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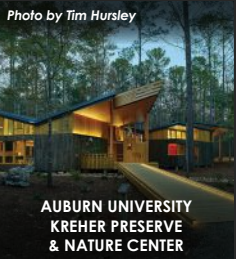
ON THE COVER

Gable House
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MASS TIMBER

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING THAT'S STRONG BY NATURE.

Photo by Tim Hursley

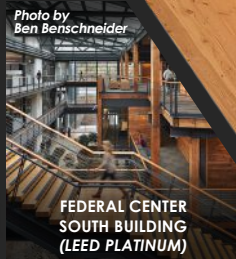


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CORE REDEVELOPMENT

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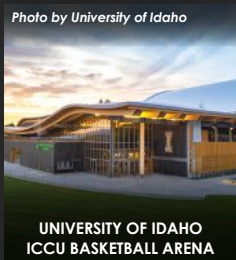


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editor's letter



Curtis Ehler, AIA
Editor, Iowa Architect

The first building created by humans was likely a home. Our earliest ancestors were nomadic, yet even they required a place of shelter and protection from the elements. While we are often inspired by the remarkable ruins of ancient pyramids and temples, the oldest known structure is far more personal and ordinary: a simple tent crafted from mammoth bones.

Whether an ephemeral encampment or a robust château, we all need a place to live. A dwelling may be a transient porch—or something more permanent and intentional. A house can be a gathering place for family, a private retreat, a workspace, a gallery, or simply a place of rest. Some dwellings are designed for simplistic and minimal living; others as a container for one's possessions and collections. As Le Corbusier put it, "The home should be the treasure chest of living." It is a place for both belongings and belonging.

Engaging architects can be vital in meeting the expectations and delights of the client. The design of one's home is a deeply personal matter, and the process of crafting one's place of living can be both vulnerable and rewarding.

Please join me as we seek to uncover how Iowa architects collaborate with clients and homeowners to create spaces for living, whether for mainstream inhabitants or those individuals seeking deeper roots.

"I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself." – Maya Angelou

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Correction: In the Winter 2026 issue, we listed the incorrect designation for Kianna Lechtenberg on page 5. It should have appeared as "Kianna Lechtenberg, Assoc. AIA."

Honoring Community Dedication Through the Citizen Architect Program

AIA recognizes members who advocate for the profession through community leadership.

WORDS: JESSICA SEARS

Since 2008, the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter's (AIA Iowa) Citizen Architect Program has recognized AIA Iowa members who exemplify AIA's value of public service in their community. There are two pathways for AIA Iowa members to become eligible participants. The first is for those who serve as an appointed or elected member of a government committee, council, or body at the local, county, regional, or state level. The second is for those who serve as a volunteer for a nonprofit organization that benefits people in need, their community, or the state—all while advocating for AIA Iowa's core principles of quality design, sustainability, and livable communities.



This year, AIA Iowa recognizes Kevin Eipperle, AIA, president and architect of FEH Design and past president of AIA Iowa, for his work and dedication with the Foundation for

Dubuque Public Schools (FDPS). FDPS provides funding for myriad services and programs that cannot be provided by the school district. Through FDPS, students receive opportunities they otherwise would not have. Some of the programs include raising money to pay off school lunch debt, providing musical instruments, paying for field trip costs, donating high school shop tools, and interacting with students about careers. Eipperle has served in most of FDPS' leadership roles, including as president. He also leads the Governance and Nominations Committee to ensure a strong board makeup to meet FDPS' goals.

"As public-school systems continue to struggle to meet the financial needs of students and staff, foundations like ours

become even more important in creating awareness, providing a conduit for private funding sources, and letting students and staff know of the community support for them," says Eipperle.

Growing up, Eipperle showed a propensity toward architecture, excelling in math and drawing skills. Now, one of his areas of expertise is designing educational facilities. He's worked on many school facilities around the country and within his local community. In 2007, he was recruited to serve on the FDPS board, and he's helped the foundation grow since. Eipperle remains passionate and dedicated to architecture: "Architects have the tools to help with facility needs, organization, and project planning."

Coupling architectural skill with community service brings safety and security, more amenities, and reduced crime. Investing in communities helps attract and retain people, and businesses

thrive. "At its most basic level, community service is about caring for our neighbors. Everyone has struggles at different times, and anyone can help to raise them up. In today's world, there should be enough for everyone. Anyone who receives help knows that other people care about them. They belong."

"At a higher level, the hundreds of service organizations in our community make that community a better place to live. When we can elevate one, it uplifts all."

— KEVIN EIPPERLE, AIA,
PRESIDENT AND ARCHITECT
OF FEH DESIGN

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE
2026 AIA IOWA CITIZEN ARCHITECT PROGRAM.

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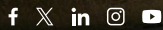


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The Blanchard Bethune Fellowship Award: AIA Strategic Council

LINDA SCHEMMELE, AIA

Linda Alfson Schemmel, AIA, has been a strong advocate for our profession and the Iowa architectural community for decades. Early in her career as an architect, at a time when there were fewer women working in practice and fewer yet in firm leadership roles, Schemmel decided that her best chance at becoming a firm leader was to start her own practice.

WORDS : NATHAN KALAHER, AIA

After several years of successful practice, Schemmel found herself increasingly working and volunteering with communities—and the City of West Des Moines in particular. When an opening arose in the West Des Moines Development Services Department, it provided Schemmel with the opportunity to work directly for the city—and to have an impact on the community in new ways. After taking that opportunity, Schemmel notes, “I quickly learned that there is a big difference between the business world and the public sector.” One positive was that the city encouraged the kind of volunteering and advocacy that have become a big part of Schemmel’s life. Schemmel’s public sector position provided a more consistent 8-to-5 workday than firm management offered, making it easier in some ways for Schemmel to spend more time volunteering with various groups for the betterment of our profession.

