walls here because they always hear these things — and it really is just that: We're a group of passionate people who care about design and want to support each other." CA



**Meghan Webster, AIA, and Brian Vitale, AIA, LEED AP,** co-managing directors and principals of Gensler's Chicago office. EVENING CUE LLC



With North Michigan Avenue at a crossroads, Gensler and a team of real estate leaders identified the northern end as a key opportunity to reimagine one of the world's most iconic high streets. Enhancements to Jane Byrne Park and a stronger connection to Oak Street Beach aim to create a seamless, engaging pedestrian experience that links the Magnificent Mile to Chicago's lakefront. © GENSLER

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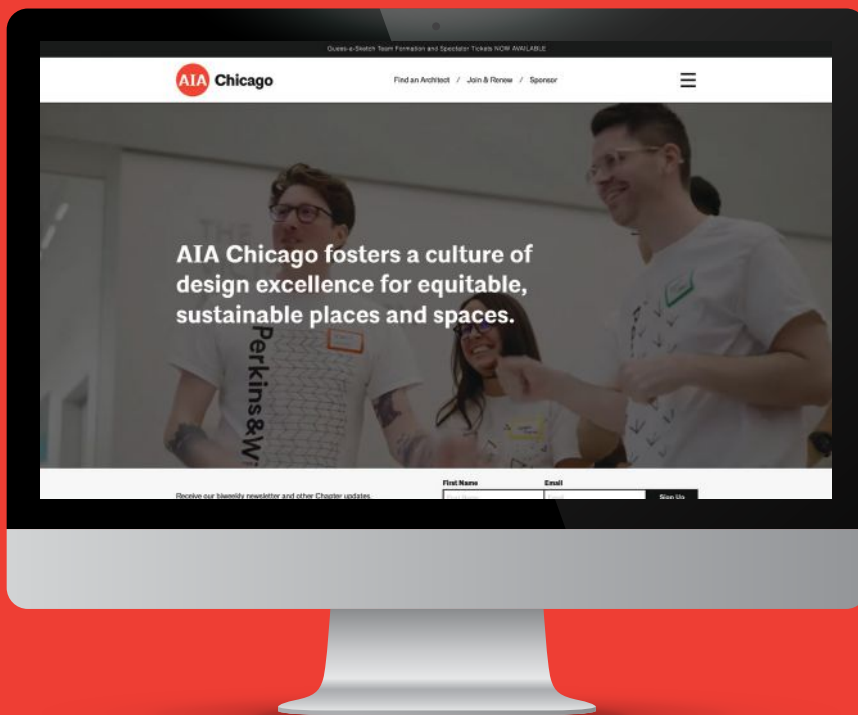
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Thirty years ago, Steve Baldrige founded BASE with a vision—to deliver client-focused service and bring exceptional value to projects in the increasingly commoditized sector of structural engineering.

Today, we are thrilled to announce the addition of long-serving team members Fernando Frontera, Mark Hirschi, and Anantha Chittur to BASE's ownership team. Fernando and Mark began their journeys at BASE as structural designers in 2006 and 2010, respectively, while Anantha joined in 2011 to lead our international projects. Over the years they have exemplified our firm's commitment to excellence, advancing through the ranks and taking on key leadership roles.

Now, as principals and partners, they will join Steve to shape the firm's future while continuing to lead projects and provide the outstanding service our clients have come to trust. Please join us in congratulating Fernando, Mark, and Anantha as they step into their new roles as BASE's new generation of owners!

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# Affordable Housing for the Long Haul

Facing an affordability crisis, Chicago's architects are doing what they can to design resilient homes for all our city's residents.

by Zach Mortice

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALSH CONSTRUCTION



In Chicago's gentrifying and affluent neighborhoods, the struggle to build and preserve affordable housing is won through both penny-pinching resource efficiency and a willingness to open up the checkbook for more durable, long-lasting materials and finishes. The need to integrate supportive services is balanced by recreational amenities, especially when affordable and market-rate units are situated side by side. And as with all historic preservation projects, the charge to maintain a building's historical integrity can come into conflict with functional constraints meant to combat a pervasive housing crisis.

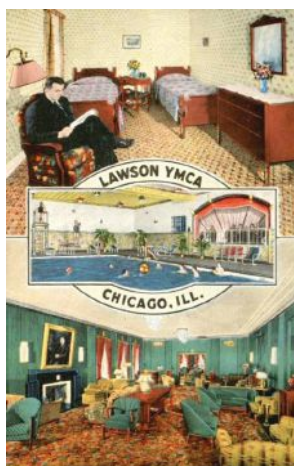
The key to balancing all these competing demands, as always, is design.

In recent years, Chicago architects have undertaken several ambitious affordable housing renovation projects, generating and preserving affordable units in historic buildings in some of the city's most sought-after neighborhoods — places where affordable housing has been least likely to exist. This historical sensitivity may be legally mandated or a cultural consensus. It can also apply to prototypical and vernacular buildings, as well as singular outliers. But design ingenuity and a commitment to a democratic city are what bind them.

From the time it was built in 1931, Lawson House has been the largest supportive housing single-room occupancy (SRO) in the Midwest, and a decade-long crusade waged by **Farr Associates Architecture and Urban Design** and affordable housing developer Holsten has kept it so.

Once the tallest building in the city, this 24-story art deco tower in River North was designed by the firm of Perkins, Chatten, and Hammond, and its spare, proto-modern details and stolid brick massing mark it as typical of Dwight Perkins' masterful civic oeuvre. Landmarked as part of the renovation process to get access to historic tax credits, the former YMCA facility was built after Victor Lawson, publisher of the Chicago Daily News, made a \$3.6 million donation to the organization, which Perkins and his colleagues formed into a crisp and tightly proportioned tower of limestone, gold-hued brick, and terra cotta trim.

At the time, the YMCA saw its properties as havens for 19th-century Victorian morality in the midst of explosive 20th-century urban growth, offering better living conditions for the hordes of young men



Original postcards showcasing Lawson House, Chicago's historic YMCA. Built in 1931 as the tallest structure in a then-changing part of town, the building occupies the northeast corner of Chicago and Dearborn. PROVIDED BY FARR ASSOCIATES

trekking into Chicago as well as peaceable distraction from the corruption and vice they might find there. At Lawson House, there was a library, classrooms, a chapel, office space, and places for physical exercise. It was a regional showpiece designed to appeal to young white-collar professionals.

