

Oculus

Fall 2025

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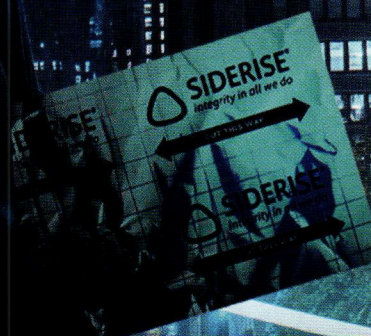
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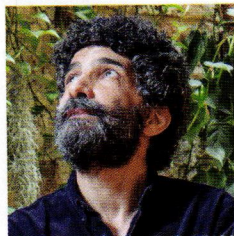
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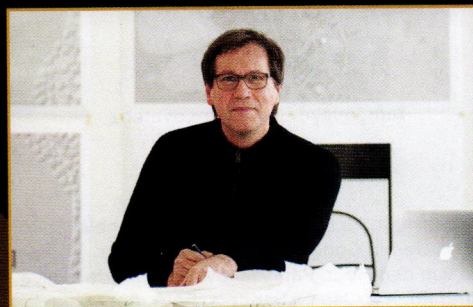
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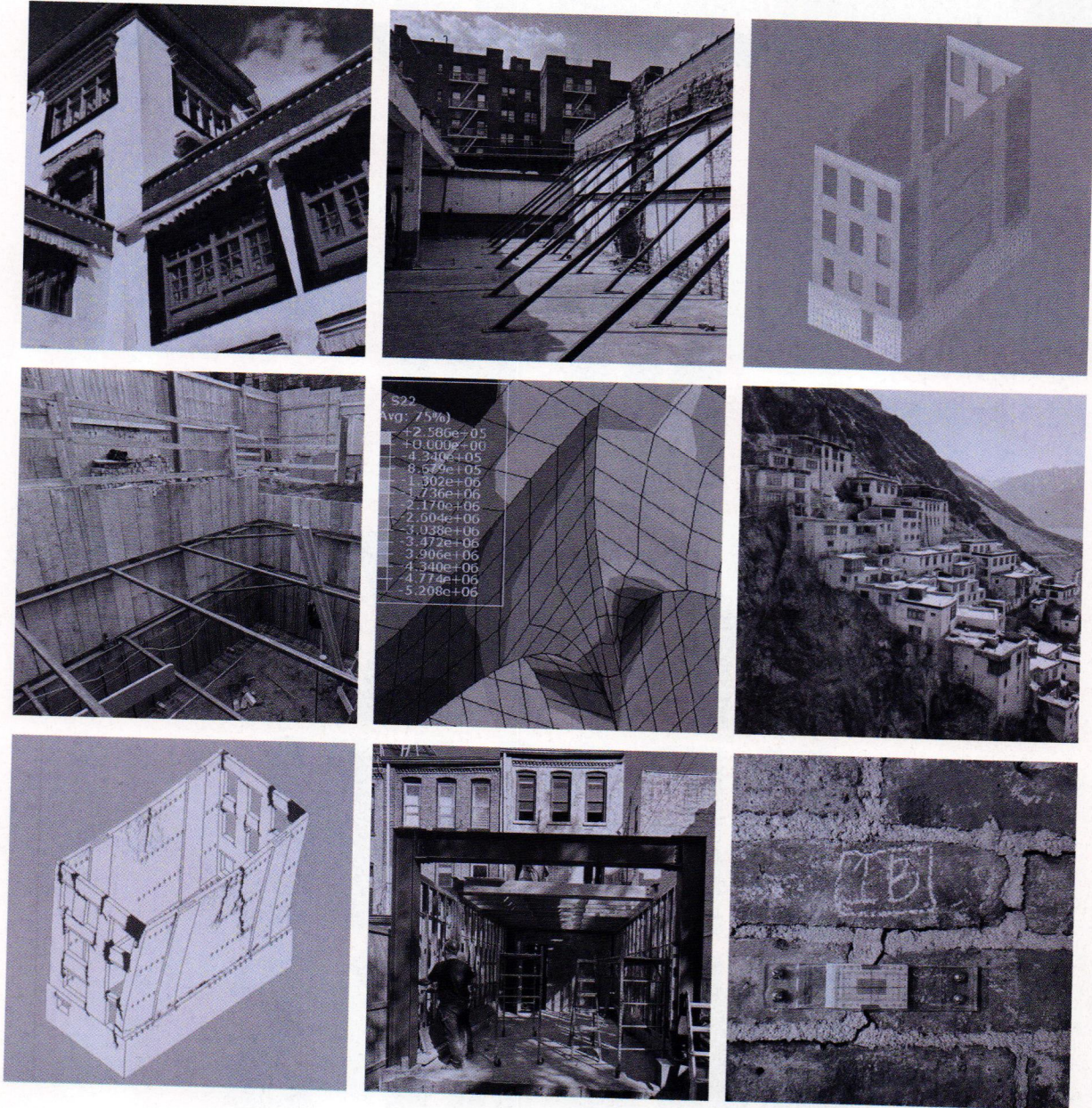
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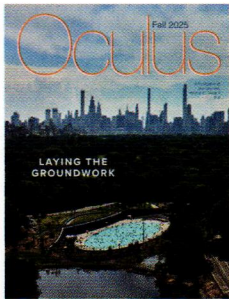
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Cover: An aerial view of Central Park's new Davis Center pavilion and Gottesman Pool, designed by Susan T Rodriguez | Architecture • Design and Mitchell Giurgola in collaboration with the Central Park Conservancy.
Top: Oko Farms, founded by Yemi Amu in 2013, is a publicly accessible outdoor aquaponics farm and education center located at various sites across Brooklyn.

Cover: © Richard Barnes; above: Valery Rizzo, Oko Farms

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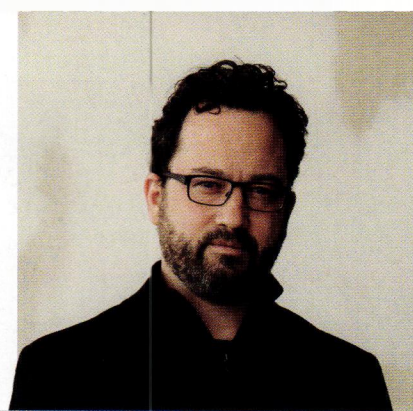
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By Jesse Lazar, Assoc. AIA, Executive
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In the Streets, Together

BY AIANY PRESIDENT **BENJAMIN GILMARTIN**, AIA



Friends:

It's a difficult time. Many of us feel rising anxiety and concern about the state of our democracy, with the ongoing attacks on our civil institutions, the federal incursions into our cities and streets, and the increasingly dark nature of our national discourse, among other developments. I believe the radicalization of our national discourse is amplified by our reliance on social media as a primary conduit for news, information, and dialogue—its predisposition to elevate our most extreme moments and to generalize from them. I crave optimism and continue to find comfort in our community and the vibrancy of this city. As you know, I believe deeply that one critical ingredient in the remedy to break this dark spell is the time we spend together in person in our neighborhoods, streets, and public places, and that those spaces be safe and welcoming for all.

Together in public we discover a common humanity, question the city's spaces, navigate our differences, reinforce social bonds, share a cultural life, and engage in political debate predicated on an ability to disagree civilly. As designers of the physical fabric of our city, we create public spaces to provide the arena for this vibrant public life promoting social resiliency. All this gives me faith that New York City remains a model for inoculating us against our current national malaise.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to come down to the Center for Architecture to see the exhibition "Searching for Superpublics," I invite

you to do so. I produced the exhibition as part of my presidential year, and it was designed and curated by New Affiliates. It advances the premise that our public realm is the infrastructure of our civic, social, and cultural life. It takes stock of how large, connective public spaces have been conceived, created, programmed, and maintained in the decade or so after Superstorm Sandy, George Floyd's murder, the pandemic, and other transformative events. It examines the stakeholders and the current "superheroes" reimagining and maintaining the public realm.

The exhibition proposes three concepts that continue to reshape and invigorate our public life:

Connectors are large-scale physical pathway networks linking traditional parks and outdoor gathering spaces across neighborhood boundaries. These are interwoven today with projects addressing coastal resiliency, pandemic response, infrastructure repair, pedestrian safety, and initiatives for public health, and are exemplified in projects underway like the Queensway and Greater Rockaway Coastal Resilience plan, Broadway Vision, Reimagine the Cross Bronx Expressway, and the Staten Island Bluebelts.

Temporals are designed, time-based programmatic transformations of our streets into pedestrian public spaces: the DOT's 34th Avenue Open Streets program, Paseo Park in Queens, the New York Marathon, and Pride.

Constellations are systems or infrastructures, distributed across the

street networks and public spaces of the city, providing comfort, orientation, and support for a vibrant public life. These are represented by the city's active plans to engineer the networks like the Urban Forest Plan, raising the city's tree canopy coverage from 23.4% to 30% in the coming years, and the initiative to increase the inventory of public restrooms across the five boroughs.

I'm excited that the content of this issue of *Oculus* is resonant with the themes of "Searching for Superpublics," focusing on all the infrastructures that make our public life together in the city possible. It offers a deeper dive into the systems that underpin, connect, and give vitality to our public realm: public space infrastructure and pedestrianization efforts throughout the boroughs, the major public transportation projects happening right now, efforts to create "food forests," and the Department of Design and Construction's work to improve subsurface utilities throughout the city in response to our changing climate.

Let's be active together this fall, supporting each other, speaking out, and sharing our lives in public to build our strength and resiliency.

Benjamin Gilmartin, AIA
2025 Chapter President

CONCRETE CHANGE: WHY CMU DESERVES A FRESH LOOK IN LOW-CARBON DESIGN

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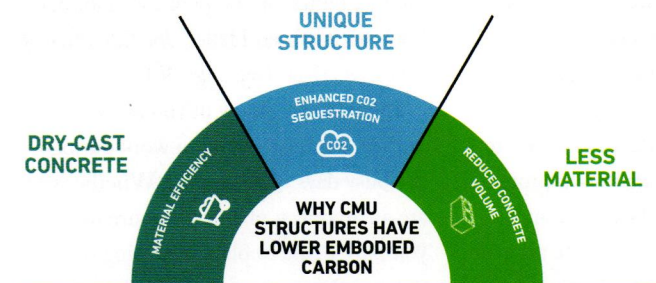
Concrete masonry has long been a staple in New York City construction for good reason. It's strong, fire-resistant and holds up to everything from harsh winters to urban density. But in a city focused on climate-smart building, concrete masonry units (CMU) may be unintentionally overlooked when seeking low-embodied construction solutions.

The reality is that concrete masonry's role in sustainable design has evolved significantly over the last 10 to 15 years. In fact, it may be one of the most underappreciated tools in a designer's carbon-reduction toolkit.

CMU Has Lower Carbon Than You Think

Contrary to common belief, CMU is *not* inherently high carbon. In fact, concrete masonry often has a lower embodied carbon profile than many other structural materials, thanks to several key factors:

- **Material efficiency.** CMU is made using a dry-cast method, which vibrates and compacts zero-slump concrete, requiring less water and cement. This reduction in cement content translates to lower embodied carbon.
- **Enhanced CO₂ sequestration.** The difference in manufacturing gives CMU's concrete matrix an interconnected void structure, enabling air to penetrate deeper and faster into the concrete itself. This enables increased amounts of CO₂ to be sequestered at significantly faster rates. Research by the Concrete Masonry and Hardscapes Association (CMHA) confirmed through Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA), that this process absorbs 21% of potential CO₂ within the first 28 days after manufacture and 49% in the first two years.
- **Reduced concrete volume uses less material.** CMU has open cores, which means less volume of concrete is needed to construct a wall. This reduction of concrete volume further decreases the embodied carbon of CMU structures.



For New York architects working under Local Law 97 or targeting LEED, WELL or Passive House certifications, these embodied carbon savings add up.

CMU Supports Energy Performance and Net-Zero Goals

Beyond initial embodied carbon, CMU continues to add value over the building's life cycle:

- **Thermal mass benefits:** CMU's mass helps regulate indoor temperature inherently, which can help reduce HVAC loads.
- **Durability and lifespan:** With a projected service life exceeding 100 years and minimal maintenance needs, CMU avoids the need for early replacement and limits material turnover.

In high-performance envelopes and mixed-use projects, thermal mass can improve occupant comfort and reduce energy consumption, which is particularly valuable in NYC's variable climate.

It's a More Efficient, More Sustainable Supply Chain

Sourcing matters. CMU is typically manufactured within 50 to 100 miles of the jobsite, reducing transportation-related emissions by 15% to 30% and minimizing reliance on long-haul freight. That's a win not only for carbon, but also for project scheduling.

It's easily recycled, can be crushed and used as aggregate in new blocks as road base or in landscape applications. That makes it a material that performs well at every stage of the project life cycle.

Innovation Is Alive and Well in Concrete Masonry

From carbon-reducing mix designs to digital manufacturing techniques, today's producers are pushing boundaries. And with evolving aesthetic options and finishes, CMU can be just as design-forward as it is durable.

For New York architects, where every project is a balancing act of performance, aesthetics and code compliance, CMU checks all the important boxes.

The Bottom Line

If you've written off concrete masonry as a legacy material, it's time to take a new look. CMU's embodied carbon profile, energy-saving potential and supply chain sustainability make it a smart, forward-looking choice, especially in dense urban markets like New York.

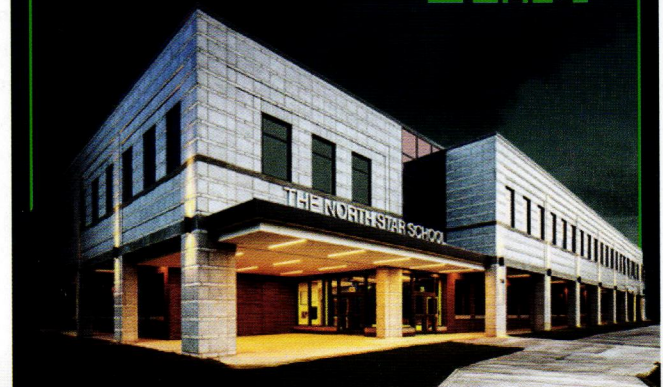
As the industry moves toward lower-carbon construction, concrete masonry isn't just keeping up. It's helping lead the way.

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HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT CMU?

The Block Design Collective offers free project support to architects, engineers, and developers and can help answer your CMU-specific questions.

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Infrastructure for Everyone

BY OCULUS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JENNIFER KRICHELS



In the course of researching this issue, I spoke with Jim Wright, AIA, the director of advocacy for the AIA New York Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, about a topic a lot of New Yorkers might not have heard of: the New York and New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Study (NY/NJ HATS). The plan, led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will shape how the city confronts flooding and sea-level rise for decades. Yet the conversations about the area of the study affecting Harlem's waterfront have been surprisingly quiet.

Wright's concern, as he outlines in his op-ed on page 54 of this issue, is not the protection the corps is proposing, but how it will be executed. The project has narrowed from its early idea of a giant floodgate across Sandy Hook and the New York/New Jersey Harbor to more localized floodwalls, including a proposal for the low-lying areas of East Harlem along the East and Harlem rivers. But even in this smaller scope, the plan risks being too single-minded. A concrete wall built just off the shoreline, for example, would ignore the city's ongoing work to complete the Harlem River Greenway, and could trap contaminated stormwater overflow in the narrow strip of water it creates.

The problem is bigger than one site. Infrastructure projects cannot be planned in isolation. They must connect with other efforts—repairing bulkheads, building

These projects remind us that infrastructure is never just about moving water, utilities, or people—it's about the quality of life and equity we want for our city.

greenways, improving drainage—and they must incorporate the voices of the communities they affect. When they don't, the results are walls that cut communities off from waterfronts and piecemeal protections that leave vulnerable neighborhoods exposed.