Even in college, it was clear to Schemmel that the American Institute of Architects (AIA) had a big role in the architectural community in Iowa. And, given Schemmel’s natural draw toward being engaged in community, it wasn’t long until she became active in the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa), eventually serving as the president in 2013 (while simultaneously sitting on the State Licensing Board). I asked Schemmel, who has served as the Iowa representative to the AIA Strategic Council and now serves as a regional director for the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), how she was able to be so effective while moving from the state level to the national level

in both NCARB roles and AIA roles. Schemmel’s response: “You cut your teeth so to speak at the state level as you gain institutional knowledge and local and regional perspective.” While serving at the national level, her roles have been “less about micro current issues at a management level and more about long-term visioning and anticipating future issues and trends.” In many ways, that long-term visioning is where Schemmel’s career with the City of West Des Moines has evolved as well.

Schemmel is quick to point out that one of the greatest differences she sees at the national level is hearing about others’ perspectives from around the nation. “With the added perspectives, you learn how similar issues may affect different places in different ways. You learn there are commonalities, and you learn which things have worked in other places that may be effective in yours,” Schemmel states. “There is something almost magical about the profession, with how we are able to help make real change in the real world from our ideas.” Schemmel adds, “We are trained in school and in practice to be problem-solvers, which is a value to so many areas of the work world.”

Schemmel exemplifies the fact that as creative problem-solvers, we as architects can be effective in many venues and fields beyond the traditional architectural firm-based roles. Through her work in envisioning a better future for the community she works with, to being a strong example of an entrepreneurial firm leader, to her state and national leadership roles with AIA and NCARB, Schemmel has been an advocate for the profession and its role as a protector of the public.




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U.S. Pavilion Exhibition at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia:

A Homecoming

WORDS : PETER MACKEITH, ASSOC. AIA, DEAN AND PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE, FAY JONES SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
PHOTOS : TIM HURSLEY (ABOVE) AND MATT NIEBUHR (NEXT PAGE)

A recent *New York Times* article described a growing “sourbread baker” movement across the United States: enterprising home-based entrepreneurs, who by and large distribute their baked loaves to their local customers from their front porches, via a trust-based pickup shelf. The combination of the front porch as the projection of a home economy, coupled with the reliance on local ingredients and community trust, all suffused with the aroma of freshly baked bread (what could be more evocative of home?) makes a powerful, emblematic case for the American front porch as a signifier for that place called *home*.

Writing from the vantage point of a co-commissioner who led the U.S. Pavilion exhibition at the recently concluded 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, the *Times*’ article resonates deeply. This shared perception of the porch’s value in American life was one of many motivations leading to our exhibition at the Pavilion, titled *PORCH: An Architecture of Generosity*. As we described it more generally: “an exhibition focused on the representation of the United States of America, at its best, in architectural means and in national character, through the contemporary manifestation of ‘the porch’—of that

quintessentially constructed American place that is at once social, environmental, tectonic, performative, hospitable, generous, democratic.”

The *Times*’ article provides a specific understanding of the value of the porch in everyday life—and at the residential scale; through the *PORCH* exhibition, we proposed that there were many “porches” in our daily and civic lives, at many scales, in many climates, sheltering many activities, accomplishing many good purposes. To a large extent, we proposed that the United States can be understood, literally and metaphorically, as a nation of porches. In doing so, without nostalgia or sentimentality, we implicitly suggested that the comprehension of a nation of porches might lead to a comprehension of a collective sense of homecoming in American life.

In the exhibition we constructed and curated, these gentle ambitions were given an essential multivalency through the contributions of a community of American architects, landscape architects, designers, artists, and authors, through large- and small-scale constructions. Central to the experience of the exhibition were 54 “porch-windows,” each designed and crafted



by 54 participant practices from across the country, selected through an open-call, juried competition. These “windows” were evocations of the porch in American life, in American cities, communities, and landscapes—each with a focused worldview, often extremely tactile and full of sensory appeal.

In this context, the RDG Planning & Design window, which focused on their project in Fort Worth, Texas, the Lake Como Park Pavilion, was exemplary. A sculptural installation designed as a public space to encourage dialogue and community connection, the Lake Como Park Pavilion highlights the community’s spirit of “Do Something GOOD for Your Neighbor.” In the exhibition, the representation of the pavilion in the RDG window gave visual and tactile substance to that goodwill.

“We are a nation of houses; we are a nation of porches.”

— PETER MACKETH, ASSOC. AIA

As artist and designer Matt Niebuhr, RDG co-designer, describes, *“The weathering steel sculpture is conceived as both a literal and figurative frame for the community. Framing the natural beauty of the neighborhood park while also framing community, the gap in the frames is bridged by the recognition of community leaders. The walls of the sculpture are engraved with stories of this African American community coming together and celebrating values we all strive to fulfill. Expressing both an inward and outward commitment to community and participation, there is a space where the frames remain open where the sunlight shines down and highlights accomplishments while also suggesting there is much more work to do. ...”*

The presence of an Iowa-based practice in the Biennale may have surprised some visitors and seemed exceptional to others. The RDG contribution, however, was essential—not only for how clearly it amplified the exhibition’s theme but also for how it represented the strength of architectural practice in Iowa and, more broadly, the quality of work occurring across the country, often beyond the established centers of media and culture. If the porch represents the best of American life, so too can that quality be found in Iowa.

on the boards

Projects
In Progress



Goldfinch Lofts



Des Moines, Iowa

Knop Killeen Architects

Situated at the corner of Ingersoll Avenue and 35th Street in Des Moines, Goldfinch Lofts is a three-story mixed-use development setting a new benchmark for sustainable design. The project features ground-level retail and restaurant spaces with 28 mixed-income apartments above, offering one- and two-bedroom units.