"The YMCA was seen as a dignified space [where] you could send your husband up to Chicago and they wouldn't get into any trouble," said **Mercedes Miley, AIA**, president at Farr Associates.

This demographic would not stay at Lawson House long, as its clientele got poorer and the building was neglected. By the late 1980s, more than 100 of its 583 sleeping rooms were out of service for lack of maintenance. Peter Holsten bought the building for \$1 in 2014. From the outset, Lawson House was to remain affordable housing, which required the largest-ever allocation of low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) in Illinois history, just one part of its \$129 million budget.

Construction began in late 2021, and residents who were granted the right to return moved out. Now that they've returned, they won't spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent.

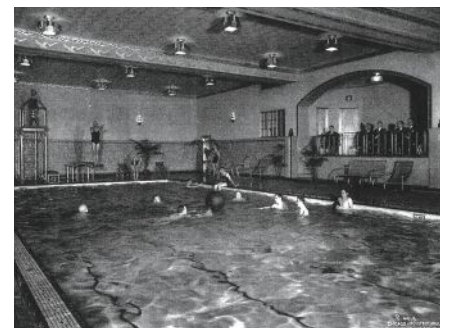
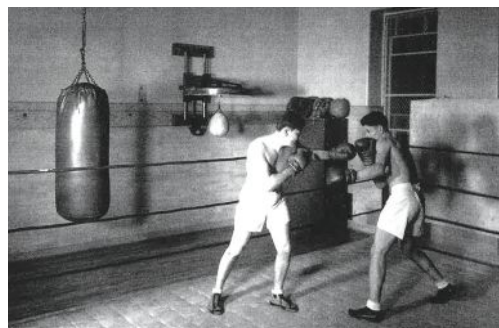
The transition from sleeping rooms with communal bathrooms to studio units with private kitchens and bathrooms dropped the number of units to 409. Remarkably, this significant increase in utility service was accompanied by a 40 percent reduction in water and energy usage. To achieve this, Farr Associates inserted 4.5 inches of insulation in the walls and installed energy-efficient windows. Mechanical systems (electrical, plumbing, and HVAC) were replaced, along with the addition of low-flow showerheads and toilets. Farr Associates estimates this will save building management \$215,000 a year.

The state historic preservation office required the firm to maintain the original dimensions of the corridors, so Farr Associates tore out party walls and moved doors to accommodate the larger, approximately 150-foot units. The library was refurbished as was one of the building's gymnasiums. The basement barbershop was repurposed into a laundry room and the pool into a community event space.

There are more amenities — and a green roof, designed by **site design group, ltd.** — on the 19th-floor roof deck. Here, the only exterior formal change to the building comes into view: three new vertical circulation corridors, a passenger and freight elevator, and two emergency egress stairs. Clad in tan aluminum, they mimic the rest of the building's terraced massing.

A guiding principle for Miley was to make durable material choices that would ensure the building could serve residents as far into the future as possible, even when it meant spending more money upfront. "Someone who's been experiencing homelessness may not be used to having a laundry facility," said Miley. "They may wash their clothes in the sink and throw them on the floor to dry. The bathrooms have floor drains independent of the shower, so if someone forgets to turn off the shower or if they clog the toilet, it doesn't damage the building." The bathroom flooring material, for example, is poured epoxy, which is easily mopped and allows the drain to be placed anywhere.

Throughout the building, Miley and her team reused materials and decorative details that conjure the past life of the building as a reassuring presence, like metal grills hung in the lobby and gold floral molding in the library.



Originally designed by Perkins, Chatten & Hammond as a “city in a block,” Lawson House featured athletic facilities, a barber shop, and period-themed lounges offering residents a “grand tour” of architectural styles. Though structurally sound and lovingly maintained for decades, the building had become outdated — lacking modern amenities, residential kitchens, and essential upgrades. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHICAGO YMCA

Social, educational, and supportive spaces, aimed at addressing the needs of recently unhoused individuals who comprise a significant portion of the resident community, are located on the second floor, adjacent to the building management offices. Next door is a series of thematically assertive rooms, originally done up in Tudor, Florentine, and modern styles. In an Americana frontier-themed room, log cabin wall panels are lacquered to rustic perfection. Miley explained

their historical origin as pre-internet experiential tours of different places and times that might be an engaging curio for a visiting Nebraskan, and their preservation still makes them perfectly serviceable as meeting and counseling spaces. These rooms are certainly quirky — and seemingly superfluous. But upon closer examination, in context with the omnipresent restored art deco detailing, it demonstrates a purpose: “Everything comes with the intention of not making [it] feel

institutional,” said Irene Burke, director of development at Holsten.

Sometimes this lack of institutional allusion is very literal. Interior paint was chosen so as not to overlap with colors associated with local hospital systems to avoid health care trauma triggers. The lobby and corridors tend toward bright pastels. Units are the “brightest white we could find,” Miley said, to make them seem bigger.

The most visually impressive restoration feat at Lawson House is its chapel, where a

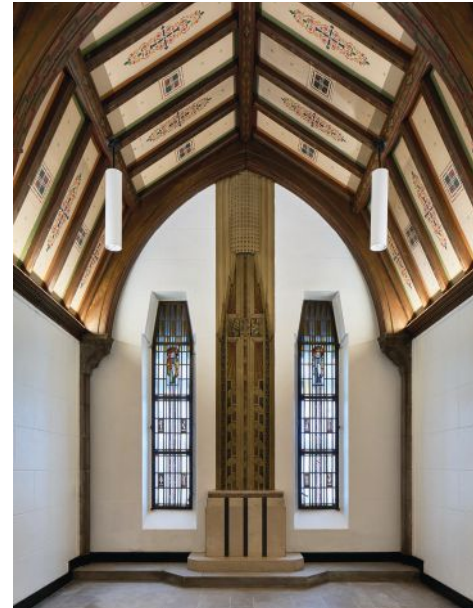
strong sense of old and new handicrafts creates a meditative and dignified place for reflection. After original panels were destroyed during multiple flood events during construction, Farr Associates brought in local artists to paint sylvan motifs combining Rococo whorls with bracing deco modernity on panels in between thick wood ceiling beams. These hang above a pencil-thin altar, where monks are depicted kneeling in prayer, surrounded by a heliotropic burst. There is far more travertine, original and new, than CMU block, and tiny moments of discovery, like the nautical-themed tiles in the former pool, abound. Again and again, Farr Associates' preservation work calls residents' attention upward, toward a history and life beyond what their current struggles might be.