We have examples of what better planning can look like. Along the East River, projects from Battery Park City to 23rd Street have integrated flood protection with bikeways, public access, and neighborhood connections. These are not perfect, but they are urban infrastructure in the best sense: they make resilience part of daily life. The challenge—and the advocacy agenda—is to ensure that these kinds of investments are extended equitably across the city, and that the voices of New Yorkers are part of the process.

That focus runs throughout this issue of *Oculus*, which looks at infrastructure in all its forms. Transportation projects, subsurface utilities, food networks, and

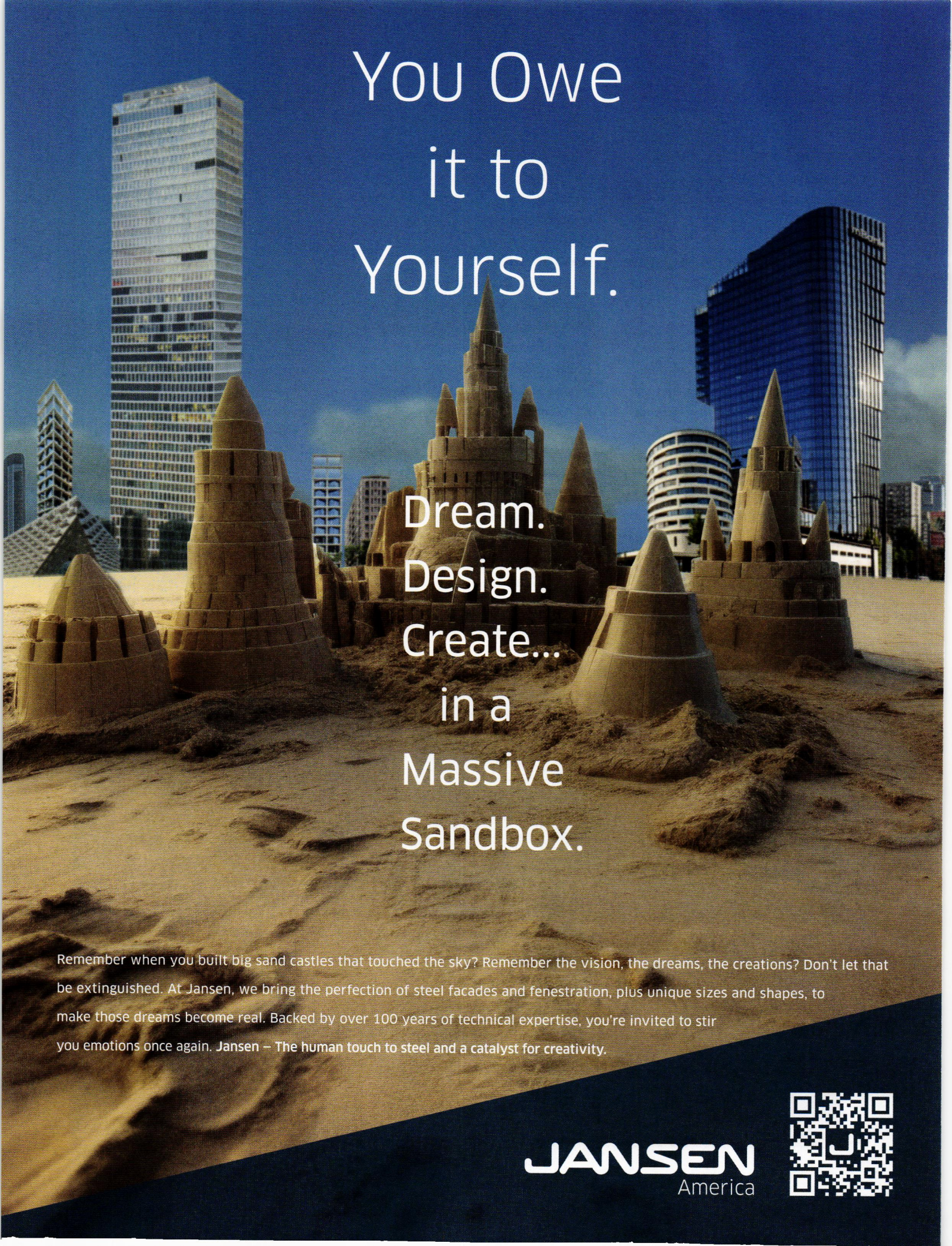
public space initiatives are just some of the systems that underpin civic life. These are not always glamorous projects, but they are vital. And they remind us that infrastructure is never just about moving water, utilities, or people—it's about the quality of life and equity we want for our city.

While this marks the final *Oculus* of 2025, we look forward to addressing the pressing topics of advocacy, repair, and growth in our upcoming 2026 issues. As always, it is a privilege to write about this city and its progress. In that spirit, I want to congratulate the magazine's former editor-in-chief, and a friend, mentor, and valued colleague to many in our world, Molly Heintz, on the publication of her book with Steven Heller, *The Education of a Design Writer* (see page 48).

I hope to see many of you as we put our city's infrastructure to work during the busy days of Archtober. Whether you are an architect, planner, or journalist, you have a role to play in keeping our city running and our conversations open, pushing projects to be more holistic, and ensuring that no community is left behind.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JKrichels".

Jennifer Krichels, Editor-in-Chief
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Contributors to This Issue

BETH BROOME (“Street Level”) is the former managing editor of *Architectural Record* and a writer based in Brooklyn.

THOMAS GRASSI, FAIA, co-chair; **RUSSELL KRIEGEL, AIA**, co-chair; and **EVE MICHEL, AIA**, director of programming, (“Moving in the Right Direction”) are members of the AIA New York Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. The mission of the committee is to examine the architecture of transportation and infrastructure projects, and to advocate for design quality in these projects.

BILL MILLARD (“Rethinking the Unglamorous Underground”) contributes regularly to *Oculus*, *The Architect’s Newspaper*, *Metals in Construction*,

Annals of Emergency Medicine, and other publications. His book *The Vertical and Horizontal Americas*, assisted by a Graham Foundation grant, moves glacially forward.

DAVID SOKOL (“Beyond Roads”) is a longtime New York-area design journalist who is now based in the Hudson Valley. His 2022 book *Hamptons Modern* (Monacelli) is a follow-up to 2018’s *Hudson Modern*. He also contributes regularly to *Architectural Record* and *Dwell* magazines.

LINYEE YUAN (“Vision of an Edible New York”) is an educator, editor, and cultural organizer. She is founder and executive director of *MOLD* and Field Meridians, an artist collective committed to strengthening local food ecologies in Central Brooklyn.

Save the Date

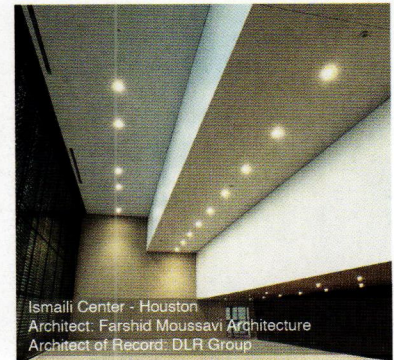
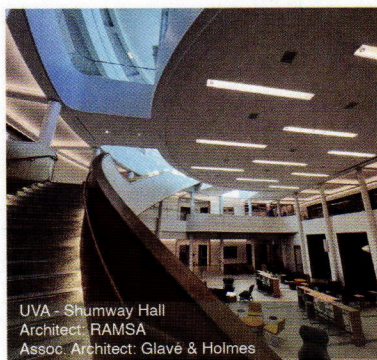
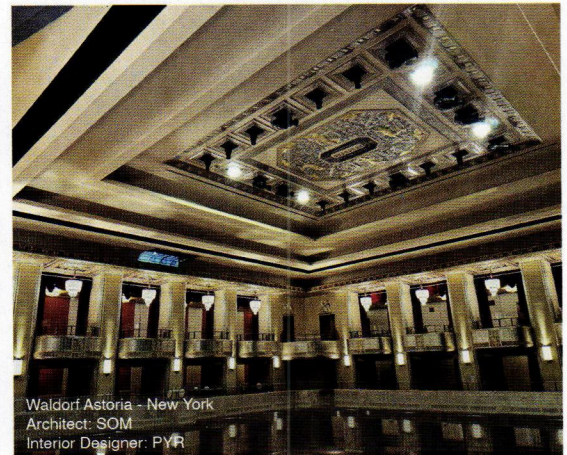
**Launching October 28:
The 2026 AIANY + ASLANY
Transportation + Infrastructure
Design Excellence Awards**

Now in its sixth cycle, the awards program celebrates exceptional design in transportation and infrastructure architecture by architects, landscape architects, and planners across the United States. The program recognizes built and unbuilt projects for their design, innovation, and impact, raising awareness about the critical role that well-designed infrastructure plays in our lives. AIANY and ASLA-NY will also honor projects that reflect a commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and civic architecture. Check the awards page via aiany.org/committees/transportation-and-infrastructure for updated information on the 2026 program schedule.

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On View

AT THE CENTER

Searching for Superpublics

Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Place
Through March 28, 2026

Center for Architecture
centerforarchitecture.org

“Searching for Superpublics” explores current directions in the design of New York City’s public space. The work on view introduces a search for additions to city life that overcome the boundaries of neighborhoods, communities, boroughs, and typical public spaces. While not necessarily square, central, or as lush as some of the parks and plazas that predate them, the selected projects are indeed “super.” They exceed the boundaries of traditional public spaces and neighborhoods by working together across the city, inventing new tools for participation, and occupying resources and infrastructure.

In a city as dense as New York, these projects emerge as opportunistic and



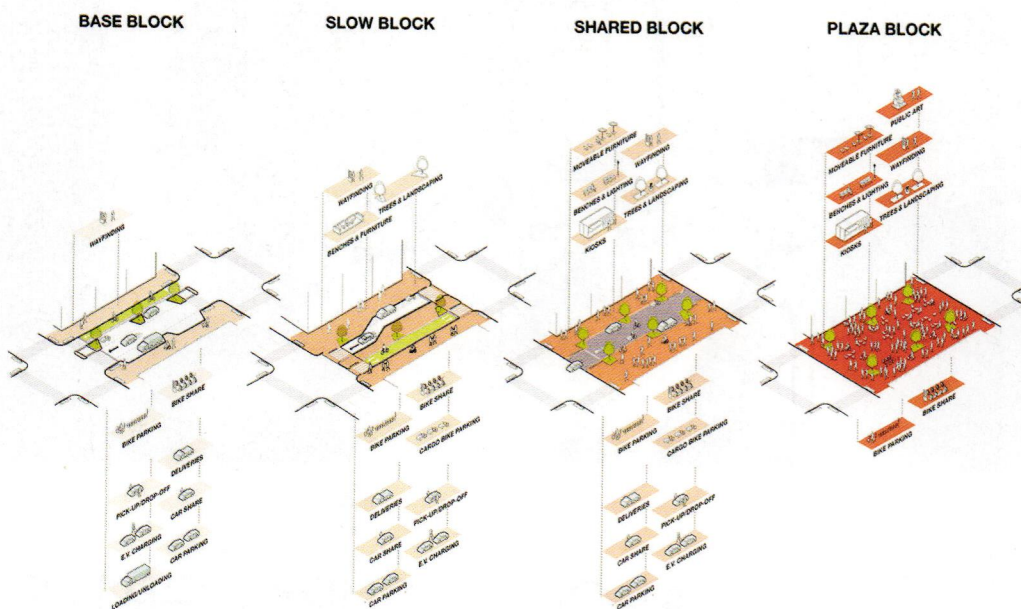
strategic sites of intervention that weave through the city’s fabric. This search is framed through these questions: What is our current era of public space? Who designs and maintains it? The exhibition brings together eight primary projects and numerous other examples to explore these radical shifts between specific public spaces and the interstitial public realm at large. Each emerged through conversations with communities across the five boroughs, with stakeholders including city agencies, designers,

architects, planners, and activists. While by no means definitive—the curators invite agreement and critique—certain formal and organizational tendencies emerged along the way.

“Some projects will be familiar to many and some to only a few, but together they tell a story about the city that is both bottom-up and top-down; that synthesizes the desires of the city’s residents with the plans of its stewards; and that shows how design can be formal, informal, visionary, and responsive all at the same

Above: The Cross Bronx Expressway Capping Feasibility Map by the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT), showing the 13 specific locations along the expressway where capping it with a deck or “lid” is potentially feasible. This serves to reconnect communities, improve mobility, and potentially create new green spaces.

Right: An illustration of Open Street Typologies by the DOT and ARUP



Above: Courtesy of NYC DOT; right: NYC DOT and ARUP



Left: Following Superstorm Sandy, several of the city’s agencies are working with architects, landscape architects, and planners to create a more resilient ecology across the Rockaway Peninsula.

Opposite: One Big Table, installed in New York City by Street Lab, is modular and scalable, and transforms any space into a place for outdoor dining, art workshops, and more.

time,” said curators Ivi Diamantopoulou, AIA, and Jaffer Kolb, co-founders of New Affiliates Architecture.


The exhibition documents a search through found materials, each presented as the outcome of past planning, current conditions, and ideas for future use. Featured projects are categorized under

three umbrellas: Connectors, Temporals, and Constellations. Connectors work across communities, neighborhoods, and lot lines to reunite disparate parts of the city. The four projects in this section of the exhibition often link together traditional public spaces, mixing populations, confronting environmental conditions,

and providing a means to traverse the city without cars. They are sometimes continuous and often realized in phases; on occasion, they exist as single lines in discrete physical territories. For example, the Greater Rockaway Coastal Resilience Plan by RISE is linked by a continuous boardwalk that ties together numerous engineering projects.

Temporals are events that create major new arrangements of public life for discrete periods of time. These include the Open Streets program—notably Open Streets 34th Avenue, which created Paseo




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Above: WXY; opposite: Street Lab

Park— the NYC Marathon, the city's countless parades, and other events that are objects of design, evolving over time, and managed by multiple agencies and organizers. Temporals have both direct and indirect consequences, with secondary markets, food vendors, and performers all participating on their sidelines.

The projects within the exhibition's third umbrella, Constellations, transform the city as a whole, representing collections of recognizable elements often centered on comfort and daily life. The city's data platform lists 975 public restrooms, for example, that serve as essential public amenities. In a bid to increase this number, the city, led by NYC Parks, is testing out new comfort and construction standards, easily deployed modular units, and quick-to-build prefabricated components across the five boroughs. The exhibition features these new strategies alongside historic photographs of previous generations of bathroom design. Constellations offer a collective sense of belonging and place across the city in its smallest sites.

The exhibition is presented in tandem with the theme put forth by 2025 AIA New York Chapter President Benjamin Gilmartin, See You IRL: Designing for Public Life, which explores the importance of our shared physical spaces in New York City. Alongside these projects, the exhibition will feature a multichannel film looking at Broadway as a progenitor of public space, past and present; an installation showing a large-scale map by Diller Scofidio + Renfro of the city overlaid with its "Superpublics"; and new seating elements referencing New York's stoops and stairs that encourage visitors to linger in the gallery and look back to the street and city. Together, the projects and installations on view illustrate an optimistic portrait of a city constantly striving to be more livable, collective, just, and radical.