The residential levels are targeting PHIUS (Passive House Institute U.S.) Certification, while the entire building aims to achieve Zero Carbon Certification through the International

Living Future Institute, positioning it to become the nation's first Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) project to earn this distinction and Iowa's first Passive House-certified multifamily building. Utilizing a mass timber structural system, Goldfinch Lofts expresses sustainability through both performance and beauty, delivering a warm, natural aesthetic that reflects its ambitious environmental mission.



Financial Center Residential Conversion



Des Moines, Iowa

Slingshot Architecture

Originally constructed in 1973, the Financial Center was a huge driver for commercial investment in downtown Des Moines—the tallest building in Iowa when built, the collaboration between two local banking entities was a major catalyst toward establishing downtown as the business hub it is today. Slingshot Architecture was engaged in 2023 to provide design services for the adaptive

reuse of the first 18 stories, which will provide more opportunities for downtown living and new shared building amenities—all while navigating both state and federal historic tax credits, awarded in 2024. Reconfiguration includes 210 apartments with a mix of studio, one-, and two-bedroom units, and high-end amenities, including a shared rooftop park and pool. Replacement of original mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems, which had reached the end of their effective lifespan, and extensive exterior envelope restoration scope will allow the Financial Center to continue serving Des Moines for another 50-plus years.



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GABLE HOUSE: LIGHT ON THE LAND

By carefully siting the house around a series of curated views and maintaining a deliberately simple palette, the design achieves what the architect describes as “inside-out living.” With a pristine vista to a picturesque postcard view of a neighboring Iowa farm pond and field and deliberately restrained landscaping, the walls fade into the background and dissolve away, giving the illusion that you truly are living as part of the land.

WORDS : EVAN SHAW, AIA **IMAGES :** BRANDON HUTTENLOCHER **ARCHITECT :** KNOP KILLEEN ARCHITECTS





Interior materials were kept simple and limited to smooth drywall, selective wood use, and honed granite counter tops. The leftover dirt from the foundation excavation was gently bermed around the house and planted with native grasses and wildflowers, providing a natural, subtle buffer to the street and grounding the house in the site.

From the moment architect Cody Knop, AIA, set foot on the site, he knew he had stumbled across something special. He had been helping his client look for a place to build a new rural repose, somewhere he could escape the bustle of the business world and unwind after a busy day. Many sites were considered, but this one seemed to have the makings of what they were looking for: a wooded and rural plot, not far from the city, within the convenience of a planned development. It was while standing among the thick brambles and undergrowth that Knop sent up his drone. From that vantage, he could see what the site was hiding: a pristine vista to a picturesque postcard view of a neighboring Iowa farm pond and field.

With the site acquired, the design commenced by arranging the spaces to take advantage of the view to the pond. The program was organized into two distinct forms. One contains the garage, kitchen, and living spaces, which were arranged on axis to maximize views from the living room and to hide the garage doors from the street. The other contains three bedrooms and is oriented perpendicular to the living wing, giving each bedroom its own secluded view into the adjacent landscape. Between the two wings, a glazed flat-roofed entry link provides a delicate connection between the living and sleeping areas and is also oriented to maximize its exposure to the viewshed, thus giving all elements a singular curated experience.

With a tight budget, the building forms and construction techniques were kept deliberately simple and as modular as possible. The identical gable forms harken back to an agrarian-inspired architecture, while the width of each wing was set at 22 feet so that traditional off-the-shelf truss components could be used. Even the ashen gray siding boards were individually laid out to maximize each board length and minimize cutting and waste. Only the gable ends required horizontal seams in the siding. Interior materials were kept simple and limited to smooth drywall, selective wood use, and honed granite countertops. Additionally, all millwork and trim were custom fabricated on-site to precise measurements, a special benefit of having a general contractor who started out their career as a cabinet maker. Even the landscaping was deliberately restrained and kept as natural as possible. The leftover dirt from the foundation excavation was gently bermed around the house and planted with native grasses and wildflowers, providing a natural, subtle buffer to the street and grounding the house in the site.

By carefully siting the house around a series of curated views and maintaining a deliberately simple palette, the design achieves what the architect describes as “inside-out living.” An experience where the walls fade into the background and dissolve away, giving the illusion that you truly are living as part of the land.





BELONGING:

EMERGENCY YOUTH SHELTER TINY HOMES

WORDS: GRANT NORDBY, AIA **IMAGES:** PLAN ARCHITECTURE **ARCHITECT:** PLAN ARCHITECTURE

Because components are placed with care, what might otherwise have felt like a motley assemblage of castaways is knit into an intentional, mutually supportive community—a metaphor, of sorts, for the village and its residents.

Secure

Put yourself in the shoes of a youth who has never known a secure home. Many spend years in foster care after escaping abuse or neglect, only to hit the streets at 18 years old with limited life skills, no family resources, and no credit. According to Youth.gov, nearly half of youths aging out of the foster care system experience homelessness.

Kim Scorza, CEO of the Crittenton Center—a nonprofit providing shelter, counseling, and support services to families and children in crisis—was determined to change that. “We wanted to do better for these kids, to give them a safe and welcoming place they can be proud to call home while they continue to grow in their independent living skills.” The Center decided to create a village of tiny homes facing the shelter and its supportive services.

They approached Sioux City-based PLaN Architecture early. PLaN Architecture—together with contractors and suppliers recruited to the cause—donated their services to stretch a budget cobbled from grants and local donations of money and materials.

PLaN Architecture’s Nathan Kalaher, AIA, explains the private dwellings’ importance to the youth: “So much of their life to this point has been temporary and in flux. Having a place to call their own—a place to store things that they cherish, under their own control—is key to moving toward independence.”

Semi-Autonomous

Kalaher explains, “The idea was to create individual homes where adolescents can learn to cook, bathe, clean, maintain a home, and even pay bills [to establish credit and rental history].”

PLaN Architecture put residents at the center of the design process. “These young people were very clear: They wanted

a space that looked like what a home is to them—with separate rooms, a tub [not a shower], and a gable roof.”