Given the long gestation of this project, a community of people has emerged around this historic artifact, driven by a vital social mission. "It's been fascinating to see the number of people connected to the building," Miley said, "and just feeling like you're one little ant that's been part of a larger ecosystem has been really gratifying."

This ecosystem of housing conversions is certainly growing in Chicago. Burke said the city-sponsored LaSalle Corridor Revitalization program — originally launched in 2022 to spark mixed-income residential development along the historic commercial street — is "absolutely spurred by this example." The program's emphasis on turning vacant office towers into market-rate and subsidized housing, at a 30 percent minimum, reinforces her point. The first conversion at 79 West Monroe broke ground in March.

Architects at **Ware-Malcomb** are collaborating with developer R2 and owner Lagfin to convert floors seven through 13 into 117 residences, with 41 units (35 percent) designated as affordable. The 1905 tower, designed by Jarvis Hunt, features a long, rectangular floorplate, and these shallower depths allow light and air to penetrate the interior, making residential conversion more practical. Its stone and terra cotta façade is topped by upper stories of red brick.

Like many of the planned LaSalle Street conversions, the substantial addition of affordable housing at 79 West Monroe does not mean skimping on amenities. There is a bike room, a pet-washing station, a fitness center with sauna rooms, and a game and media room in the basement. The rooftop amenity floor features co-working spaces both indoors and outdoors. Inside, there are private phone call rooms and larger meeting spaces that can double as a dinner party venue for residents.



TOP: Lawson House's historic chapel endured three significant water events during construction, which damaged many of its delicate painted panels. Restoration required the skill of local artists, who meticulously recreated 22 historic ceiling panels and refreshed faded wood trim to revive the space's original character and vibrancy. BOTTOM: Lawson House's redesigned entrance on Dearborn Street opens into a welcoming, hotel-like lobby filled with natural light, bold colors, and Art Deco-inspired details.

"Neoclassical nautical" is the aesthetic regime: a navy, ivory, gold, and bronze color scheme with warm wood notes. **Mark Schwamel, FAIA**, Ware-Malcomb's director of interior architecture and design, wanted to evoke luxurious, sculpted wood finishes, like a boat, with materials and patterns that emulate subtle, wave-like movement. "We really were fascinated by the connection to the lake because given the scale of our units within urban living, we really wanted the development to use the city and its lakefront as their playground and outdoor space," he said.

His mission was to "keep the beauty of the building but also bring it up to a 21st-century modern multifamily living experience," he said — an experience inclusive of affordable housing.

Like Lawson House, 79 West Monroe was landmarked to apply for historic tax credit funding. This option was not available to the client and architects of Casa Veracruz, a series of scattered-site affordable housing renovations commissioned by The Resurrection Project (TRP). And that, said Guacolda Reyes, TRP's chief real estate development officer, is a good thing.

"When you apply for those types of credits, another set of architectural requirements comes with it, and most of the time, it makes the project even more expensive," she said.

In recognition of its singular composition of workers' cottages, two- and three-flats, and industrial buildings overlaid with ancestral



Built in 1905, 79 West Monroe is the oldest surviving commercial structure designed by Chicago Architect Jarvis Hunt. The renovation project, led by design firm Ware Malcomb, includes converting seven floors to create 117 residential units, with 41 units affordable. PROVIDED BY WARE MALCOMB

Central European buildings and Mexican American flourish, Pilsen was deemed a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. But a 2020 plan to create a landmark district with formalized renovation and demolition protections never garnered community support and subsequently failed. TRP has been building and preserving affordable housing for more than 30 years but saw the landmark district as a potential “tool of displacement,” Reyes said, that would make repairs to historic buildings onerous financial obligations. “I was happy that we didn’t have to comply with that,” she said.

But Casa Veracruz is no less a work of preservation, maintaining 155 units across 15 buildings as affordable housing in Pilsen, Little Village, and Back of the Yards, guided by Canopy. This project, which began in 2015 and was completed in 2021, honored the simple, vernacular fabric of these places: three-flats and industrial warehouses — some of which were more than a century old — amid rapid gentrification and displacement.

In a city where world-famous crises of public housing have been known to arise because of the disregard for proper funding for maintenance, **Canopy** founder and Little Village native, **Jaime Torres Carmona, AIA**, called these modest renovation projects the “chance of a lifetime in many ways.” And he’s not upset about Reyes’ lack of commitment to regulatory preservation: “She was such a steward not only of affordable housing but also the preservation of significant buildings,” said Torres Carmona.

Before Canopy’s involvement, these Casa Veracruz buildings were all owned by TRP, and some had been renovated by Weese Langley Weese decades ago. Many of the units were funded by the LIHTC program, and as TRP’s compliance period came to an end, they once again had to gather funding and package a deal to keep these units in working order. “It’s like starting all over again,” Reyes said. Casa Veracruz’s budget was \$28.7 million, with an average construction cost per unit of \$150,000.

The repairs were practical and occasionally dramatic. Interior finishes in units and common

areas were replaced, windows swapped out, and building systems upgraded. If Torres Carmona could slot in an extra foot of kitchen counterspace, that was a win. In some ways, it was a wide-ranging job. The smallest building had three units, while the largest had 52.