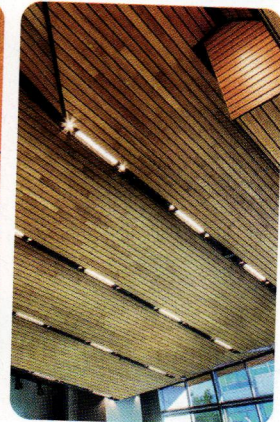
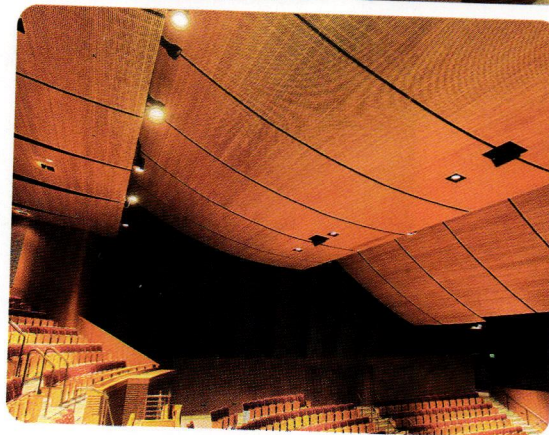
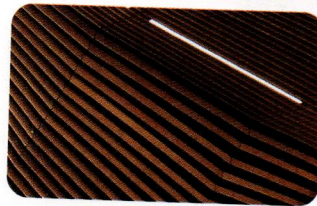
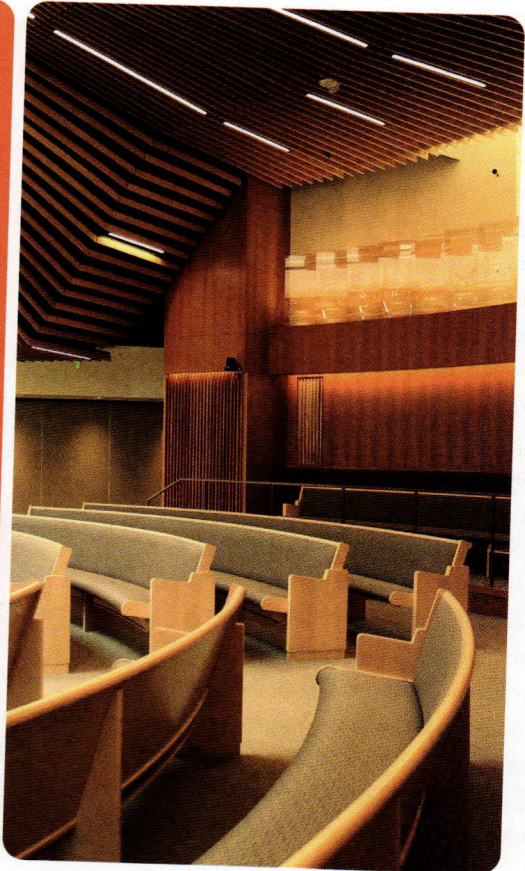
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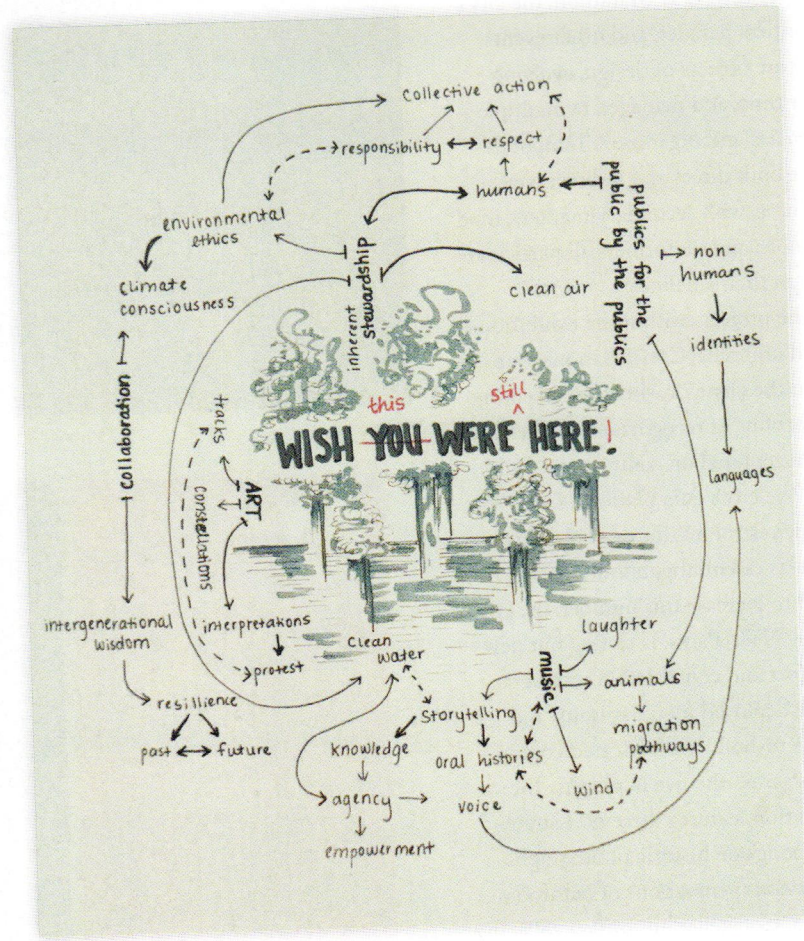


AT THE CENTER

Honorees Named in Second Annual Archtober Postcard Competition

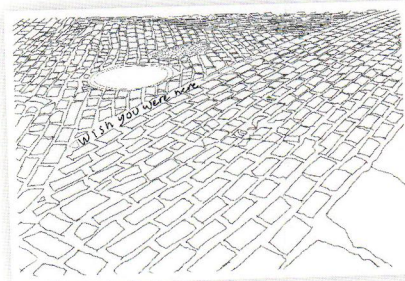
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Place
Through October 31, 2025
Center for Architecture
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This fall, in tandem with its 2025 festival theme “Shared Spaces,” Archtober launched the second iteration of its annual Postcard Competition. Titled “Wish You Were Here,” the contest invited design enthusiasts from around the five boroughs to submit their concept for an ideal public space in New York City in postcard form. The resulting 40 submissions were reviewed by a jury comprised of four designers and architects: **Annie Barrett**, founding partner, aanda architects; **Anjelica Gallegos**, director, Indigenous Society of Architecture, Planning and Design (ISAPD); and **Leigh Mignogna** and **Liz Turow**, principals and founders, L&L Studio. The jury chose three winning designs—congratulations to **Emma Sumrow**, **Olivia Baldacci**, and **Megan Elevado**! The jury also awarded three honorable mentions: **Cara Cragan**, **Malavika Madhuraj**, and **Timothy Zhang**.

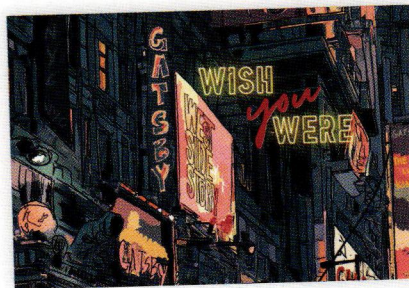


“The Vanishing Commons”
by Emma Sumrow
The jury appreciated Sumrow’s idea

of creating a method-map of mutual stewardship and nature’s soundscape shared across different species. “It’s a bit of a critique on public spaces, but a needed critique,” said Gallegos. “It’s more of a call to action and a method that can be applied to a lot of different public places in New York City.”



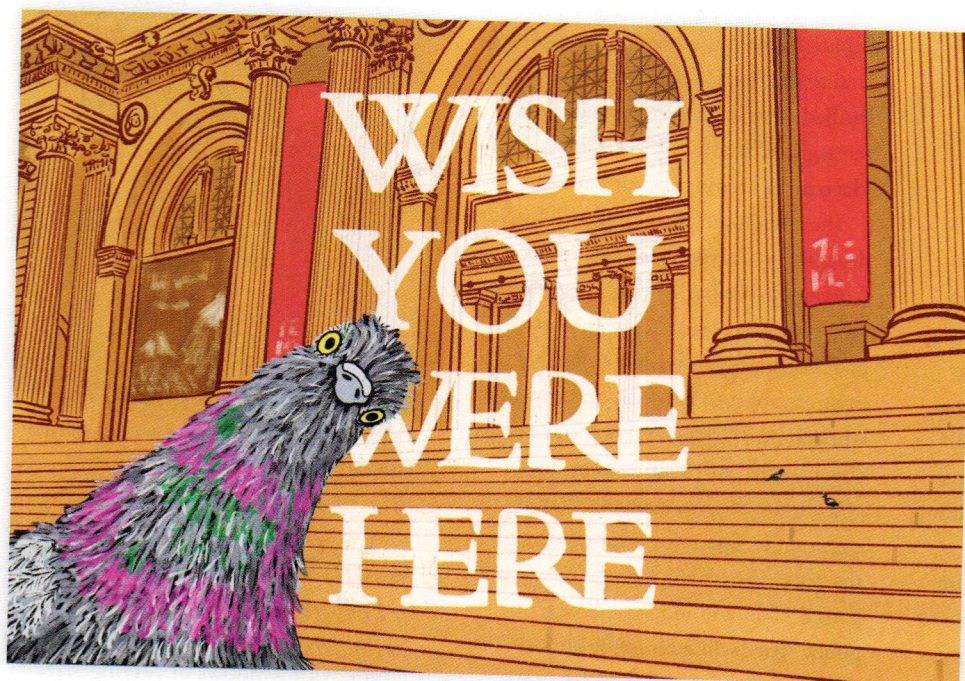
“Where We Walk”
by Cara Cragan



“A Chorus of Neon Dreams”
by Malavika Madhuraj



“Wish You Were Here”
by Timothy Zhang



“Meet Me on the Steps”

by **Megan Elevado**

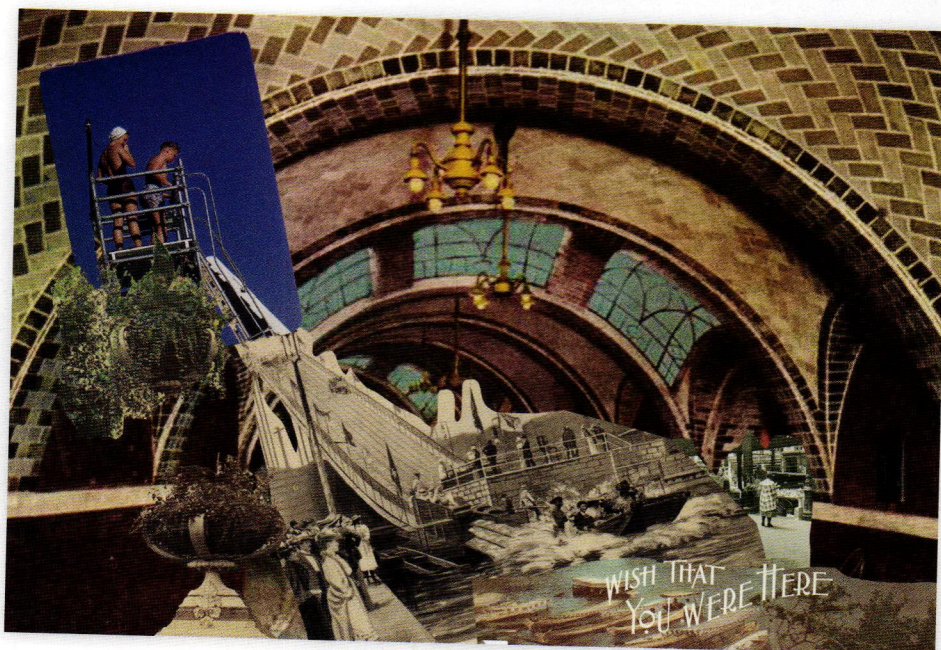
“It’s one of those things where if you’re a New Yorker, you get it,” said **Turow**. The jury was delighted by the illustration and cheeky expression of the pigeon, and also noted the effective composition of the overall design. “I love that it centered the steps and not the building, the ornamentation or the art,” said **Mignogna**. “The steps are really an important public place, so that sort of pedestrian, street-level view of how real people see the city—I liked all that.”



“New York Summer Collage”

by **Olivia Baldacci**

The jury praised the originality of reimagining the city’s public transportation using images from The New York City Public Library. “This amalgamation from the New York City Public Archive—moments of New York City’s public infrastructure—I think is a really beautiful and strange image,” said **Barrett**. “And this idea of diving into a pool/highway/bridge—I love it in all those ways.”



The three winning designs will be printed and distributed at the Center for Architecture throughout the duration of the festival through October 31. Now celebrating its 15th year, Archtober presents tours, lectures, exhibitions, and more in collaboration with over 100 partners. Stop by the Center to see the postcards in person and grab a few for yourself! **Lynn Kim**

BEYOND THE CENTER
**Studio Museum
 in Harlem**

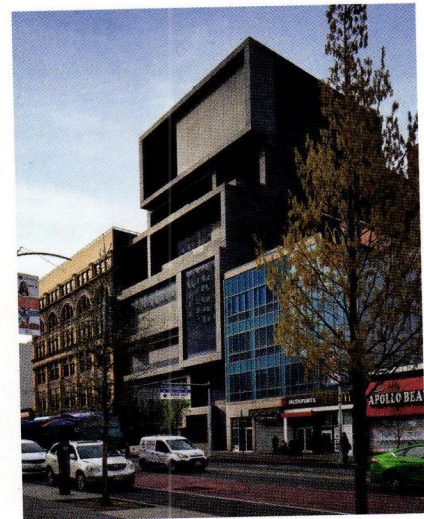
144 West 125th Street
 Opening November 15, 2025
 studiomuseum.org

The Studio Museum in Harlem will celebrate the public opening of its new seven-floor, 82,000-square-foot building on Saturday, November 15, 2025. This milestone moment will be marked by a celebratory Community Day that will activate the entire building, welcoming everyone from the museum's surrounding communities and beyond. "As our historic homecoming approaches, I am reflecting on the transformative vision of the artists, supporters, and community members who have helped us shape this pivotal moment in our legacy," said Thelma Golden, Ford Foundation

director and chief curator of the Studio Museum. "Our breathtaking new building is an invaluable space and a tribute to the museum's mission and the vitality of artists of African descent. I am thrilled to welcome everyone back to a reimagined Studio Museum, rooted in Harlem and resonating far beyond."

The new home of the Studio Museum, designed by Adjaye Associates with Cooper Robertson serving as executive architect, provides state-of-the-art galleries, an expansive lobby, flexible program spaces, and dedicated education workshops. Together, these foster deeper engagement with visitors of all ages and elevate the museum and Harlem community. Space for exhibitions and the artist-in-residence program will more than double, and indoor and outdoor public space will increase by almost 70%.


The architectural design takes its inspiration from the brownstones, churches, and bustling sidewalks of



The museum's stacked volumes are clad in precast concrete with generous glazing.

Harlem. The masonry-framed windows of Harlem's apartment buildings are echoed in the composition of a façade with windows of varying sizes and proportions. The neighborhood's churches find a counterpart in a top-lit

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Courtesy Studio Museum in Harlem © Dror Baldinger FAIA

interior gallery with ample wall area for installing large-scale artworks, and a central stair that provides lookout points from the landings. A set of glass doors, which can be opened in different configurations, welcomes people to descending steps that evoke the ubiquitous stoops of Harlem's brownstones. The steps can be used as benches for watching lectures, performances, and films presented on the building's lower level—or simply for relaxing in informal gatherings.

The new facility also includes a rooftop terrace with striking views of the surrounding area, and displays a dynamic landscape design by the Harlem-based firm Studio Zewde. Conceived as a space for gathering, reflection, and engagement, the terrace features native plantings and sculptural seating that frame striking panoramic views of Harlem and beyond. On the museum's lower level, a café operated by the local

family-owned restaurant Settepani will further enhance the museum's commitment to organizations and businesses in the local neighborhood.