Spaces are planned with care and economy. The back-to-back bathroom and kitchen cluster plumbing and HVAC while separating the bedroom from the living area without a redundant door. Daylight playing on the tall vaulted ceiling creates the impression of great space in what is actually a very compact layout. One interior wall is painted a brilliant accent color to personalize each unit.

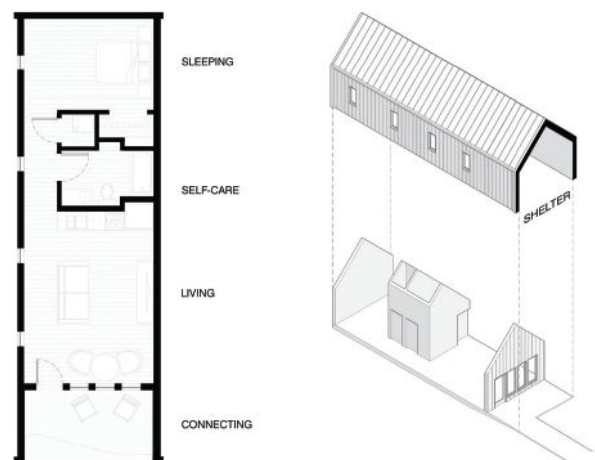
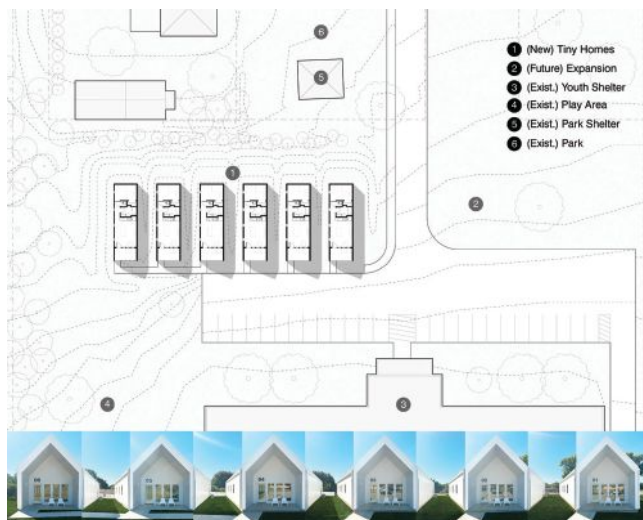
Windows are confined to the porch and one long side of each dwelling. This nestles near the blank rear wall of its neighbor, creating a private outdoor view of what would otherwise be a no-man’s-land.

Connected

The village provides a gradient from private to public spaces—from bedroom and bath, to living area, to private porch nestled companionably beside neighbors, to a shared outdoor commons, and finally to the supportive resources of the shelter. This gives each resident agency by offering them choices among differing degrees of privacy and community—a spatial manifestation of the scaffolded support the Center provides. Each intermediate step is there when it’s needed—until finally, when ready, the birds leave the nest.

Greater than the Sum

Donated and discounted materials provided a constraining palette from which to compose a community. PLaN Architecture embraced, curated, and integrated these constraints. The village is legible as a unified composition because a limited number





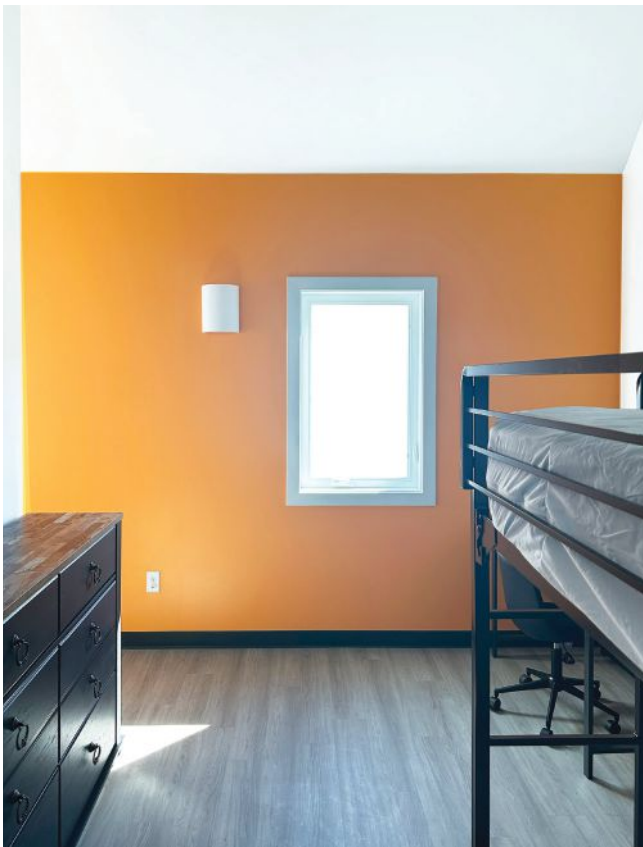
of elements are powerfully repeated with minimal clutter, evoking the visually striking yet humanely integrative social housing projects of Peter Barber.

Crisp, Monopoly-house gabled exteriors are all a brilliant white, serving to visually unify the village while pragmatically improving nighttime security.

Differently sized, donated components are carefully integrated. Their dimensions sometimes necessitate a syncopated rhythm—every third cladding joint aligning with a roof seam, for example. But because components are placed with care, what might otherwise have felt like a motley assemblage of castaways is knit into an intentional, mutually supportive community—a metaphor, of sorts, for the village and its residents.

When asked how it's going for residents, Kalaher reports: "These homes are 100 percent occupied all the time, and they are working. The first residents are now beginning to leave the tiny homes and are finding success in permanent housing." It's difficult to imagine a more fulfilling outcome—a nurturing collaboration giving young lives the shelter they needed for flight.