Torres Carmona said the smaller buildings often required the most intricate repair jobs, like Casa Chiapas in Pilsen. Located next to the ‘L,’ a structural analysis revealed that the constant rumbling of trains accelerated its settling into the ground. Working with structural engineer CE Anderson, Canopy proposed placing a tensioned steel cable between the interior wall and façade to hold the building together. The rattling train traffic also loosened connections between the exterior fire escape and the masonry wall, so it was dismantled, repaired, and tied back through the walls. “It was like open heart surgery to get the frames back into good shape,” said Torres Carmona.

It’s all subtle repairs — from the outside. “If we’re successful, people from the neighborhood

will notice very little change on the outside, but residents using the spaces inside the building will really notice a drastic change,” he said.


This meant making material choices that were initially more expensive but would require less maintenance in the long run. The apartments feature solid surface countertops instead of polyurethane laminate veneer and synthetic marble in the bathrooms. The lighting systems are LEDs.

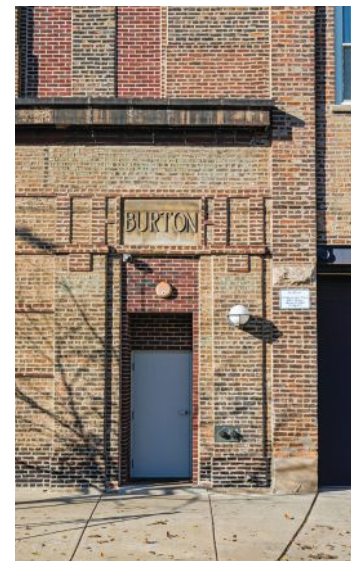
Torres Carmona saw this level of quality as a measure of neighborhood stability. Paying more money up front and designing for durability can “allow [residents] to stay longer,” he said.

In Pilsen especially, the ferocity of real estate development is making access to the neighborhood a very transient thing. “We are losing the battle,” said Reyes. “I think it’s critical that we preserve our physical assets in a way that they are not displacing anybody, that we are improving the quality of housing and the quality of life of the residents that we serve.”

She began her career in affordable housing development when cheap housing — and abhorrent conditions — were plentiful in Pilsen. Now, Pilsen is a destination for recent immigrants and young professionals alike, the latter at the expense of the former, and the housing stock reflects this. “What we want for our families is that they can have both — that they can have a decent home that they’re proud of, but also a home that they can afford without sacrificing any of their basic needs,” said Reyes.

Here and at Lawson House, planning for long-term durability and maintenance is a lesson learned from past disasters in subsidized housing. Chief among them are the Chicago Housing Authority’s doomed high-rises that pancaked to the ground in the largest-ever demolition of public housing in American history in the first decade of the 21st century. To even begin to repair the legacy of this catastrophe, the city must offer up its best to all — not just with faith but also with design acumen, regulatory structures, funding pipelines, and summoned political will.

Only then will a more democratic and accessible city be possible. 



Casa Veracruz rehabilitates 15 affordable apartment buildings within Chicago’s Pilsen Historic Landmark District. Led by the Resurrection Project (TRP) with design by Canopy, the project extends the life of the buildings by over 30 years while reinforcing TRP’s commitment to high-quality, affordable housing. SARAH CROWLEY

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Left to right: Reed Kroloff, dean of the College of Architecture, Illinois Institute of Technology; David Brown, acting director of the School of Architecture, University of Illinois Chicago; Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA, executive director, AIA Chicago; Nicholas Lowe, John H. Brian chair of historic preservation, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and Tristan Sterk, chair of architecture and interior architecture, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. EVENING CUE

# In Conversation with the Leaders of Chicago's Architecture Schools

## How Architecture Schools – and AIA Chicago – Are Shaping the Next Generation of Design Professionals

AIA Chicago has long included a student director on its board, with the position historically rotating among the city's three schools of architecture. In 2022, Chapter members approved a bylaws change that expanded student representation, establishing three dedicated student director roles — one for each local school in the Chapter's boundaries. These directors offer a vital perspective, helping strengthen connections with the local AIAS (American

Institute of Architecture Students) chapters as AIA Chicago explores new ways to support students in their transition from academia to professional practice.

In April, AIA Chicago Executive Director Jen Masengarb sat down with the heads of each school for a conversation. Participants include **David Brown**, acting director of the School of Architecture, University of Illinois Chicago; **Reed Kroloff, Assoc. AIA**, dean of the College of Architecture, Illinois Institute

of Technology; **Nicholas Lowe**, John H. Brian chair of historic preservation, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and **Tristan Sterk**, chair of architecture and interior architecture, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**This conversation has been lightly edited for clarity and flow. Read a more extensive version at [AIACHicago.org/ShapingtheNextGeneration](https://AIACHicago.org/ShapingtheNextGeneration).**

**Jen Masengarb (JM):** Thanks for being here today. Let's jump into the conversation. What sets your school apart from the others here in Chicago?

**Tristan Sterk (TS):** Interior architecture.

**Reed Kroloff (RK):** The heritage of modernism and Mies.

**David Brown (DB):** I think it really is trying to be protective in terms of design — and providing a good theory foundation. And I think we really try to emphasize architecture as a cultural practice. The criticism program in particular, I think, starts to frame the multiple things that people can pursue with architecture.

### Understanding Today's Students

**JM:** What are your students most passionate about?

**DB:** The student groups have been more active in organizing events — inviting faculty to come and speak or touring offices. They are curious about learning from the faculty, and I think more and more, they are trying to learn about [things] beyond the school. We try to foster that they engage the city as much as possible.

**Nicholas Lowe (NL):** [For us], it's professional connections. They want a network that's really clear and they want to be out in the city. Being in Chicago is a big deal for them for sure.

Sustainability is another issue that a lot of students want to talk about, and climate change. They also want to talk about social justice. And they see that as really visible in Chicago in a certain way because of where we are and who we are.



**TS:** They want to make the world a better place — and it comes through several lenses. Sustainability is certainly a lens. Social responsibility is another lens. What they want is mentorship.

**NL:** I'm going to say they're really good at leveraging their peer group. That's another thing I noticed, really, sincerely, that they come in ready to work together.

**RK:** All those things are true, particularly for our students. I would echo the interest in social justice, and I would echo the interest in environmental justice and environmentalism in general. Our students are, because of the nature of the school, very interested in how you make a building. They're all mad for the shop all the time. They can't spend enough time in it, and I would guess that's true at all three schools.