Inaugural exhibitions and commissions include:

- A major presentation of the work of Tom Lloyd, the innovative artist whose practice was the subject of the Studio Museum's inaugural exhibition in 1968. Based on extensive new scholarship and intensive conservation work, "Tom Lloyd" will explore the artist's prescient contributions to the interplay of art and technology, and will be accompanied by the first publication dedicated to the artist.
- The first installment of a rotating installation of works from the museum's distinguished permanent collection, which today holds nearly 9,000 artworks. Works will span from the 1800s to the present—

highlighting more than 200 years of artistic achievements by artists of African descent—and will range from those newly acquired to those that have been recently conserved and not shown for decades.

- A first-of-its-kind presentation of new works on paper by more than 100 alumni of the Artist-in-Residence program. The exhibition will place intergenerational artists in conversation with each other, while paying tribute to this foundational program of the museum, which has nurtured artists of African descent for more than half a century.
- A presentation of archival photographs and ephemera of the institution's history, offering visitors an opportunity to discover the host of exhibitions, events, and programs that defined the Studio Museum throughout nearly 60 years of cultural and political change.



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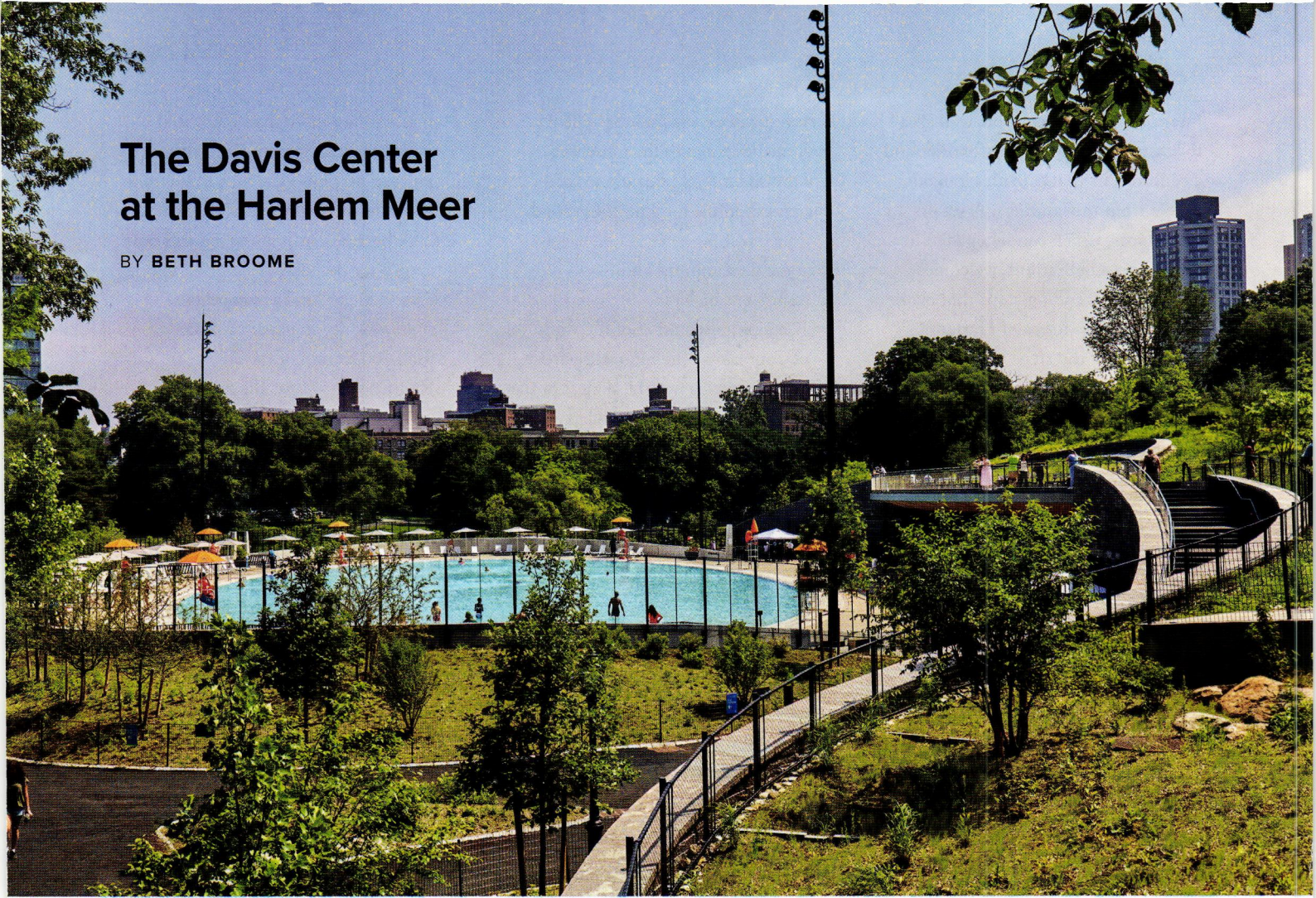
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The Davis Center at the Harlem Meer

BY BETH BROOME



On a cloudless August morning, the Gottesman Pool at Central Park's new Davis Center lay momentarily still as young children filed toward the changing rooms following their group lessons, and families queued for free swim. A lifeguard's errant whistle rose into the tree canopy along the adjacent creek, while atop the center's green roof a runner stretched, and a couple lingered on a bench over coffee. It was an idyllic portrait of summer in the park.

With activity taking center stage, the 34,000-square-foot pavilion—matching the curve of the historic park drive and tucked into a hillside—nearly disappears, serving as a conduit rather than a focal point. This merging of building and landscape, echoing Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's original vision for creating a naturalistic retreat for city dwellers, guided the design by Susan T Rodriguez | Architecture • Design (STR | A • D) and Mitchell Giurgola in collaboration with the Central Park Conservancy which, as a team, also aimed to make the center open and accessible to all.

Despite its quiet presence, the project, funded by \$60 million from the city and \$100 in private donations, represents the culmination of decades of work to revive the park's northernmost edge—once imagined as a pastoral enclave but long degraded. Anchored by the Harlem Meer, which was originally fed by a stream flowing through the wooded Ravine, the area suffered

from neglect and, after the infamous Central Park Five case, came to symbolize the city's struggles with violence and racism.

The Davis Center replaces the Lasker Rink and Pool, a relic of the 1960s, which had served the community for decades but sat heavily on the land. Built atop the culverted stream, Lasker blocked water flow to the meer, leaked, and flooded during heavy rain. Its mass interrupted pedestrian circulation, and it

Top: The Davis Center is built into the topography of the site along its eastern slope, with landscape and pathways that cover the entire building and blend the building into the park.

Below: The project replaces Lasker Rink and Pool, a flawed and failing facility. However, in 1967, these ice skaters were enjoying the ice.



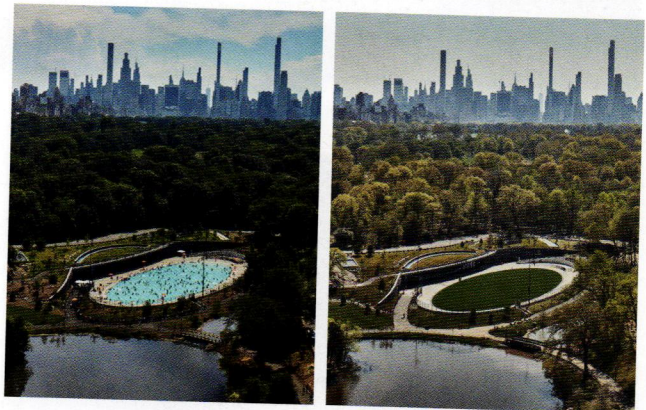
Top: © Richard Barnes; left: NYC Parks



operated as an isolated, fee-based concession rather than as an integrated part of the park.

In 2016, the city, which operates the pool, asked the conservancy for help. With STR | A • D, they explored options for the facility and surrounding landscape, proposing a conceptual design the next year. From the outset, the design team knew success depended on deep community engagement. “It was a continuation of conversations we’d been having for decades,” recalls Chris Nolan, former chief landscape architect for the conservancy. The public would need to see the new facility as more than a set of amenities. “The objective was to paint a picture not of what the center would look like,” says Susan Rodriguez, “but how it would feel—an experience rather than an object.” Listening sessions with lap swimmers, hockey players, birders, dog walkers, and others shaped the program. “After hearing from these passionate constituencies, we asked how the facility could accommodate the overlay of all these uses and make the experience better than before,” says John Doherty, a partner at Mitchell Giurgola. As the ideas for blending recreation with landscape emerged, Rodriguez recalls, “the community began to feel part of the process.”

The project restores eight acres of damaged ecology, hydrology, and circulation around the meer. The once-buried stream has been brought to the surface, with a footpath reestablishing connection to the park’s southern precincts through the Ravine and the historic Huddlestone Arch. A boardwalk now edges the lake, while to the east a path climbs the pavilion’s meadow-like green roof—with plantings such as drought-tolerant grasses, fragrant sumac, native roses, and oak and pine trees. “We didn’t want walking on the roof to feel like you were on a planted piece of infrastructure,” says Nolan. “We wanted it to be perceived as a

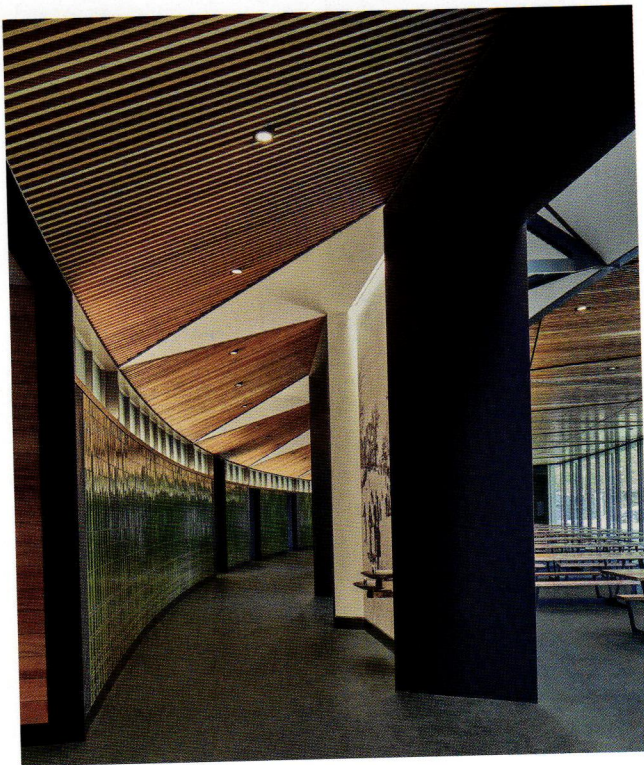
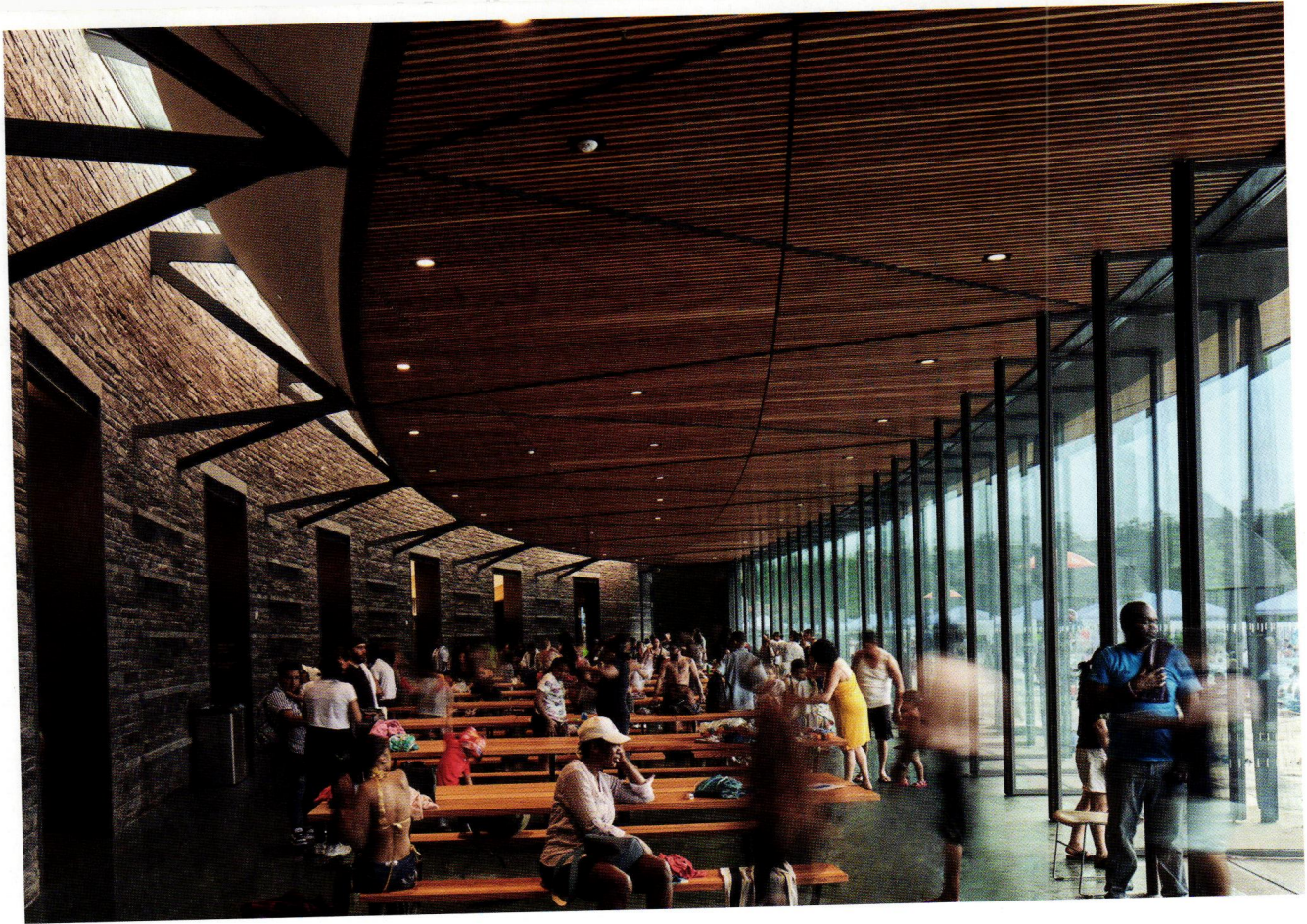


Top: The new pool is the eighth-largest pool in New York City—making it one of a handful of city pools that can accommodate 50-meter lap swimming.

Above: An elliptical swimming pool transforms into an ice rink in winter and a new public green, the Harlem Oval, in spring and fall.

continuation of the natural landscape.” At the top, the path opens onto a scenic overlook of the expansive “outdoor room” below.

In summer, that space is anchored by the vast elliptical pool, smaller than Lasker’s but able to accommodate 1,000 swimmers. Surrounded by greenery, the pool feels fully part of its environment. “Now you’re swimming in the park, rather than in a facility in the park,” says Rodriguez. Its elongated form improves lifeguard access, and one side provides an accessible, gently sloped, zero-entry deck. In winter, the pool becomes an ice rink. A breakthrough in the design process came with the realization that the rink platform could support turf in spring and fall, as the Oval, extending the facility’s use year-round as a yoga studio, playground, or movie theater. “It’s three buildings in




Top: The Davis Center's light-filled interior gathering space opens to the outdoors. During warmer weather, center-pivot floor-to-ceiling glass doors open along the entire length of the gathering space to create a covered front porch.

Above: A Heath tile-lined passage leading to dressing rooms, restrooms, and a concession that are nestled further into the slope.

one," says Doherty, with distinct systems for the building, ice, and water—a remarkably complex infrastructure.