Clockwise from top: Spaces are planned with care and economy. The back-to-back bathroom and kitchen cluster plumbing and HVAC while separating the bedroom from the living area without a redundant door. Daylight playing on the tall vaulted ceiling creates the impression of great space in what is actually a very compact layout. One interior wall is painted a brilliant accent color to personalize each unit.





DWELLINGS INSPIRED BY PEOPLE AND PLACES

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SPICE BOX: HOMEMADE

WORDS: KIANNA LECHTENBERG, ASSOC. AIA **IMAGES:** SANJAY JANI PHOTOGRAPHY **ARCHITECT:** AKAR ARCHITECTURE



How would you design your own kitchen?

Kitchens are deeply personalized spaces, shaped by daily cooking and family routines, where design choices are often guided less by trends and more by the lives of those who use them. Sanjay Jani, AIA, co-founder of AKAR ARchiTecture, recently renovated the kitchen in his family home. This kitchen renovation tells the story of raw materials, which are reflected in both the design and food preparation. *Spice Box* is a kitchen

that demonstrates the success a designer can find when pulling from lived experience.

A circular spice box helps shape the family's daily routine as it provides storage and organization. This spice box "becomes the source of both the color language and the functional order of the kitchen." The red and orange accent colors, along with warm earth tones used in the kitchen, were carefully selected to match chili powder, turmeric, cumin, and coriander.

Above: This spice box "becomes the source of both the color language and the functional order of the kitchen." The red and orange accent colors, along with warm earth tones used in the kitchen, were carefully selected to match chili powder, turmeric, cumin, and coriander. The creation of the sunroom and the window backsplash flooded the kitchen with natural light and green hues.

Green-toned spices were intentionally left out of the kitchen's color palette, as the kitchen's position overlooks the backyard.

The design team knew the foliage outside would shine through the windows after they demolished the existing wall between the dining room and the kitchen. The creation of the sunroom and the window backsplash flooded the kitchen with natural light and green hues. The window backsplash is both aesthetic and functional. This detail is successful due to the raised shelf that mitigates the amount of food splatter and prevents crumbs from reaching the glass. This also creates clear sight lines in the kitchen, as items can be placed and stored on the shelf while the counter is preserved as a workstation. To the right of the range, there is an operable window in the backsplash that can be opened when smoke fills the kitchen. During the day, sunlight shines through the window, providing natural task lighting. This is especially appreciated by Jani's 84-year-old mother, who cooks twice a day.

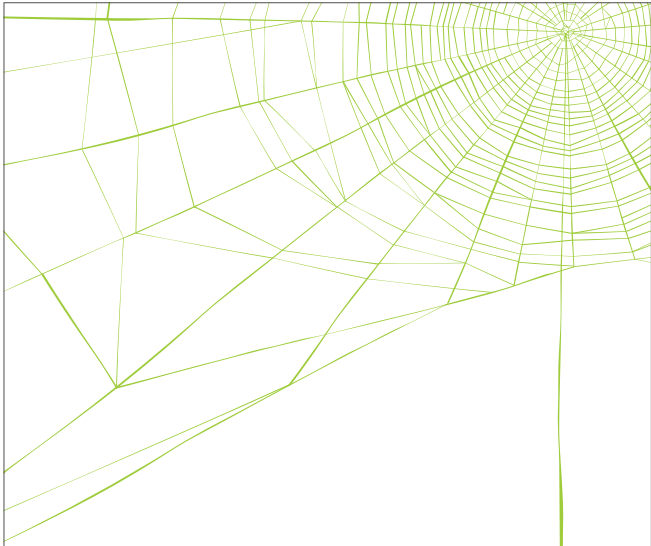
Additional details were customized to fit the habits of Jani's family. The clothing worn in the household, including saris and loose garments, informed the clean design of the cabinets by removing any projecting hardware. This detail prevents clothing from getting caught on handles. The vertical-hinging

upper cabinets allow the user to move efficiently between cupboards. When opened, these cabinet doors create additional sight lines, contributing to the kitchen's modern aesthetic. The quartz countertops help achieve the modern look and feel while also performing well. Turmeric, being a staple of this spice box, was specifically considered. Due to turmeric's bright yellow stain, AKAR ARchiTecture's design team actually created a turmeric paste and tested the staining properties of many different countertop samples before selecting quartz. The family's ceramic collection is also showcased in the kitchen design, further adding to the personalization of the space.

Spice Box reminds us that good design often begins at home. Rooted in culture, routine, and material honesty, this kitchen transforms everyday cooking into a deeply personalized and thoughtfully designed ritual.

Below: Rooted in culture, routine, and material honesty, this kitchen transforms everyday cooking into a deeply personalized and thoughtfully designed ritual. The vertical-hinging upper cabinets allow the user to move efficiently between cupboards. When opened, these cabinet doors create additional sight lines, contributing to the kitchen's modern aesthetic.





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RESTFUL RETREAT

FERRINGTON PLACE: AN INDUSTRIAL DWELLING

WORDS: PAOLO ORLANDO, AIA IMAGES: CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO ARCHITECT: MA ARCHITECTURE



At right: The scale of the space and its dedicated entrance naturally accommodated a single residential unit, maintaining the building's historical programmatic division between industrial workspace below and domestic life above.



At left: MA Architecture's approach centered on balancing preservation requirements with functional necessity.

At 1201 Keosauqua (Keo) Way in downtown Des Moines, a century-old industrial building quietly tells the story of one of Iowa's earliest and most accomplished businesswomen. The Reliable Rug Co. complex stands as a rare surviving example of early 20th-century industrial architecture, constructed in 1910 by Emma Owens Ferrington to house both her thriving rug factory and family apartments. MA Architecture transformed the upper-story apartments into Ferrington Place, a 1,500-square-foot residential unit that honors this heritage while embracing contemporary living.