**“... Students are consistently inventive about how they find their way through this, and I think the professionals underestimate them. ... They learn and absorb really, really fast.”**

— REED KROLOFF, ASSOC. AIA (RK), DEAN, IIT COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE



### Architectural Practitioners as Faculty Members

**JM:** You each have many faculty members who are also practicing architects. In what ways are these faculty members shaping the curriculum and the conversations with the students?

**RK:** They are a driving force. I'll give you one example. I'm quite sure this goes on in all our schools. Our fourth year is now a yearlong comprehensive building experience for the students. Five years ago, that didn't exist. Two practitioners have set it up. They have a whole lecture series that brings in engineers, bankers, contractors, client groups of various types — you name it, they all come in. And the students just devour this. ... So, that's had a profound effect.

**TS:** I think probably one of the hardest things for us to do is to find a great teacher, and I think the reason could be particular to our school. Because in our M.O., we don't squish individuals, but we expect them to put

something on the table. And that contributes to the conversation. That places a very high demand on the teacher, as they need a tremendous amount of flexibility because they need to be able to respect creative practices from different points of view. And classes that have people from around the world will have quite a diverse point of view, and so you have a lot of delicate conversations.

One of the most important attributes of a professor who comes [to SAIC] is someone who has the ability to do that. I think our faculty has a very pluralistic approach to design.

**DB:** I think for us, that's probably a little bit of a back and forth. Most of the years, except for the final year of our programs, are team-taught. In terms of the undergrads, there are five or six sections. There's usually somebody that's coordinating. That could be a practitioner, or it could be somebody that's more theory focused. Or it could be a broad generalist — someone who's been teaching for

some time. We often get clustered in types of interest. There are those of us who are more interested in urbanism, for example. In most cases, there are ways in which those studios are getting framed where they're asking questions. And potentially, those questions are coming out of things faculty are encountering in practice.

### Newly Released Building Impact Report on the Gap Between Academia and Practice

**JM:** I'd like to shift the conversation to the new Building Impact report: an independent study that RAND released examining the gap between architectural academia and professional practice. It picks up from the well-known "Boyer Report" (1996) and was commissioned by the AIA, NCARB (National Council of Architectural Registration Boards), with support from ACSA (Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture).

Two quotes from the study jumped out to me.



## “We do wear these three different hats. ... We are information creators, right? ... We have to speak these three basic languages: law, construction and design.”

— TRISTAN STERK (TS), CHAIR, SAIC ARCHITECTURE

Speaking about their program, the faculty member said, “... its core is still conceptual design and ideas because, again, we are teaching for the next 50 years, not the next five years.” Another faculty member captured the dilemma in recognizing the inherent conflict between teaching to “land a job” and teaching “for service of society.”

In the same study, an early licensed practicing professional reflected on their own schooling and the lack of immediately applicable knowledge in transitioning into practice: “It sort of feels like they’re preparing us to be a good design principal 30 years from now rather than the in-between where we work up to that point.”

What are your thoughts on this?

**RK:** We’re teaching for life, I would say, [but here], you get to the nub of the problem with higher education and architecture.

I wasn’t very keen on the RAND report because, like so many other [studies], it stated the problem and then didn’t really offer any kind of meaningful solutions... The one before [the Boyer Report] — got a little closer, right?

**JM:** Do you think that expectations from the profession are wrong, and do you think the expectations from the students are wrong?

**NL:** No, I don’t.

**RK:** They’re not wrong. What’s wrong is the way we’re trying to resolve it. The school saying, “We’ve done everything we can do, now you pick it up.” And the profession saying, “You guys don’t do nearly enough of this.”

But we all set this system up. It’s wrong for all of us. I think that the expectations need to be reconsidered along with how the delivery system works. I would like to see less

[complaining] about it and more people sitting down and saying, “Hey, here are three ideas. Let’s try one.”

**JM:** Are students still wanting to pursue licensure?

**RK:** Yes.

**NL:** Yes.

**RK:** [The number of students interested in licensure] dipped in the 1980s and 1990s and ... now, [it’s] started to ratchet back up again. These kids want to go out and be architects. Not all of them, but the vast majority of them.

**TS:** Very close to all.

**DB:** I started thinking I wanted to be a practicing architect, and then as I was going through school, I ended up pursuing teaching and then everything just evolved from there. ... And I think the base is to have a kind of focus that would enable me to kind of build a body of work that’s a combo of writing and design, but not a traditional practice by any means.

**TS:** If you ask our classes, it is the rare student that doesn’t put up their hand when asked if they want to be licensed. But what does that mean to the students? They want to be a professional. But I think there is a little bit of difference in that insofar as we do have a lot of people who go on to work on the client side.

I look at it a little bit differently. I think it’s simpler. I think the people who come [to SAIC], they want to join the profession because they want to make the world a better place. I don’t think we have to teach about the “50-year problem.” They will find the “50-year problem.” We are preparing them as practitioners to go into the workplace, and I think that’s what they want. All we have to do is to prepare them so that they’re out into the

world and they experience success. And then they blaze their own paths.

**RK:** I agree and I disagree. There’s a perception problem on both sides of the issue, or it wouldn’t show up in reports consistently about what the profession thinks should happen at the end of school and what schools think should happen at the beginning of the profession. But you raise a good point, that students are consistently inventive about how they find their way through this, and I think the professionals underestimate them.

**TS:** I would say there is a general fault in architectural education. The status quo is that we are producing designers.

**RK:** That’s a good point.

**TS:** We do wear these three different hats. If we were to just categorize what we do in this profession, [it’s that] we are information creators, right? We just draw a lot, but we’re also on the telephone. We’re also writing, corresponding. We’re managing legal agreements. We’re on-site. And we have to speak these three basic languages: law, construction and design.

**RK:** We’re talking only about the school side. The professional side should be heard and considered as well on this. And over the years, what I hear from the professional stays relatively consistent, which is: “They’re not learning enough at school. I need them to have more of X or Y.” And so, X and Y may change, but it’s the same argument each time they need to have more of it.