Where Lasker offered little space simply to gather, the Davis Center provides a new civic hub. A soaring hall with communal tables (designed by STR | A • D) opens, via pivoting glass doors, onto the pool deck, transforming this space in the summer months into a shaded porch. A Corinthian granite wall flows from outside to inside, where it is punctuated with broad openings to a Heath tile-lined passage leading to dressing rooms, restrooms, and a concession that are nestled further into the slope. In winter, the pavilion functions as a skate-rental center and warming hut. Sustainable strategies—including passive climate control, water- and energy-saving systems, and locally sourced materials—are embedded throughout. Exposed steel trusses, which resolve in slender exterior columns, support a ceiling made of an acoustically absorptive Douglas fir baffle system. Edged by skylights, it seems to float above. The design balances resiliency with a material richness and refinement rare in public architecture.

With the Davis Center, what was once an obstruction has become an open passage, repairing a broken section of Central Park and weaving it back into the landscape. Open year-round for a vast array of free or low-cost uses, it now welcomes all New Yorkers. And, through thoughtful design and carefully selected materials, it confers dignity—signaling a city that values both its people and the natural world. ■

An aerial photograph of a playground in Brooklyn. The central feature is a rectangular pool of water surrounded by a bright yellow deck. Several people are swimming and sitting on the deck. To the right of the pool is a green artificial turf basketball court with white lines. Below the pool is a wooden play structure with blue railings and a slide. The playground is surrounded by trees and a paved area.

FALL 2025 FEATURES

Laying the Groundwork

The infrastructure reshaping the city, above- and belowground

Infrastructure in New York is rarely simple—projects are messy, politicized, and often decades in the making. Yet the city continues to build: not just bridges and transit lines, but systems and spaces that shape daily life.

The features in this issue show how infrastructure is being reimagined for the 21st century, from new transit links and civic hubs to greenways, gardens, and the networks beneath our streets. Together, they expand the definition of infrastructure beyond moving people and goods, toward healthier environments, resilient communities, and more equitable public space.

What follows are snapshots of a city in motion—imperfect at times, but driven by the conviction that shared systems are essential to civic life.

The Editors

A “mini pool” at the PS20 playground in Brooklyn. At 40 feet long and 20 feet wide, public mini pools are typically located in playgrounds and meant for children accompanied by adults.



Food, drink, and retail

LIRR East End Gateway

Public seating and programming

Planters support tree health and fixed seating

“Plaza 33 delivers a busy transit entrance as the focal point of diverse, well-maintained, and programmed functions. It serves as a great example of the potential for a transit facility to enliven public spaces.”
—THOMAS L GRASSI, FAIA
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee co-chair

Generous circulation space

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Moving in the Right Direction

Transportation projects are shaping public space in NYC.

BY THOMAS GRASSI, FAIA, RUSSELL KRIEGLER, AIA, AND EVE MICHEL, AIA, NEW YORK TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

An impressive range of transportation and infrastructure projects currently planned and/or underway in New York City are promising to transform the passenger experience and the quality of public spaces in the city. Transportation and infrastructure projects are among those most uniquely positioned to partner with and provide spaces through Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and other synergistic relationships.

These projects impact the ways we live and move in the city, so it is critical that they tie seamlessly into the public realm as they present incredible opportunities to make civic-oriented spaces better than those that previously existed.

In recent years, we've experienced the creation of very successful public pedestrian-focused spaces in those that were once car-based: Times Square, and 33rd Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues. We now see the opportunity to build on this positive trend.

New Yorkers enjoy and share our public spaces, so it is essential that architects lead the way in making well-designed, environmentally sound connections between these newly planned and constructed infrastructure projects and the existing streetscapes. In addition to working with the associated city agencies, we have the opportunity to partner with developers as they introduce valuable housing and associated TODs.

Among the many capital improvement transportation and infrastructure projects that have the potential to deliver on those promises are:

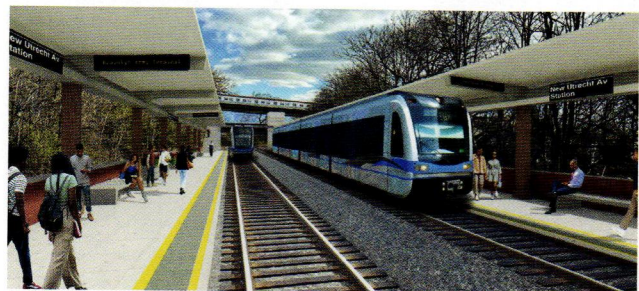


Above: The IBX will connect Sunnyside Park, Brooklyn, to Jackson Heights, Queens, serving over a million New Yorkers and reducing travel times between the boroughs.

Below: An IBX station at New Utrecht Avenue in Brooklyn will connect to the D and N trains.

MTA Interborough Express (IBX)

In addition to the project's potential to provide a direct connection between a range of diverse neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens, easing the travel for thousands, each station location presents a unique opportunity for improvement and new public spaces. How the new stations intersect with the existing streetscape and the communities they serve will be crucial to their success. Each new station (there will be 19 in all) will serve as a direct link between community and transit.



Opposite: The 33rd Street Plaza, or Plaza33, was designed by MNLA and offers a pleasant place to relax near bustling Penn Station.



Port Authority Bus Terminal Replacement

As a key component of the Bus Terminal Replacement project, the Port Authority of NY & NJ is planning to create approximately 3.5 acres of new, publicly accessible open space. This new green space will be developed on “deck-overs”—platforms built over the currently below-grade Dyer Avenue, cut once the new main bus terminal is constructed. This public space aims to enhance the commuter and community experience by adding a significant area of green space to the neighborhood.

Above: Foster + Partners’ proposed design for the new Port Authority bus terminal includes 3.5 acres of green space. **Right:** New York Governor Kathy Hochul’s Penn Station redevelopment plan includes a single-level, double-height train hall that eliminates the cramped and overcrowded passageways in the existing station.

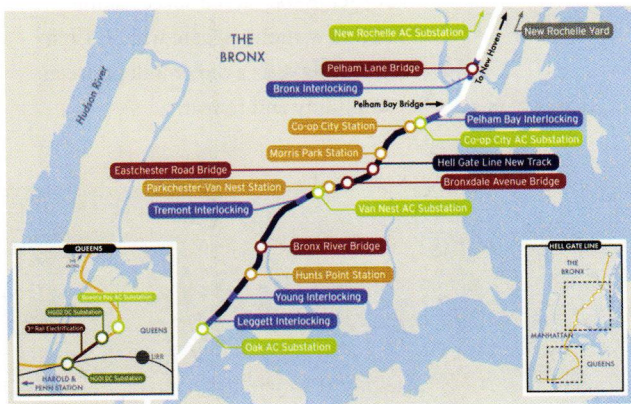


Penn Station Redevelopment

The federal government’s recent takeover of the project may point to its moving forward. While its future is unknown, most proposals for the development include significant public spaces, perhaps building on the recent improvements—the aforementioned and wildly successful 33rd Street plaza and the new entrances on Seventh Avenue.

Penn Station Access

The four new Metro-North stations that will service the East Bronx are excellent examples of well-designed, properly integrated urban spaces. The areas directly surrounding the stations have been thoughtfully designed with pedestrian plazas that link the station seamlessly to the city streetscapes. Environmentally sound principles are in play, with drought-resistant landscaping and water-retention drainage.



An extension of Metro-North Railroad’s New Haven Line will include four new accessible stations.

Pedestrianization Efforts on Fifth and Park Avenues

NYC is funding a \$400 million “Future of Fifth” project to transform a stretch of Fifth Avenue between Bryant Park and Central Park into a pedestrian-friendly boulevard. Construction is set to begin in 2028, with the project including widened sidewalks, more green space with planters, and fewer vehicle lanes to encourage walking and boost local businesses. The plan aims to create a world-class walkable street and “a world-class network of public space in Midtown,” which will increase the area’s value as a destination that spurs economic growth. To this end, the proposal recommends “making Fifth Avenue from Bryant Park to Central Park a vibrant corridor for pedestrians by expanding sidewalks, improving lighting, and adding more seating.”

Dedicated Busways

The city’s ongoing trend for dedicated busways presents an untapped opportunity to reenvision the entire public right-of-way along the routes into world-class transit corridors that also support pedestrians and green public spaces.



Above: Proposed streetscape in front of the New York Public Library. **Right:** A shared-use path in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park—part of the Historic Brooklyn Greenway—provides space for cyclists, joggers, and walkers.



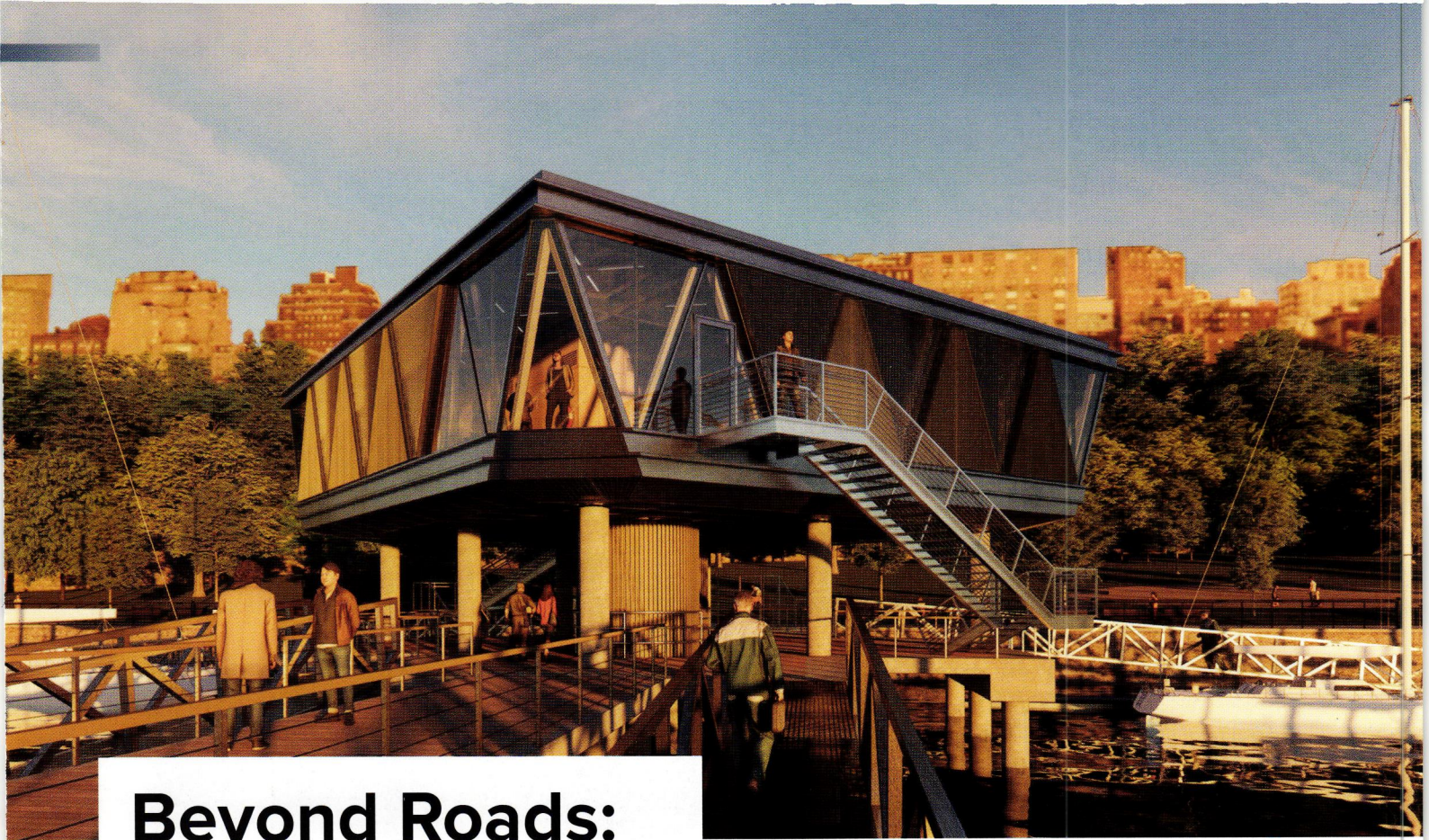
Greenway Pedestrian and Bike Network

In August, the city unveiled the “Greater Greenways; the New York City Greenway Plan” for the expansion of the growing network of greenways across New York City. The plan will connect greenways—continuous, multiuse corridors designed for human-powered and electric-assist transportation and recreation—to parks and other green public spaces along the routes. The Greenway program is divided into two chapters, the Greenways of Today and the Greenways of Tomorrow, and aims to increase public access to parks and waterfront.

In many cases, some of the most people-friendly projects are still perceived only as “nice-to-haves.” No doubt, as these projects progress and time and budgets become stretched, some elements could be compromised. As architects with a keen eye on the public realm, we have the responsibility to monitor these projects and ensure that the preservation and development of these spaces that belong to New Yorkers are vital and exciting—and that they continue to play a large role in making the city we love so special. ■



A rendering of a redesigned Flatbush Avenue and Fourth Avenue in Brooklyn shows center-running bus lanes and a concrete bus-boarding island.



Beyond Roads:

The Infrastructure of a Resilient City

Despite obstacles, New York continues to make commitments to the future.

BY DAVID SOKOL

Infrastructure projects are glitchy, politicized, and time-consuming in the friendliest of circumstances, and amiable is the last word to describe this moment of government-level investment. Nevertheless, New York persists. Like the other infrastructure developments featured in this issue of *Oculus*, the half-dozen undertakings shown on these pages represent a citywide commitment to infrastructure despite current headwinds. Perhaps more important, they expand the definition of infrastructure to include outcomes like public health and economic resilience, in addition to the movement of people and goods, so that more New Yorkers can achieve a decent quality of life.

A new dockhouse on the Hudson River, designed by Architecture Research Office, meets flood zone code and necessary accessibility requirements.

79th Street Boat Basin Dockhouse

When Superstorm Sandy gravely damaged the 79th Street Boat Basin in 2012, it also wiped out the Robert Moses-era standards by which the marina could be operated. Consider the dockhouse, the administrative headquarters of the marina: rebuilding the facility requires erecting it on pilings to bolster flood resilience, as well as to comply with ADA and OSHA standards.

Thanks largely to its transformation from background building into an elevated, visible landmark, the new dockhouse has been subject to repeated scrutiny and slow progress—that is, until August 2025, when the New York City Public Design Commission unanimously approved its design by Architecture Research Office (ARO). The studio has conceived a single-story dockhouse standing atop nine pilings and enclosing 3,800 square feet in a composition of bird-safe glass, aluminum grilles, and low-luster stainless steel. ARO further designed the façade's diagonal structural columns and chamfered corners to echo the nearby vernacular—boat rigging, for instance—while a green rooftop is planned to make the building relatively inconspicuous from the Upper West Side.

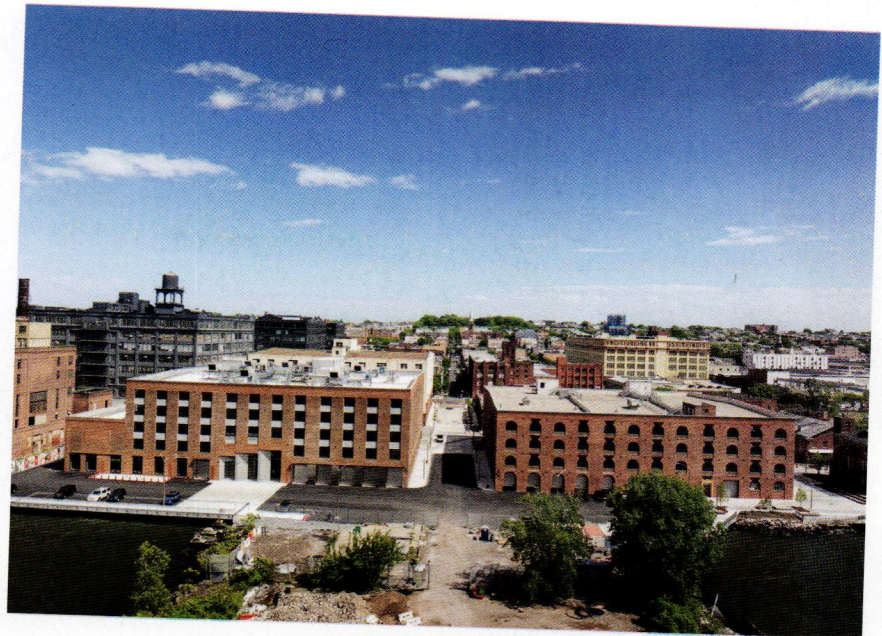
The dockhouse is part of a wider marina rehabilitation led by Moffatt & Nichol that includes design of a new fixed wave screen located at the southern portion of the site. The Boat Basin has been closed to vessels since 2021.