Ferrington built her enterprise from modest beginnings into what Carolyn M. Ogilvie described in 1910 in *Midwestern* magazine as "one of the most remarkable enterprises in the middle west ... owned and managed by a woman." During her 35-year presidency, Ferrington demonstrated what contemporaries praised as "splendid business judgment, courage, and hard work."

The original two-story structure, built in 1910, predated Keo Way and was originally entered from 12th Street. When Keo Way was created in 1920, a portion of the building's structural masonry was removed, physically truncating the footprint and creating the diagonal facade that now defines the building. A new stone entrance was inserted along this newly formed Keo Way frontage, and the internal stair was reversed to address the new primary entry. The original 1910 wood storefront remains intact along 12th Street, where the former residential stair door now serves a popular local coffee shop.

"I think a lot of people looked at this building," explains Principal Mindy Aust, AIA. "It's difficult to adapt it to a single use." The complex presented significant topographic challenges, including an 8-foot drop from Crocker Street to Keo Way and varying entry conditions along each street frontage. The shifting grade required distinct access strategies, ultimately informing the decision to divide the building into multiple uses, starting with the upper story returning to its original residential function. These were the same apartments where Ferrington and her family once lived. The scale of the space and its dedicated entrance naturally accommodated a single residential unit, maintaining the building's historical programmatic division between industrial workspace below and domestic life above.

The renovation maximized bedrooms while ensuring natural daylight throughout. "Every room in the house has a window," Aust explains. The triangular plan, challenging as it was, offered unexpected advantages: windows on all three sides of the building. This abundance of natural light and the distinctive geometry became defining characteristics of the residential experience.

MA Architecture's approach centered on balancing preservation requirements with functional necessity. The state of Iowa's historic tax credit process mandated preservation of defining elements: original openings, the main staircase, the stone entrance, and plaster surfaces. These constraints became opportunities rather than limitations.

In contrast to the preserved structure, new interior elements are articulated in matte black finishes. Casework and appliances, paired with smooth quartz countertops, are set against restored wood windows, original plastered masonry walls, and stone-trimmed openings. The smooth, dark volumes read as precise insertions within the heavier masonry shell, creating a clear tonal and textural distinction. For Aust, that clarity was essential: "We wanted to show what is new and what is original through material and color contrast."

Project feasibility relied on strategic layering of historic and brownfield tax credits, essential tools for making projects like Ferrington Place economically viable. While new apartment buildings reshape the city fabric, thoughtful rehabilitation of historic structures can offer distinctive living experiences that connect residents to the city's industrial past.

Now surrounded by thriving businesses in a neighborhood that continues to adapt and grow, Ferrington Place remains what it was designed to be: a distinguished urban dwelling that honors both maker and material, past and present.

At right: The triangular plan, challenging as it was, offered unexpected advantages: windows on all three sides of the building. This abundance of natural light and the distinctive geometry became defining characteristics of the residential experience.



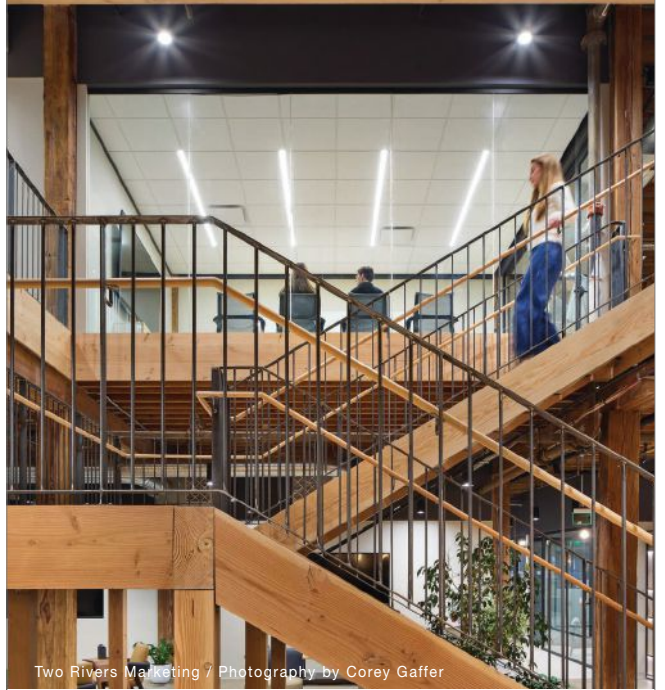
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MACKSON CORNERS:

From Sawdust to River Rooms

WORDS: NATHAN GRIFFITH, AIA **IMAGES:** MERGE URBAN DEVELOPMENT GROUP **ARCHITECT:** SLINGSHOT ARCHITECTURE

Nestled near the center of the city is Mackson Corners, a multi-unit dwelling that connects the best parts of its surroundings to create an easy living experience positioned within walking and biking distance of the university, downtown, and the Fox River. The building section responds directly to the site's water table, grade change, and river adjacency.





Oshkosh, Wisconsin's identity is shaped by its logging history, its summer air shows, and its working-class manufacturing culture. Once home to hardworking loggers who fueled the growth of middle America, the city now attracts those seeking an urban lifestyle with access to outdoor recreation. Nestled near the center of the city is Mackson Corners, a multi-unit dwelling that connects the best parts of its surroundings to create an easy living experience positioned within walking and biking distance of the university, downtown, and the Fox River. This alignment between site, program, and urban context results from a development model refined through long-term collaboration.

Mackson Corners is the product of a trusting collaboration between Merge Urban Development Group and Slingshot Architecture. Over years of working together, the team has transformed communities across Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin with housing and mixed-use buildings. For them, successful dwelling begins with identifying places that share a need for housing, a college population, and access to outdoor recreational space. In their search for cities with these ingredients, they found Oshkosh. Oshkosh fit the bill.