**JM:** Is that a conversation you’re having at UIC, David?

**DB:** It varies student to student. I think it also depends on when students start to pursue

short internship experiences. Compared to forgoing that until they finish [school] and then thinking, “Oh well, now that I’m finished, I need to find a job.” I think that’s where there’s more anxious moments. And I think realizing how they haven’t learned this software yet or somehow there’s some other demand — that becomes a kind of obstacle in terms of the learning.

But I think we really try to emphasize the kind of learning and education and not trying to teach to specific things too much. Students might start to incorporate Revit on their own. It’s not something we teach specifically, but I think that’s what they’re hearing that a lot of offices want Revit. ... But for teaching, it already seems to set so many parameters before students have even had a chance to think through: “Do I want this to be this material or some other aspect?”

### AIA Chicago’s Role in Supporting Emerging Professionals

**JM:** Let’s shift the conversation again. A few years ago, our Chapter changed our bylaws to have three student directors on our board of directors — one from each of your institutions within our Chapter’s boundaries — rather than rotating between schools every three years. This has really strengthened our ties to your schools because it’s the AIAS chapters that appoint that person. We also restructured our staff team and now have Allison Garwood Freedland serving as director of outreach, who, as one part of her role, is the liaison to the students and faculty. And as a result, we’re seeing more of your students at our programs, which we’re delighted to see. We have over 600 student members at AIA Chicago.

We’re thinking about our roles — as a Chapter and Foundation—to help students bridge the gap between academia and professional practice. What does that last year of school or first year after graduation look like for them? How do we better support your students and new grads?

**NL:** Is it about facilitating working opportunities between schools and professional offices? ... What else?

**RK:** Maybe this chapter — working with three very willing, different, and interesting schools

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- Minor in Architectural Studies
- Master of Architecture (MArch)
- Master of Science in Architectural Studies
- Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture
- Doctor of Philosophy in Landscape Architecture





**“I think we really try to emphasize architecture as a cultural practice. Through the criticism program in particular, I think starts to frame the multiple things that people can pursue with architecture.”**

— DAVID BROWN (DB), ACTING DIRECTOR, UIC SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE



EVENING CUE

— could be a place to invent something that helps span that gap and keeps people from falling into the chasm. Truly inventive.

**DB:** How can you help students find means to fill some gaps? Without being made to feel like somehow the education that they’ve been getting, from one place compared to another, is, quote, unquote, “failing.” To understand that they have different weights and to appreciate the different weights but then also begin to say here are some means where, if you feel like you need more understanding of this aspect, here are some ways in which you can find that out or pursue it. Finding means where students just continue to broaden their understanding.

**TS:** I think the Chapter is wonderful, and the [Wing] mentorship program is brilliant, and our students love it. The reason why it’s so successful is because it motivates them ... the relationships that they build through AIA are very important and useful to them. Like I said, I think you’re doing everything right with that.

**JM:** What if we were to do something each fall on the topic: “You’ve graduated! Now what?” What would that look like?

**RK:** Oh, that could be a lot of fun. That could be a set of seminars.

**NL:** Is it an annual or a semiannual thing?

**RK:** Maybe there’s a way that AIA Chicago becomes the clearinghouse for student internships. It could be tied to the schools. We could all figure out a way that they get a certain amount of academic credit. I know we could work that out. And it’s not mandatory, it’s voluntary. ... This is what I mean by doing something creative in Chicago, something that’s different. We can all stand up and blaze a path of innovation.

**NL:** The National Council for Preservation and Education has an incredible internship piece of their website. Having something local like that would be really, really effective. I think [internships] are the biggest question I’m getting all the time.

**TS:** Maybe if that’s too difficult, see if you can extend your mentorship program. Maybe every intern in the city has a mentor. We keep talking about internships. That’s one person going to a firm.

**RK:** There’s another possibility. That an internship has a group of internship managers who have a cohort with whom they work to pass on their knowledge.

**TS:** It’s a pluralistic mentorship. Have different mentees. And they all kind of work together.

**RK:** I mean, there are ways. I just love the idea that two years from now, we’re the city that the whole rest of architecture is looking at.

► **We want to hear from you.** Reflecting on your own journey from student to professional, what support would have made that transition easier, and how can AIA Chicago facilitate that?

Share your thoughts or interest in getting involved by writing to us at [editor@aichicago.org](mailto:editor@aichicago.org). Your response could be featured on AIA Chicago’s blog or in a future issue of *Chicago Architect*.



**“Sustainability is another issue that a lot of students want to talk about, and climate change. They also want to talk about social justice.”**

— NICHOLAS LOWE (NL), HISTORIC PRESERVATION CHAIR, SAIC

# Hearing from Schools Across Illinois



**Francisco Rodríguez-Suárez, FAIA, Director and Clayton T. Miers Professor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

## What sets U of I apart from other schools of architecture?

The University of Illinois has a remarkable history, being the oldest public school of architecture in the U.S. and the first to graduate both a male and a female architect. But aside from celebrating history, it is quite conscious of its mandate to engage the important issues of our time, as our graduates become leaders in Chicago — arguably one of the world’s epicenters of architecture culture and practice. We are committed to providing this carefully calibrated balance between memory and desire at a cost that is affordable to the widest possible cross-section of society.

A significant number of our undergrads receive their education tuition-free through the Illinois Commitment, and a large percentage of our grad students actually get paid to go to school through research and teaching assistantships. Furthermore, when our students travel every semester to Asia, Europe, Latin America, or Sanaa’s Grace Farms, the experience is fully funded by grants or alumni gifts.

## From your perspective, what is most critical in bridging the gap for students between academia and professional practice?

As a practicing architect and a studio instructor, one of my first initiatives was to revamp our design offering through robust curricular changes, changes to faculty recruiting, and a conscious expansion of our footprint to Chicago and abroad. The creation of an Alumni Board with some of the most important architecture leaders in the city paved the way for an innovative initiative of collaborations not only with the Chicago Architecture Center but also with design firms where students are embedded within their spaces or directly collaborating with their design teams. Similarly, we are converting our Chicago Studio into a community engagement hub, providing

students the unique opportunity to work directly with community leaders on real challenges that require design solutions.