MADE Bush Terminal

This past summer the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) began redeveloping Pier 6 at Bush Terminal in Sunset Park into a five-acre park. The \$25 million project follows on NYCEDC's redevelopment of Bush Terminal Building A as a light industrial facility that can accommodate approximately 150 people working in disciplines like design, pattern making, and seamstering. nARCHITECTS oversaw the adaptive reuse of Building A, which also includes 30,000 square feet on the first and second floors for events and community programming.

Building A's common area occupies the middle bay of the old warehouse. It is at turns soaring and poignant, inviting awe at the structure added to comply with new standards like flood resilience, as well contemplation of history's layers—notches where floor joists have been removed. It is also what nARCHITECTS co-founding Principal Mimi Hoang calls an interior street, because "we were trying to connect the city to the water, because we're interested in how buildings can learn from their environments and reframe what you think of the environment." While the vision predates Pier 6's redevelopment, the park's completion in 2027 should only confirm the wisdom of linking Sunset Park to its waterfront.

nARCHITECTS will also lead conversion of the 155,000-square-foot Building C, for which the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget approved \$98.7 million in capital funding last year; both A and C are part of the four-building MADE Bush Terminal. In the meantime, the progressive architecture studio is upgrading Building A's white-box annex (site of the most recent Beaux Arts Ball) for an events operator.



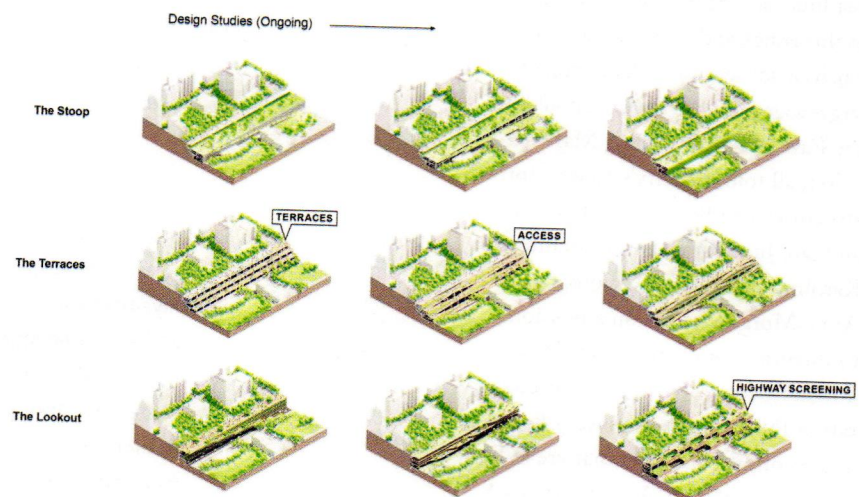
Above: With four dynamic buildings, the redevelopment of the Bush Terminal campus in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, will revitalize the waterfront, creating space for work and recreation.

Below: Proposed cantilever concepts for the BQE

BQE Corridor Vision

How do you solve a problem like the BQE? Hire an interdisciplinary team that counts WXY among its members, collect public feedback via 13 workshops and more than 400 grassroots activities, and document the best design concepts in the October 2024 report "BQE North & South: Safe, Sustainable, Connected." Currently, the NYC Department of Transportation is delving further into the recommendations, in part by conducting additional public engagement. It is doing some implementation, too, using \$5.6 million in federal funds granted earlier in 2024.

"North & South" refers to 10.6 state-owned miles of the BQE, which excludes the stretch in Downtown Brooklyn that is home to its infamous triple-cantilever. This city-owned portion of the artery is undergoing its own visioning process, called BQE Central Project, which is now entering environmental review.



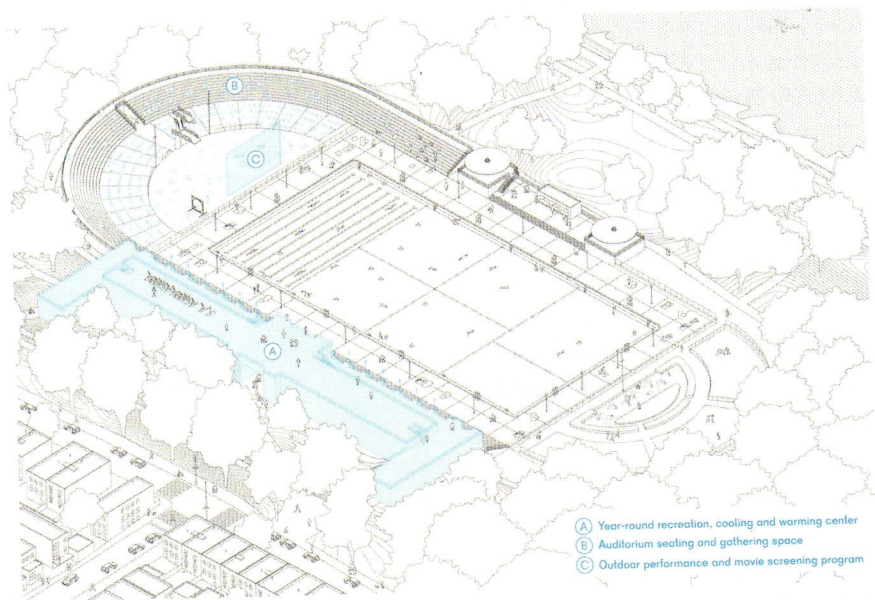


A public pool in Astoria Park, Queens, has a dramatic backdrop.

Public Pools

New York is slowly yet surely transforming into “Swim City.” The local non-profit First Strokes offers free swim lessons to teenagers, employing other teens as their instructors. The NYC Housing Authority Swim Corps pays young people living in New York’s public housing developments to learn to swim. Gottesman Pool opened in Central Park last June (see “Street Level” on page 24 of this issue), and after a decade and a half of advocacy and development, a large-scale pilot of +POOL should hit the East River this coming May.

Yet, all told, the city’s aquatic infrastructure sits idle between Labor Day and late June. In response, architect Karolina Czecek and photographer Anna Morgowicz are on a mission to integrate public pools into New Yorkers’ lives year-round. Their collaboration Public Pools proposes off-season activations for the sites that are as bold as they are tenable. An exhibition of



(A) Year-round recreation, cooling and warming center
 (B) Auditorium seating and gathering space
 (C) Outdoor performance and movie screening program

Above: Architect Karolina Czecek’s proposal for the Astoria location includes a performance venue on the site of the diving pool.

these saunas, performance venues, warming centers, and other uses recently concluded at Citygroup Gallery, and Czecek says that another staging is in the works. “I believe that, with an integrated approach that brings together supportive policy frameworks, programmatic innovation, and architectural design, existing pools can be reimagined as sites for social gathering, education, and climate-resilient and health-related programming,” she notes.

The QueensWay

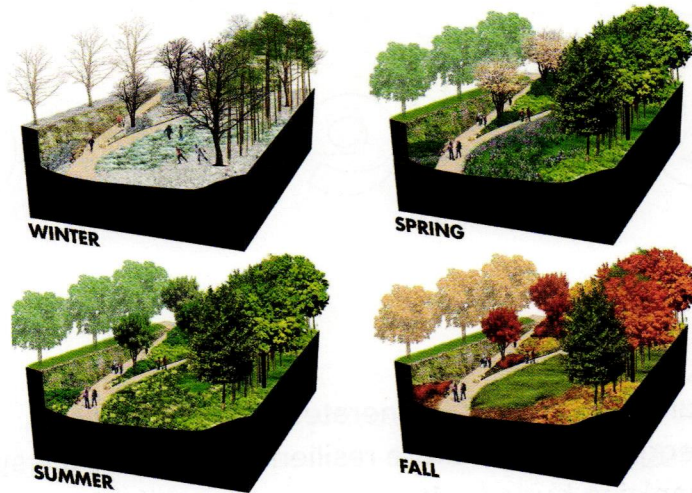
While enactment of the One Big Beautiful Act in July eliminated \$117 million in federal funding that had been promised to the QueensWay, the reimagining of the defunct LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch into a 3.5-mile greenway and park for Central Queens forges ahead. The project's Metropolitan Hub is funded through construction, and this 0.3-mile section will become a five-acre space that includes recreation and outdoor-education amenities, according to a design by DLANDstudio at Sasaki.

Friends of the QueensWay—the group formed in 2011 to spearhead rail conversion—is organizing advocacy events to restore remaining funding to the QueensWay, and its partner Trust for Public Land is overseeing an online petition to the same effect. The setback has simultaneously prompted a letter-writing campaign on behalf of QueensLink, a competing parks plan that also reintroduces rail transit to the former LIRR corridor.

Below: NYC Governor Kathy Hochul and John Lieber, chairman and CEO of the MTA, held a press briefing in August following approval of the Second Avenue subway line extension.



Above: A multiuse lawn is part of the proposed QueensWay park.
Below: A rendering shows the QueensWay's year-round potential.



Second Avenue Subway Phase 2

The Second Avenue Subway's extension into East Harlem was cast into doubt in June 2024, when Governor Kathy Hochul suspended the congestion pricing meant to fund half of the

roughly \$7 billion investment. Realization now feels very much within reach. In August 2025, the MTA awarded the second of four contracts that will create new underground Q stations at 106th and 116th streets, as well as a modernization of the 125th Street-Lexington Avenue station that will connect the Q to the 4, 5, and 6 lines and Metro-North.

A first contract, in place since January, involves relocation and upgrading of utilities beneath the Second Avenue roadway. The second focuses on excavation. Connect Plus Partners, a joint venture between Halmar International and FCC Construction, will tunnel between 116th Street and 125th Street and between the subway and the future 125th Street station. To save some taxpayer expense, the work also includes rehabilitation of tunnels that were created, then abandoned, in the 1970s.

Civil engineering takes place next year, and boring should begin in 2027. Phase 2's fourth contract will solicit fit-out of the new stations. ■

Rethinking the Unglamorous Underground

BY BILL MILLARD

“Subsurface spaghetti” generates risks, disruptions, and staggering costs. More resilient and accessible systems for organizing buried infrastructure are available. Though implementing them citywide may be implausible, efforts toward mapping, modeling, and creating interoperable data standards could lead toward reorganization, risk reduction, and socioeconomic benefits.

What lies beneath the streets and sidewalks of New York is messy, confusing, and troublesome. This is obvious to any architect who’s been involved in site exploration and any citizen who’s encountered disruptions from water-main breaks or power-line repairs. Yet the below-grade city is less mysterious than it was just a few years ago. In the highly motivated community that stud-

ies “subsurface spaghetti” (the public and private utility infrastructure under the public right of way caused by New York’s direct-burial method), some dare to hope it could take an orderly form.

Thanks to studies in the public, private, and academic sectors, precise three-dimensional knowledge of the subgrade environment is becoming more accurate and more available to those who need it. That includes

architects and planners, because the costs and risks associated with deteriorating infrastructure are rising—arguably already past the point where systemic upgrades, despite their up-front expense, offer better benefit/cost metrics than business as usual. Stressor events such as 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy, say redesign advocates, have shown that business as usual has downsides ranging from inconvenient to cataclysmic.



An excavation project on Greenwich Street, one of the most complex areas of the city in which to build a utilidor.

The quandary of entanglement

The space beneath the public right of way is a palimpsest reflecting public and private entities that have been burying infrastructure over two centuries. Sub-surface resources provide water, sewerage, power (gas and electric), steam, telecommunications, and, of course, transportation. It is a realm of overlapping claims, unintended consequences, incessant repairs, and bad surprises.

“People maybe don’t appreciate how many decades of infrastructure are down there,” says Debra F. Laefer, Ph.D., professor of urban informatics at NYU. “We have stuff that dates back to the 1820s. Certainly by the 1840s there’s a lot of gas in New York City. By the 1880s there’s a lot of electricity. There’s a huge amount of telecom.” The city’s steam system dates to 1882, merged into Consolidated Edison in 1954. Con Ed and Empire City Subway (the 1891-vintage firm, now a Verizon subsidiary, that maintains underground conduits and

New York’s 7,000 miles of streets are cut open some 400 times a day.

manholes) operate as franchisees, with other telecoms renting space for cables and fiber optics, plus National Grid serving some outer-borough areas with gas. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) handles water, storm-water, and sewer service. State control of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) adds another administrative layer to any projects involving the subways.

No single entity knows the full scope of subsurface infrastructure. “Once something goes in the ground,” Laefer adds, “it rarely gets taken out, because the technology is not being used any more, or the company that owned it doesn’t exist any more. We have city, county, state, federal, and private stuff in the ground, and they don’t necessarily talk

to each other.” Organizations have little incentive to share documentation, citing security, privacy, and business issues (telecom firms, for example, don’t want competitors knowing where they have or don’t have lines) among reasons for siloing. The city’s 3D mapping efforts, says Thomas Wynne, deputy commissioner for infrastructure at the Department of Design and Construction (DDC), are partial, comprising sewer and water systems, and coordinating with private utilities only on major projects or under emergency conditions. “What often comes out of disasters is a motivation to fix things, and people find the energy to do it,” he says. “I think it’s hard to sustain that energy. Over time you see things gradually go back to ‘the way we always do it.’”

David Burney, visiting professor of urban placemaking and management at Pratt Institute and former director of DDC, reflected on logistical, legal, and budgetary challenges for subgrade repairs and expansions. He recounts a common “knock-on effect” even above grade:

Water main break floods Brooklyn buildings and excavation site



A 24-inch water main broke early this morning on North 6th Street and Driggs Avenue, flooding basements and a construction site, while causing the street near the L train construction to crack and undermine. (Photo by Todd Mattai)

A massive Brooklyn water main break flooded basements and a construction site—and briefly shut down the L train lines before the morning rush.

Water main breaks and sinkholes are common ground condition emergencies in New York City.

when the Department of Transportation sought to aid pedestrians with intersection neckdowns, it would come to DDC for surveying. “It’s only 10 square yards of concrete—\$50,000, off you go, do it,” he says. “But then what happens is there’s a sewer catch basin right where we want to put that concrete, so we need to move that catch basin. Actually, there’s a gas line and a water line on top of it, and before you know it, your \$50,000 curb extension is a \$2 million infrastructure project.” Cost overruns often reflect unavoidable responses to such discoveries.