Founded in 1836 on the western shore of Lake Winnebago and along the Fox River, Oshkosh grew from its access to northern white pine forests. These waterways allowed logs to move easily downstream, where they were sawn into lumber and furniture that fueled a growing Midwest. By the mid-19th century, the city earned the nickname "Sawdust City," with sawmills lining the Fox River. Though the forests eventually thinned and the industry moved on, the legacy of industry and growth remained embedded in the city's identity.

More than a century later, Oshkosh experienced renewed momentum. Economic growth returned through air-show tourism and a manufacturing resurgence. The city's waterways evolved from industrial infrastructure into recreational assets, supporting a thriving boating culture. The University of Wisconsin established a satellite campus, bringing a growing student population in need of housing. At the same time, Oshkosh was designated an "opportunity zone," spurring private investment through federal tax incentives, supplemented by local support for urban development. With the conditions for growth in place, the city turned its attention to an underperforming site along the Fox River.

Located near the center of town, the site of Mackson Corners, once home to busy sawmills, was now vacant. The city initiated a redevelopment plan to reinvigorate the waterfront, investing in shoreline reconstruction, the Riverwalk, and new boat docks.

Private development soon followed, populating much of the river's edge and leaving behind a single triangular parcel. While highly desirable, the site presented notable challenges.

Merge and Slingshot recognized the opportunity but also the constraints. Kayakers already used the site for water access, requiring the project to maintain public connectivity. The Riverwalk, newly constructed, could not be physically altered or built upon, yet it remained a major amenity that demanded engagement. A high water table further limited excavation. These constraints directly informed the site plan and building section.

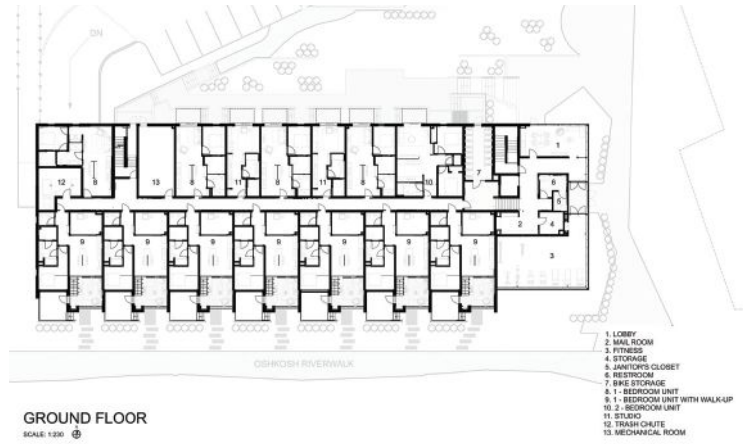
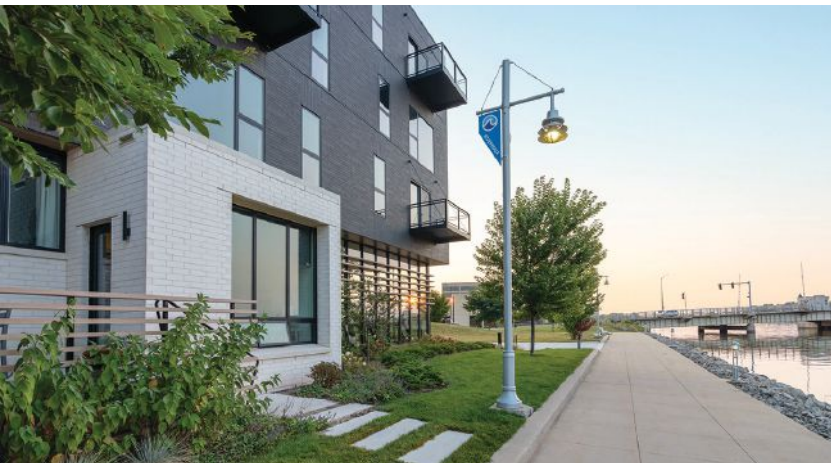
The triangular parcel was organized into a phased development combining housing and ground-level commercial space. Planned as a multiphased development, the project integrates a mix of housing types and commercial space suitable for food, entertainment, and recreation. The first phase establishes parking, walkways, and an outdoor plaza that provides public access to the Riverwalk while doubling as fire truck access. Landscaped pathways gently rise to the first completed building, Mackson Corners, which is organized to fully leverage its waterfront setting.

The building section responds directly to the site's water table, grade change, and river adjacency. Enclosed parking tucks beneath market-rate housing and is sunk 4 feet into the ground, just above the water table. Walk-up units line the street side of the first floor, offering easy access to the city to the north. Along the riverfront, river rooms step down to the Riverwalk level, directly connecting living spaces to the waterfront. These rooms have built-in casework, tall ceilings, and river-facing windows. Shared gathering and fitness spaces on the ground floor and rooftop open toward the water and adjacent plaza, capturing expansive views of the Fox River.

Material choices reinforce the project's connection to place. Light-colored brick masonry anchors the building and references nearby limestone ledges found along Midwestern waterways. Above, dark wood-toned exterior paneling recalls the log rafts once pulled from this very river. Inside, selectively placed wood surfaces create warmth, while neutral finishes recede to frame views of the river and city beyond.

While the logging heritage of Oshkosh now shares the stage with recreation and culture, Mackson Corners supports an easy, connected lifestyle rooted in that history. From the evolution of the city to the transformation of the site, and from spatial organization to material expression, the project brings together industry, landscape, and dwelling to integrate housing with the riverfront's industrial legacy and current recreational use.





Along the riverfront, river rooms step down to the Riverwalk level, directly connecting living spaces to the waterfront. Shared gathering and fitness spaces on the ground floor and rooftop open toward the water and adjacent plaza, capturing expansive views of the Fox River.