**Sean M. Gallagher, AIA, Professor, Judson University**


## What sets Judson University apart from other schools of architecture?

As a faith-based

institution, our program seeks to develop our students as leaders that shape the world through the vocation of architecture. Stewardship of the environment and a love for others in our service to the profession are paramount. A very practical distinctive feature of our program is

the yearlong preceptorship following a student’s fourth year, which allows our students a reality-based experience before returning to complete the Master of Architecture.

## From your perspective, what is most critical in bridging the gap for students between academia and professional practice?

Critical to bridging the gap between school and life as a professional is the need to establish an attitude of concern and care for continuous learning. The fluidity of the profession in terms of all aspects of practice demands that graduates be nimble with their professional and interpersonal skills. As graduates find themselves in a constantly shifting landscape of evolution in architecture, it’s imperative that students be prepared for and embrace the changes and take leadership as an opportunity to encourage community flourishing. 

## ► Snapshot of the Pipeline Between Academia and Licensed Architects in Professional Practice

### NATIONALLY

According to NCARB’s (National Council of Architectural Registration Boards) most recent 2024 report, architecture schools’ increasingly diverse graduates are making their way into the pool of licensed architects.

### IN 2024

**40% of newly licensed architects are women**

*(By comparison, 27% of currently licensed architects across the country are women.)*

**33% of newly licensed architects are people of color**

*(By comparison, 20% of currently licensed architects across the country identify as people of color.)*

Of architectural licensure candidates who took the Architecture Registration Examination® (ARE):

**46%** are women

**48%** are people of color

Source: NCARB *By the Numbers*

### IN CHICAGO

AIA Chicago’s Associate members *(those with an architectural degree but unlicensed)*

Asian **18%**

Black/African American **5%**

Caucasian **34%**

Hispanic/Latino **10%**

Middle Eastern **2%**

Other Race/ None Selected/ Prefer Not to Say **31%**



**Scott Steffes, AIA, LEED AP**, Principal, Chicago Architecture Leader at Wight & Company, and **Sheri Andrews, AIA, LEED AP BD+C**, Principal at Valerio Dewalt Train Associates. EVENING CUE

# BEHIND THE SCREENS

“Behind the Screens” is a series developed by AIA Chicago's Editorial Advisory Committee to highlight the members of the chapter. Throughout the year, this series will showcase Fellows, Architects, Associates, and Affiliate members. If you'd like to nominate someone, please write to [editor@aiachicago.org](mailto:editor@aiachicago.org).

**NAME**

Scott Steffes, AIA,  
LEED AP

**TITLE**

Principal, Chicago  
Architecture Leader

**COMPANY**

Wight & Company

**DEGREE(S)**

Bachelor of Science in  
Architecture, Iowa  
State University

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Knowledge  
Community;  
Education Committee;  
Diversity Scholarship  
Mentor; Architects  
in Schools

**NAME**

Sheri Andrews, AIA,  
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**TITLE**

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Train Associates

**DEGREE(S)**

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The Ohio State  
University; Master of  
Architecture,  
Washington University  
in St. Louis

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Community

**What advice would you give to a younger version of yourself?**

**Scott Steffes:** Think big and aim high, as the opportunities in this world are endless. For example, give it your all and pursue that dream job right after graduation. Move somewhere exotic. Say yes to (almost) all opportunities early in your career, and don't be afraid to take on more responsibility than you think you are capable of. Risk, especially early in life, can be quite rewarding. As you get more established in your role and comfortable with your ambitions, focus intently on your primary goals and aspirations. Above all, listen to your heart. It's typically your best guide.

**Which building or public space in Chicago do you wish you had the opportunity to work with the team that designed it?**

**Scott:** John Hancock Tower. I have heard stories about the intense collaboration between Bruce Graham and Fazlur Khan to mix architectural ambition and engineering innovation, and then how they poetically worked with the development team and the city to create a narrative around the notion of a mixed-use tower that expressed its function in an aesthetically iconic way.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

**Sheri Andrews:** I love landscapes, especially those that are honest and brutal in ways that the planet engages with all living things. Vacations in Chile, Iceland, and Arizona — all of which offer spectacular, amazing landscapes — exposed me to spaces that provide a sense of place that was defined in uniquely different ways. Within these landscapes there are also an infinite number of textures that inspire geometry, structure, and order. The complexities can be subtle but critical to the overall ecosystem. I find these elements inspiring; they are translatable to my work in the built environment.

**Scott:** I find inspiration through deeply understanding a project's history and context, uncovering the layers that shape a place and its people. From there, I'm driven by the potential to create architecture that makes a meaningful, positive impact on those who interact with it. A successful project for me is when I see people using the space and know that I have made a difference in someone's life.

**What gets you out of bed in the morning?**

**Scott:** The alarm on my phone and two swipes of the snooze button typically get me out of bed in the morning. But after that, I'm most driven by the multitude of projects and collaborations I work on daily. In many ways, my life feels like an ongoing decathlon. I'm typically juggling multiple initiatives, thoughts, deadlines, and priorities. There is usually an abundance of excitement and rarely a dull moment.

**What is one item on your desk that you cannot live without?**

**Sheri:** Post-its®. It needs to be the paper version, no virtual Post-it. I admit that more than once, Post-its have traveled on my laptop from the office to home. They are my reminders, my to-do list, and my basic organizational tools. I must add I feel a great sense of achievement when I remove a Post-it from my desk and toss it in the recycling bin.

**Scott:** Sheri and I share the same passion for Post-its.

**What, or who, has inspired you to become an architect?**

**Sheri:** Looking back, my childhood experiences of buildings and spaces created lasting memories of a specific point in time in my life. I distinctly remember the houses of my childhood friends: the room layouts, the stair layouts, the smells. I was fascinated by why one house had a mother-in-law in suite over the garage and the other did not. Unknowingly and in the simplest form, I believe I stepped into the profession to understand why people are drawn to one house versus another. In broader terms, what attracts people to a space or a building, and how can I create that space for them?