Proximity of systems increases vulnerability, particularly during extreme events. “One thing that’s driving a lot of the catastrophic failures,” says Rae Zimmerman, Ph.D., professor emerita of planning and public administration at NYU, “is the fact that a lot of the underground infrastructure is inter-related. Communication, electric power, and transportation are often running in the same geographic space underground, and are also functionally interdependent, and if one fails, the other one does.” From her studies of underground infrastructure failures, network theory, and stakeholders’ needs, she says, the city excels in emergency management but needs better-integrated approaches to design, operations, inspections, and communications: “one organization in

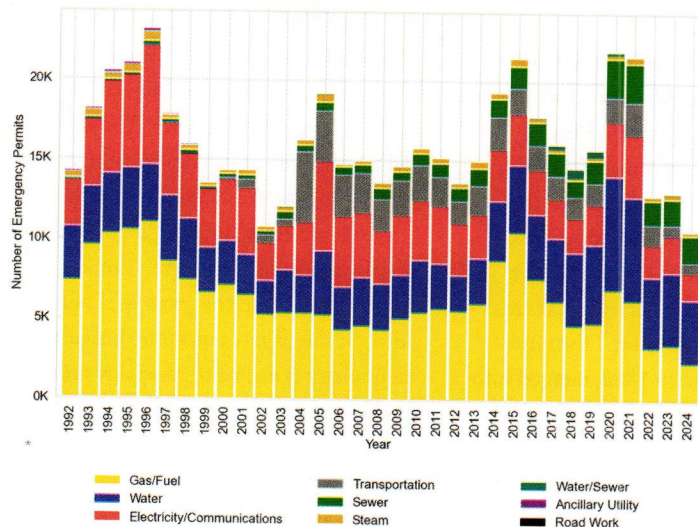
charge” instead of “a hodgepodge of organizations and professional societies that suggest standards.”

Beyond visible maintenance costs, a host of societal costs—indirect and hard to quantify, but no less real—follow from direct-burial spaces’ entangled conditions, patchy data, and poor coordination. Opening streets for repairs disrupts entire neighborhoods, and as Mark Reiner, Ph.D., PE, co-founder of analytics firm Acuitas 3D in Arvada, CO, observes from studies of street excavations since 1992, New York’s 7,000 miles of streets are cut open some 400 times a day. This creates pedestrian and vehicular obstructions and diversions, jackhammer noise, increases in particulate emissions, degradation of components from serial replacement and differential settling, and (when water mains are damaged) flooding. Laefer notes that despite the city’s pavement protection plan, “where they’re not supposed to touch a street that’s been recently paved for five years, the average time to first dig is less than a year. Not only does it create pollution and construction waste, but every cut decreases the lifespan of the pavement by several years.”

Reiner and colleagues have drawn data from open-source road-excavation permits, “the perfect source of information for a digital twin that nobody’s done

yet,” he says, analyzing “key performance indicators” to develop a Disruption Occurrence Index, linked to City Council districts and demographic variables. He describes this work as “a long-term strategic planning tool for public works and urban planners, but also as a base of a digital twin to be connected to BIM, to the architectural community, to transport,” ultimately providing comprehensive, granular, updatable information guiding efforts to replace the spaghetti with resilient critical urban corridors. Envisioning a “Smart Appian Way,” Reiner contrasts the ancient road from Rome to Brindisi with the current “Road and Buried Infrastructure Decay (RABID) paradigm,” vulnerable to both chronic and acute (emergency-related) disruptions: “If the Romans could build a road that lasted 2,000 years, why can’t we?”

Obstacles to such improvements include the oft-cited paucity of political will. Reiner explains some officials’ response to long-range problems with the neologism NIMTO: “Not in My Term of Office.” Subsurface work is short on glamour. As Laefer notes, “It’s hard to have a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a pipe.” Still, projecting the likely future under the RABID paradigm, Reiner speaks for many who study this non-system: “Everybody knows it’s not going to get any better.”



This graphic shows the number of emergency permits that were granted annually for various utilities from 1992 to 2024.



The utilidor at Disney World was built in the late 1960s. It houses utilities, is used to transport goods, and includes walkways for employees to move around the park.

Beyond Spilhaus and Mickey Mouse

Since 2006, city agencies have been investigating ways to improve maintenance practices with less disruption and lower cost per mile. DDC's Town+Gown program has led efforts to redesign subsurface space, culminating in three "Under the Ground" symposia (most recently on June 5, 2025) and the 2019 formation of a working group advocating a more accessible "system of systems": multi-utility tunnels, a.k.a. utility corridors or utilidors.

Utilidors are both commonsensical and retrofuturist; they were a feature of Athelstan Spilhaus's never-built Minnesota Experimental City. Yet they are a reality in Tokyo; Prague; Singapore; Putrajaya (near Kuala Lumpur), Malaysia; and, famously, at Disney World, where a buried box-tunnel system, a solution for a swampy site, realizes Walt Disney's intention to spare visitors the sight of maintenance crews or "cast members" out of costume. A few American academic, medical, and corporate campuses include utility tunnels; no American city to date has implemented the system on the full urban scale, yet long-term life-cycle-cost and full cost-benefit analyses by Town+Gown with scholars from Columbia, NYU, and other centers suggest that utilidor construction at certain sites vastly outperforms current practice, provided financing systems could cover the up-front costs.

Recent local projects have missed the chance to pilot a utilidor approach, Burney notes. Con Ed maintains multiple tunnels, including one under the Harlem River bringing power from a Yonkers substation to Upper Manhattan, but other opportunities to add utility spaces to new projects have fallen through. Burney cites the Second Avenue Subway and the Economic Development Corporation's Hunter's Point South, where "the developer looked at the numbers and said, 'No, we're just going to bury it in the ground like we always do.'" He recalls a DDC joint study with Con Ed exploring tunnel systems modeled on Japanese cases, but "the study basically ground to a halt for two reasons, legal and logistical." Tunnel construction beneath a new street is straightforward; digging up existing utilities for retrofitting a new tunnel "means that nobody on

that particular section of street has power or sewage or water or data" until completion, and with multiple utilities, staged downtime is not an option. "The lawyers had a field day" over ownership and leasing involving DEP, Con Ed, and Empire City Subway at Hunter's Point South, Burney adds. "It would make sense, in my mind, for the city to own the utilidor and then to lease it out to the different utilities, but we never got to the point of testing that. So that's where it died."

New York's subsurface conditions are severe but not unique. "The problem of utilities is global," says Paul Nicholas, tunnel practice manager at AECOM's Seattle office specializing in small-diameter microtunneling and trenchless horizontal directional drilling, who has lived in 16 countries and visited 135. "No one has really worked it out." Essential utilities are treated as an afterthought in new housing, he notes. Still, the United States differs from much of the world in having utilities in corporate hands. "I think the ownership of utilities is where the problem starts," he says. "The permitting requirements for construction in the U.S. are extremely complex and time-consuming, probably longer than any other country I've worked in. Whoever owns it doesn't want to mix their space up with someone else unless there's some mutual benefit to the numerous utility owners."

A utilidor tunnel in Malaysia includes power and telecommunication cables, potable water supply pipes, gas pipes, and telemetry cables.



Nicholas recalls a California project where a developer wanted utilidors in 100-foot spaces between new office buildings; AECOM began designing them, but the electrical, water, and fiber-optic companies refused to share space. “I don’t believe we’re going to see the development of utilidors in the U.S. until a city itself builds them and forces the utility corporations to use them,” he says. “They claim there are often safety issues of having power cables with sewers and water supply but, seriously, that can be dealt with in design.” London, in contrast, “has built probably nearly 100 miles of cable tunnels in the last 20 years,” unhindered by UK Power Networks’s private status (the U.K. privatized public electricity boards in 1989). “They have seen the advantage of investing in tunnels to place cables; it provides future savings that they have access at all times” for expansion.

David Green, master planning urban design leader and principal in Arup’s New York office, cites a project in which architectural expertise transformed a

routine intervention into a civic asset. In a flood-prone area with an underground creek near Atlanta’s Beltline and Ponce City Market, the Department of Public Works planned to spend \$40 million on subsurface water-detention systems. “Architects got together,” Green recalls, “figured out how the underground systems were working, and said, ‘Well, this is crazy. We’ve got the Beltline right next to it. What if we rethought this and moved the water to surface water, created a basin, and that basin became the center of a park, and that park became the center of a redevelopment neighborhood?’ So instead of spending \$40 million on this underground series of large culverts that would hold water, we now have a beautiful lake and park and billions of dollars of redevelopment.” Arup’s 17-acre park served the stormwater-detention function, catalyzed higher-density development than originally planned, and came in at \$23 million. “If we as architects can get involved in the front end, and we’re driving conversations about utilities-distribution issues,” Green

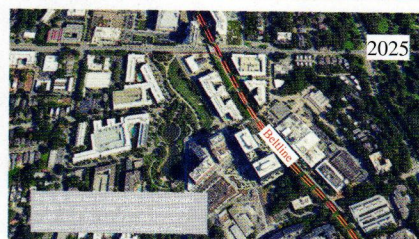
It’s in architects’ nature to convene people from different disciplines to get these things executed.

comments, “we’re able to think beyond the project manager for a city agency who’s working with a specific utility to solve a specific problem. It’s in our nature to convene people from different disciplines to get these things executed.”

In mid-journey, the map begins to appear

Efforts toward a more robust utility system require better mapping of existing infrastructure and development of interoperable data-sharing systems. Wendy Dorf, who managed geospatial information systems (GIS) for DEP and is now on the board of directors of NYC Geospatial Information Systems and Mapping Organization (GISMO), spent 10 years digitally mapping the city’s water system. She then worked with geospatial specialist Alan Leidner (then of the Department of City Planning) after 9/11, combining underground data with a topological map. Among other achievements, using infrared imaging to identify underground fire sites and locating a 200,000-pound freon tank, they helped prevent a secondary disaster: had the fires reached the freon, a lethal cloud of phosgene, a chemical-warfare agent banned by the Geneva Convention, would have added to Ground Zero’s woes.

This emergency-driven work led to the Unification for Underground Resilience Measures (UNUM) project supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), focusing on two demographically contrasting sites, East Midtown and Brooklyn’s Sunset Park. UNUM researchers, including Dorf, Laefer, Leidner, Zimmerman, and others, work with a standards organization,



Arup helped to transform a desolate, flood-prone area of Atlanta into a 17-acre park that serves a stormwater-detention function and catalyzed higher-density development than originally planned.

the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC), to create a federated protocol that recognizes different stakeholders' security requirements, letting them retain data within their environments while providing an encrypted medium for exchange on request. For the second phase of UNUM, NSF has granted the city \$10 million to continue subsurface documentation: benefits include a step toward electrification of municipal fleets—an environmental goal of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services—and toward expansion of charging networks for electric vehicles, a form of aboveground change that requires the subsurface environment to evolve. OGC's Model for Underground Data Definition and Integration extends ideas explored by UNUM toward standards that can function in any location, overcoming siloing among GIS, BIM, and digital-twin systems. The work is also guided by the surveying and documentation standards of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), ASCE 38 and 75, pertaining to existing and new infrastructure.

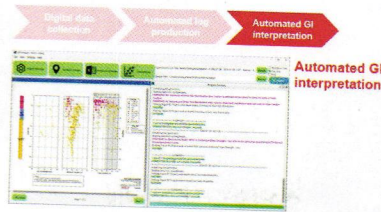
Leidner is optimistic that advances in imaging technology are approaching the holy grail of comprehensive 3D underground mapping, capable of connection with aboveground BIM. With multichannel ground-penetrating radar (GPR), "you could drag it behind a truck and go 40 mph and capture finely located geo-imagery of what's underground," he says. "You can cover a lot of ground quickly, and that would reduce costs." Time-delineated electromagnetics and acoustic imaging help overcome the depth limitations of GPR, estimated at roughly

10 feet. Synthetic-aperture radar sensors, a satellite-based Doppler technology, can "identify those areas where subsurface conditions would lead to conflict between different kinds of pipe that could lead to explosion." Another approach Leidner finds useful is the borehole soil studies of George Deodatis, professor of civil engineering at Columbia, who is "compiling an underground map of the geology of the city, based on 20,000 samples that are taken routinely but were never digitized or modeled together." Combined with DEP and MTA records, Leidner says, "there are multiple sources of data that you can use to create an almost comprehensive picture of what's underground. Let's say it'll get you 95% of what you really need to know most of the time."

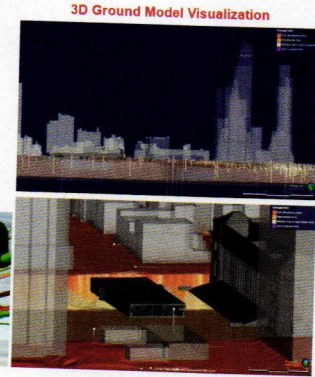
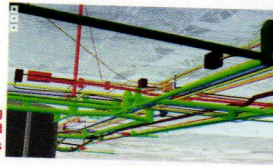
Engineers and planners overseas, Leidner points out, are ahead of the U.S. in creating and integrating models. "The U.K. is creating an underground network of all its utilities across the entire country in a project called NUAR, the National Underground Asset Register," he says. "It's already happened in Denmark, Flanders, Belgium, and the Netherlands." Still, New York "has allocated \$10 million to create its 3D underground mapping project, which will, working with the utilities, begin the process of mapping all underground utilities and marry that to George Deodatis's work to integrate the

borings. New York is going to be the pilot project nationally for this kind of 3D depiction of the underground."

More sophisticated modeling of interactions between environments underground and aboveground, natural and built, Leidner says, will help architects anticipate risks affecting their buildings, climatic and otherwise. "It's all starting to come together now, and architects need to be part of this, because they need all that data. They're going to need it integrated and standardized, and it will probably simplify the design process." Terri Matthews, director of Town+Gown and organizer of the June symposium, notes that participants emphasized the need for data collaboration from the design phase through the construction phase. Joint bidding could help accomplish better subsurface project management; likewise, NYC permit data and other public sources can identify potential subsurface vulnerability and help make subsurface planning as rigorous as surface planning. One popular symposium proposal suggested rethinking local franchise agreements to help develop new models of public-private collaboration. "It was said that we'd have to go back 100 years to fix this," says Matthews. "But understanding the history of how subsurface spaghetti happened will help us chart a future course." ■

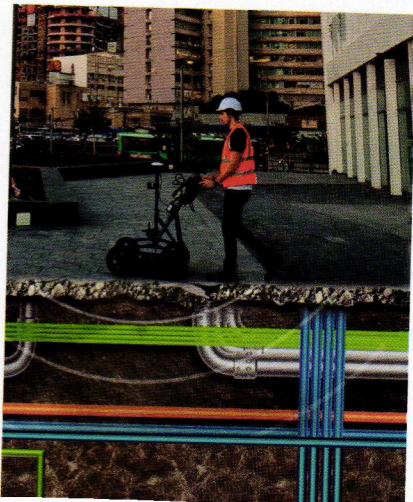



3D Ground Model including underground assets and proposed alignments



Above: Graphics from a presentation by Arup's Wylie Tsang and Francesc Mirada show how standardized digital ground data collection and 3D modeling can help create an accurate and comprehensive picture of below-grade conditions.

Below: An image from a DDC Town+Gown presentation by Exodigo, a non-intrusive subsurface mapping technology.



A photograph of a modern building with a glass roof and orange facade, surrounded by trees and people. The building has a prominent glass roof structure and a bright orange lower section. People are visible inside and around the building, suggesting a public or community space. The scene is set outdoors with lush green trees and a clear sky.

Vision of an Edible New York

A city that both feeds and nourishes its citizens requires an investment in food infrastructure.

BY LINYEE YUAN

In my dreams, I imagine walking down Broadway, smelling the dizzying sweetness of ripe fruit, and reaching up to pluck a comely apple from a nearby tree. Farmstands with nutrient-dense greens grown on rooftops in Chinatown tell me of the season. Forest gardens, full of chestnut trees and serviceberry bushes, fill in the lines between housing complexes where water-thirsty grass once withered. New York City is rescued from its fate as a concrete jungle and returned to an edible food forest.