WOOLF SUN ROOM:

BUILDING TRUST, ONE ADDITION AT A TIME

WORDS: STEVE MILLER, AIA **IMAGES:** SANJAY JANI PHOTOGRAPHY **ARCHITECT:** AKAR ARCHITECTURE

In the early 1980s, Bill Nowysz, AIA, designed a house in Iowa City for a young family. Decades later, that same family has returned to the house's design lineage three times, now working with Sanjay Jani, AIA, of AKAR ARchiTecture, who once worked alongside Nowysz before eventually becoming his business partner. This continuity of relationship, stretching across 40 years and three additions, tells a story about dwelling that goes beyond square footage and material palettes. It speaks to the kind of trust that allows a home to evolve as thoughtfully as the lives lived within it.

The latest collaboration, the Woolf Sun Room, transforms what was once an underutilized screened porch into a four-season space that deepens the connection between house and garden. "Almost every house I've designed has a screen porch," Jani explains, "and years later, I'm asked to convert them into a four-season room." The original south-facing space was rarely used—too hot in summer, too cold in winter. The new addition addresses this pragmatically while elevating the entire composition through one elegant gesture: an aluminum sunshade that filters light, frames views, and creates a ceremonial gateway to the garden beyond.

"Every room is an instrument, like a toolkit," Jani says. "This room is to connect you to nature. It's an instrument to amplify nature." When it rains, you know it on all three sides. As the sun moves across the sky, shadow patterns shift and dance across the interior, marking time in a way the homeowners have come to cherish. The screen's slats, off-the-shelf aluminum profiles chosen for their economy and lightness, mitigate the harsh southern sun while creating privacy from neighboring houses. They also define an axis that ties together all the outdoor functions, making the simple act of walking to the garden feel intentional, even ceremonial.

The structural clarity is characteristic of both the original house and Jani's design philosophy. Galvanized steel moment frames support walls of glass, their logic exposed rather than concealed. Aluminum T-sections shape the screen with efficient elegance. Silver fiberglass windows allow for slender frames and generous glazing. "There are classic designs in life," Jani reflects. "Blue jeans and a white T-shirt. It's the same in architecture. This classic palette makes it easier."

What makes this project resonate beyond its material elegance is the relationship that made it possible. Working with the same clients across



At left: The Woolf Sun Room transforms what was once an underutilized screened porch into a four-season space that deepens the connection between house and garden. When it rains, you know it on all three sides. As the sun moves across the sky, shadow patterns shift and dance across the interior, marking time in a way the homeowners have come to cherish.



decades means shared language, understood values, and accumulated trust. This familiarity creates space for bolder gestures, the kind that come when architect and client have learned to push boundaries together.

The result is a space that reveals itself slowly, rewarding repeat visits with deeper understanding. “I want to create a layered experience,” Jani says, “where the more you visit, the more you understand why the house was designed.” Every window has a reason. Every design move serves multiple purposes. The sunscreen that shades also sculpts, the frame that supports also defines, and the addition that extends also completes.

In an issue exploring how we dwell, the Woolf Sun Room reminds us that the best homes are never truly finished. They grow with us, shaped by architects who know when to assert and when to defer, when to innovate and when to honor what came before. Forty years on, in a house that continues to evolve, that seems like the ultimate form of dwelling: a home as cultivated as the garden it frames.

Every window has a reason. Every design move serves multiple purposes. The sunscreen that shades also sculpts, the frame that supports also defines, and the addition that extends also completes.





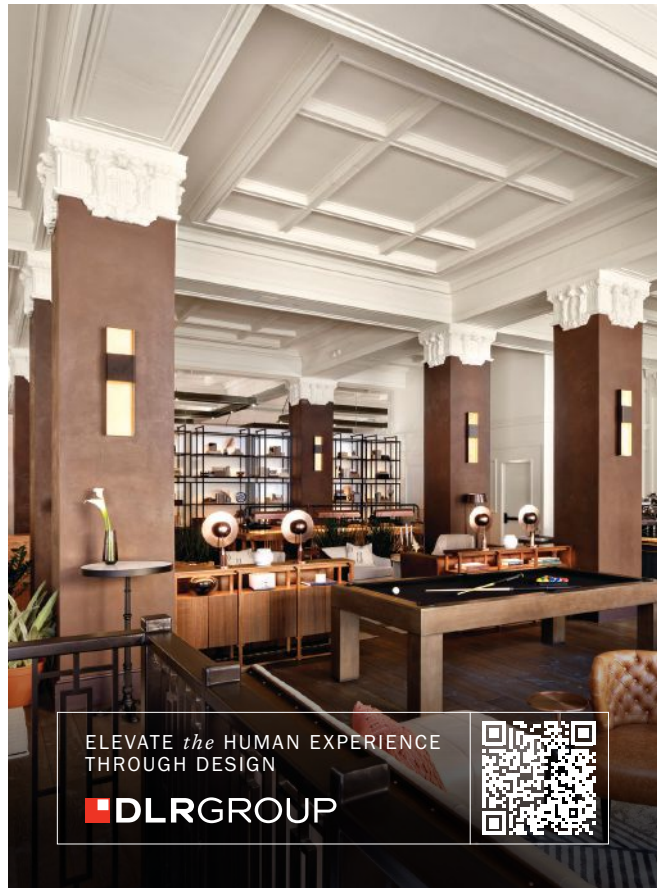
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Civil Engineer: True Engineering
Contractor: Nelson Commercial Construction
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Structural Engineer: Performance Engineering

Spice Box

Location: Iowa City, Iowa
Architect: AKAR ARchiTecture
Contractor: Mike Stych Construction
Photographer: Sanjay Jani Photography

Ferrington Place

Location: Des Moines, Iowa
Architect: MA Architecture
Contractor: Hildreth Construction Services
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio

Mackson Corners

Location: Oshkosh, Wisconsin
Architect: Slingshot Architecture
Civil Engineer: Bolton & Menk
Contractor: GreenFire
Engineer: MODUS
Photographer: Merge Urban Development Group
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes Engineering

Woolf Sun Room

Location: Iowa City, Iowa
Architect: AKAR ARchiTecture
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