**What has been a considerable challenge or obstacle as an architectural professional, and how are you working to overcome it?**

**Scott:** My biggest challenge in this profession has always been finding enough time in the day. There never seems to be enough of it. In college, I fondly remember pulling all-nighters in the studio with my fellow studio mates, having lengthy, detailed discussions about concepts and aspirations. This mentality followed me through my years at KPF in New York and into my mid-career at SOM in Chicago, where I learned a tremendous amount about architecture, collaboration, and myself through countless hours with my colleagues. This entire perspective changed when my son and daughter were born. Now, I'm more of a morning person, and spending time with my family is often at the top of my mind. I still struggle with having enough time, but I'm working on it every single day.

**What does equity mean to you?**

**Scott:** Equity is important in our field in so many ways. From a social justice perspective, equity means fairness and justice in distributing resources, opportunities, and treatment, especially for historically marginalized groups. It's about recognizing systematic inequalities and taking active steps to correct them. We also need to focus on environmental, educational, and economic equities. Architecture gives us the unique opportunity and challenge to address all of these areas through our work.

**What is the most effective step you've taken in your work toward a more equitable built environment?**

**Sheri:** I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to work with one client who has made it a priority to design

an equitable experience for all guests, which is the Shedd Aquarium. As the lead architect for the Shedd's Centennial Commitment, our design approach aligned with Shedd's three pillars: "For People, For Communities, and For Aquatic Life." Focusing on people, it was important to create inclusive spaces that are welcome for all. For decades, the accessible entry was far from the main historic entry; it was around the corner on the lower level of the building and through cramped and compromised spaces. It was confusing and disorienting. We worked with the Shedd to create an entirely new sequence, opening the old accessible entry to provide a newly designed place of arrival. The new design is both more equitable — everyone comes in the same door — more pleasant and better functioning, with a seamless security checkpoint and ticket taking, opening to a bright, double-height, daylight space.

**What is the most effective step you've taken in your work toward a more sustainable built environment?**

**Scott:** While I'm proud to say that I've worked on multiple net-zero and highly sustainable buildings; the most effective step I've taken is to practice being a steward to the environment within my own life. My wife and I try our best to reduce/reuse, limit energy consumption, live modestly, and practice what we preach. By default, this permeates into my projects and more effectively impacts our built environment. I'm fortunate that this same sustainable mentality is part of the DNA of Wight & Company, so it is a natural fit.

**What is one actionable way that young designers can positively impact climate change in their firms?**

**Sheri:** I really encourage young designers to be active outside their firms with different climate awareness organizations, such as the Living Futures Institute, USGBC, WELL, and others. Attend Greenbuild! Bring your knowledge and network back to educate others in your firm and bring actionable examples and innovative ideas to clients as well. Then, take action on your awareness. For example, bring in specialists for a focus session on a climate action topic; your actions advance the awareness of others. Be an advocate for learning and then adopting best practices firmwide. Help your leadership set a higher bar.

**What change would you like to see in Chicago's built environment?**

**Scott:** It would put a big smile on my face if we could have a notably more efficient and equitable public transit system.

Some aspects of our current system work well, but a more holistic and efficient system would be a game-changer for the city and our environment.

**What is your favorite quote about architecture?**

**Sheri:** "The acceptance of certain realities doesn't preclude idealism. It can lead to certain breakthroughs."  
— Rem Koolhaas

I reference this quote often as obstacles pop up on a project. For example, the profession provides many curveball realities: budget, code, existing conditions that you can't possibly know until you've opened the walls.

For me, his suggestion is a simple shift in mindset, which allows me to see opportunities for solutions as opposed to obstacles to overcome. It is a helpful reset during stressful moments of a project.

**What is one actionable step that an architect or designer can take to set themselves on the path of becoming a leader within their firm?**

**Sheri:** Joining a committee or board outside the firm. When I first joined CREW (Commercial Real Estate Women) Chicago in 2011, my membership sponsor insisted that I join two committees. It was great advice. Not only was it a wonderful way to meet CREW members, but our work through the committees was also incredibly rewarding.

**Scott:** One of the best pieces of advice I received about being an effective leader is to always find ways to help those around you. Strong leaders look to elevate and mentor whenever possible. This can be formalized mentoring and support, but it can also be informal and more subtle. Even as a young architect, find ways to help your peers, guide the newer members, step up, and assist a struggling colleague. Something as simple as taking notes during a meeting with senior leadership helps build you as a leader. Small or large, practice these acts every day to be an effective leader.


**What is one leadership course or program that you have taken that has been valuable in your career and why?**

**Sheri:** I feel that I have benefited from the Ladders to Leadership program through the Chicago Women in Architecture Foundation. The application to the inaugural year of Ladders to Leadership arrived in my inbox at a critical point in my career when I was looking to define my place as a woman in the design industry. The program introduced us to firm and cultural leaders, primarily women, within the design and construction world. The speakers shared professional guidance, their own growing

pains, leadership wins and losses that have sculpted their careers. For many of the participants, these stories resonated and were applicable to our own situations.

One key takeaway from the program: It takes a lot of people to make someone a great architect. We all need our own personal board of directors: hand-picked friends and colleagues to advise, mentor, and gut check as we continue our professional growth. Think about having your own CFO to advise on your personal finances, your own chief marketing officer to explain how you should be recognized for your accomplishments, your own HR adviser to help you with conflict resolution, a chief operations officer to suggest

more efficient processes, your own chief technology officer, and on and on. Through our community, we grow.

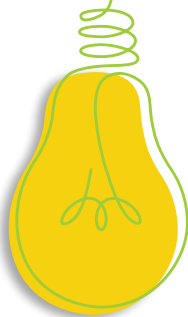
It was through our Ladders to Leadership cohort that I became aware of the co-chair opening with the AIA Chicago Practice Management Knowledge Community (PMKC). With the PMKC, Co-Chair Scott Steffes and I bring education and networking opportunities to AIA Chicago and the design community. Building off our recent sessions, Storytelling Through Social Media, Intellectual Property Principles, Working for Yourself, and the Business Acumen series, the future sessions promise continued leadership growth awareness. It has been a joy to bring these events to life, and we are excited to continue the leadership dialogue. 

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