My vision for an edible New York City is not just a Willy Wonka Technicolor dream. It's a design proposition for how cities can nourish people, ecosystems, and economies. Edible cities, defined by the consortium of European partners that make up the Edible Cities Network, are "designed and managed to support the production of locally grown food, with the goal of increasing food security, promoting health and nutrition, improving biodiversity, reducing food waste, and minimizing the environmental impact of food production and transportation." Cities such as Detroit, Paris, Andernach (on the Rhine in Germany), and Todmorden (which birthed the U.K.'s Incredible Edible network) have created policies to promote and support urban agriculture initiatives. Currently, there are campaigns to pass "right to grow" laws across the U.K. to transform disused public land for food cultivation. Havana boasts that more than 50% of the fruits and vegetables consumed within the city are locally produced, a result of

Opposite: The Marlboro Agricultural Education Center, designed by Studio Gang, transforms the grounds of a New York City Housing Authority campus into a welcoming hub for multigenerational education, job training, and community leadership in nutrition and urban agriculture.

Below: A "Seeds and Squash" festival in September in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, was hosted by the author's organization, Field Meridians.



What would New York City taste like if we allowed the landscape to breathe and become unruly?

converting approximately 35,000 hectares into agricultural land since the 1990s. This transformation—prompted by the prolonged U.S. embargo—emerged through a combination of government support, state-run *organopónicos*, and community-led urban farming initiatives. By designing towards an edible city, we strengthen that city's resiliency around climate, food sovereignty, and community.

Edible cities aren't only delicious, they mark a shift in how people see themselves in relation to the built environment. Manhattan and its surrounds were once biodiverse ecological communities of streams, forests, and swamps tended by the Lenape people. As Eric Sanderson details in his wonderful 2009 book, *Mannabatta*, the island had 55 biological diversity zones—more per acre than Yellowstone. Under colonial influence, many of these streams were filled in, and

the city's forests were clear-cut to make room for farms. Despite the destruction of colonial-style farming, this history reminds us that the city is geographically situated to be fertile. In considering the future of New York City in relation to its bountiful past, we must conjure the sensorial joy and immediate urgency of engaging with a living world by tasting the literal fruits of its labor. As botanist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer asked in a recent conversation with the Museum of Science in Boston, "How are we going to fall in love with the world if you don't pick berries?" What would New York City taste like if we allowed the landscape to breathe and become unruly? By reframing food as infrastructure, those of us who design the built environment have an opportunity to produce living infrastructures in which the urban landscape isn't fixed, but returns it to a stewarded place, brimming with fecund possibilities.

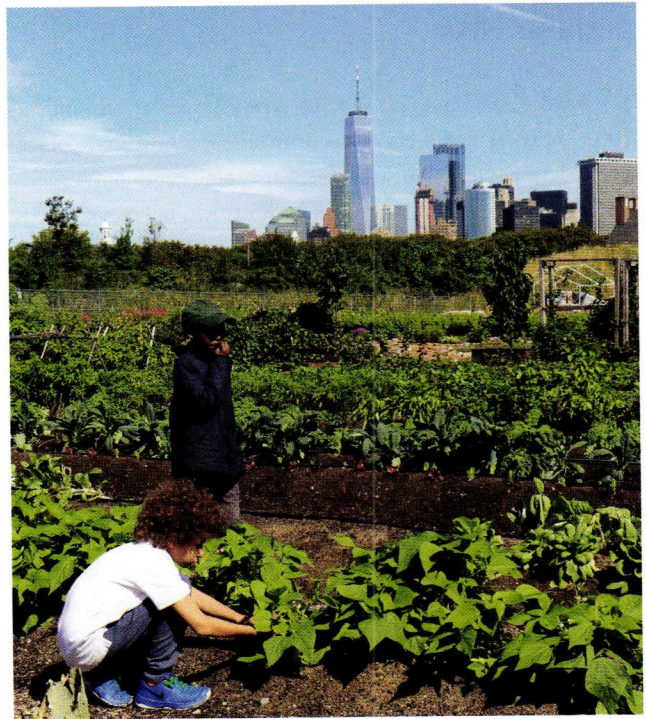
The City and the Trees

In many ways, New York City leads the nation in sheer scale of urban agriculture activity. According to a 2012 Design Trust report in partnership with Red Hook's Added Value Farms, there are more than 700 food-producing farms and gardens throughout the five boroughs, compared to Seattle and San Francisco's 75. We can also boast of more than 900 school gardens, thanks to over a century of advocacy. In 1902, Francis Griscom Parsons, a Brooklyn-based mother of seven, founded an innovative children's farm on a public lot in the neighborhood then known as Hell's Kitchen. The initiative's success catalyzed the school garden movement in New York City, rooted in the conviction that open space, the freedom to play, and agricultural education were vital to nurturing the next generation. More recently, a 2010 public-private partnership between GrowNYC, the environmental non-profit that runs many of the city's farmer's markets, and the mayor's office, created an institutional framework for supporting school gardens through technical and material assistance, educational workshops, and curricula.

Community Gardens

Community gardens in New York City represent grassroots activism and resilience at its best. With the deepening financial crisis of the '70s and a rash of abandoned buildings, neighborhood residents began to take over disused and neglected spaces that littered the city. Luis Torres and Jose Ayala began community gardening efforts in Loisaída in the early '60s. Hattie Carthan formed a youth greening corps in Bed-Stuy for street tree stewardship in 1971 to resist the negative effects of redlining. Through community organizing, more than 1,500 trees were planted in less than a decade, transforming the neighborhood, improving quality of

In the early 1970s, "Green Guerillas" planted gardens in vacant lots, eventually forming what became the city's first official community garden on the corner of Bowery and Houston streets.



GrowNYC's Governors Island Teaching Garden is a one-acre urban farm where the organization provides school tours for over 5,000 schoolchildren every year. The farm is also open to the public on weekends.

life and property values, and creating policy change by establishing a tree matching program. The "Green Guerillas," a band of guerilla gardeners, began greening the Lower East Side and East Village through radical acts of civil disobedience: throwing seed bombs over the fences of vacant lots, planting sunflowers in street meridians, and putting flower boxes on the window ledges of abandoned buildings. In 1973, with a coalition of neighbors, they took over a lot on the Bowery and Houston, which later became the first officially recognized garden in New York City.

The history of NYC's community gardens—where the tensions among land stewardship, development, and community intersect—underscores the question of who gets to decide the future of New York City. In 1999, then Mayor Rudy Giuliani created a plan to auction off 112 community gardens to real estate developers. Hundreds of gardeners organized their communities to fight the mayor's plans and save their gardens, ultimately suing the city. In 2002, then Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed the Community Gardens Agreement with then Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, preserving an additional 198 gardens. Of the original 114 gardens under threat, the Trust for Public Land saved 69 gardens, and Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project took over an additional 51. Today, community gardens remain a place for rest and both physical and spiritual nourishment—a rare third space for people to gather and find fellowship. These green spaces (over 550 are registered with New York City Park's GreenThumb program) are being upheld as a model for "nature-based solutions" for climate resiliency.

Considering Agricultural Waste

If we think of the food web as the web of life, we must also consider the ways we can compost death to generate life. The architectural materials researcher, Mae-ling Lokko, is advocating for the creation of a culture of care when dealing with biomass for building applications—biocomposites for interior, exterior, and structural applications. With the building and construction sector already responsible for 37% of global CO₂ emissions, transforming our relationship with waste is critical to our future. “There’s a whole world to care for,” when it comes to collecting biomass from myriad, diverse sources in and around the city, Lokko says. Whether it’s from urban forestry, peri-urban farms, or timber plantations, municipal waste coming from hospitality and homes, or invasive species growing in and around the rivers or water bodies in the city, “our agricultural industries are not mature enough to care about the quality of their waste,” she says.

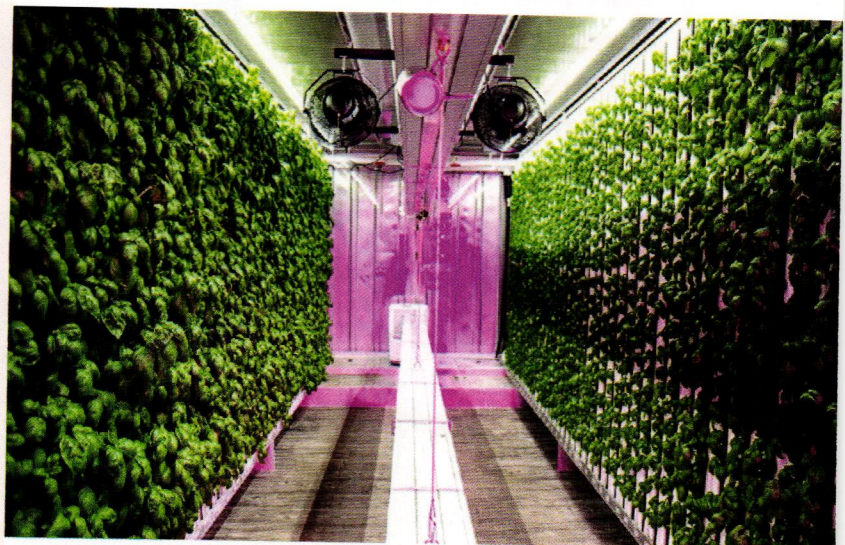
Top-down approaches—as we’ve learned from our largely failed efforts to recycle things like plastic, paper, and glass—are expensive, inefficient, and intensive. As Lokko understands, when it comes to creating value for biomass, the question lies with how we organize at a local-to-regional level. “A lot of work is trying to figure out where we have some degree of control—from rural, urban farms to neighborhood waste-collection systems. We can put in rituals of, say, separating certain types of biomass streams because the scale of people working on these farms is more manageable and in close contact with each other.” Collaborators of Lokko, like professor Jennifer Pazour of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, are looking at organizing people at a grassroots level and decision-making for logistics and supply-chain challenges. “When we start to look at biomass, it’s a really interesting case study, because all of a sudden we have to organize people who are essentially at the other end of the material value chain: users, urban farmers, homeowners. How do we organize ourselves around the rapid, high-quality collection and transformation of biomass materials that leave our spaces?”

What Lokko is pointing towards is a new role for architects—not just as agents for value generation, but participation. Alice Rawsthorn, in her 2018 book, *Design as an Attitude*, advocates for interdisciplinary experts to apply the tools of their various practices to projects that help us make sense of the world around us, and turn these observations to our advantage. And what better thorny problem to address than how living in relationship with our food can help us shift our relationship with waste?

Urban Farms

This question of who charts the future of the city was in the foreground when I first began reporting on food systems in 2010, and witnessed a great hype around a more tech-enabled food future in New York City. Investment from City Hall, real estate developers, and venture capital poured in to jumpstart the future of urban agriculture. As Henry Gordon-Smith, founder of the agtech consultancy Agritecture recalls, “It was a really exciting time. A lot of these new urban ag companies were private and using new technologies—they had different needs, different technologies, and there was no place for them in the historical context of urban ag in New York City.” Vertical, aquaponic, container, and rooftop farms captured the imagination of speculators and entrepreneurs alike. These larger operations promised economic development, technology-enabled innovation, and local jobs that bridged agriculture and precision manufacturing. But for many of these operations, the future of feeding the city was something that needed to be charted by private interests, reliant on investment capital. The city was slow to support these agtech companies, so when the money ran out, so did the momentum. Many of these upstarts have since shuttered, including Kimbal Musk’s Square Roots container farm, and some have stalled out, like Sky Vegetables, the 8,000-square-foot farm on the NYCHA-situated Arbor House in the Bronx. But many are still in operation today—including Gotham Greens’s distributed network of urban greenhouses, Brooklyn Grange’s rooftop operations in former industrial landscapes like the Navy Yard and Sunset Park, and Newark-based vertical farm, AeroFarms—despite the slowdown of investment capital.

Square Roots is an urban farm and accelerator platform empowering entrepreneurs with vertical farming shipping containers. Agriculture consulting firm Agritecture provided advice on training program development.



In 2013, Yemi Amu established Oko Farms, New York City's first and only publicly accessible outdoor aquaponics farm on a disused lot in Bushwick. With a professional history rooted in food and education, Amu had years of experience working in an interdisciplinary manner with city agencies, schools, and non-profits to lead growing and nutrition initiatives. Since then, the farm has taken on different forms under different land conditions, including 10,000 square feet on the East River shorefront in Williamsburg, and its current iterations across a residential space in Flatbush and a commercial space in Bushwick. But the heart of Amu's operation remains dedicated to education, production, and research. Her hybrid model represents a sustainable vision for how urban farming should be integrated into the fabric of the city, and why Oko Farms remains a vital model for the future of an edible city.

"I see empty spaces as potential for food. I've grown in so many different places—schools, residential houses, museums, food pantries, community gardens and youth centers," Amu reflects. "In addition to places like hospitals and grocery stores, these are all places where we could grow food and where open space exists. Our current farm in Flatbush is a residential building where they installed an A-frame greenhouse extended from the building." Like the community gardens that came before, Oko Farms's radical history of reclaiming space for food production while simultaneously providing opportunities for intergenerational knowledge sharing and innovation has become a hyperlocal model for how New York City is thinking about the future.

Despite a network of community gardens, urban farms, and farmer's markets, our city lacks the infrastructure to provide any semblance of food security at a neighborhood, borough, or municipal scale.



A handful of millet sorghum grown at Oko Farms Aquaponics Farm & Education Center.

Towards Relational Architectures

Despite a network of community gardens, urban farms, and farmer's markets, our city lacks the infrastructure to provide any semblance of food security at a neighborhood, borough, or municipal scale. Adding to this urgency is the fact that an estimated 14.6% of New Yorkers are food insecure, compared to a national rate of 13.5%. This translates to 1.2 million people who cannot access enough food to meet their daily needs, many of whom are children. Even with robust changes, urban agriculture will not be able to fully meet the consumption demands of city dwellers, but an edible city will provide steps toward that goal, bringing us a new relationship to the foods we eat and their seasonality, as well as to one another. The challenge is how to use the tools at our disposal—utilizing disused spaces, integrating agriculture-friendly infrastructure in city planning and real estate development, and implementing a pro-urban agriculture policy—to support a vision of a more delicious future.

New York is only now working to establish a centralized and comprehensive approach to urban agriculture. Established in 2022, the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture was created by city council mandate, and oriented its mission by laying out the myriad benefits of urban ag in its first official report: "Urban gardens and farms aren't just places for respite. They also absorb stormwater, reduce outdoor temperatures, and create cleaner air." It is the first step in creating a plan for greening and feeding the city but, in many ways, the mayor's office is playing catch-up with grassroots and private organizations that have been advocating for a more edible city for decades.



Farm.One is an indoor vertical farm in Manhattan using hydroponic technology to grow rare culinary herbs for NYC's finest restaurant chefs. Agritecture designed and installed Farm.One's first facility, recruited their head grower, and researched rare crop species for production.

Gordon-Smith, of Agritecture, envisions an edible New York City where 5% of the city's square footage is dedicated to growing food: "There are big opportunities for clusters of urban farms to leapfrog each other—not just in production but in value processing, training centers, and markets." Gordon-Smith has been advocating for a plan with the city to implement a special zone where maximum incentives are put into an area that both needs reliable access to nutrient-dense, culturally appropriate foods and also has viable space available to develop urban agriculture. He continues, "There is a perspective that is also resilience-based—each borough needs to have some farms and skills to have resilience shocks in the systems. How could these farms work together? How do buildings integrate them better? How do water, energy, and waste all fit into that?" Both Gordon-Smith and Amu see the opportunity to transform disused spaces—food distribution hubs like farmer's markets, hospitals, schools, large corporate sites, hotels—into sites for production and food infrastructure.

Architects have a unique opportunity to design these encounters within our built environment. "When we talk about bringing food to where people are, having architects and designers prioritize green spaces in construction is a simple first step," Amu says. "When architects are considering water runoff, solar, heating, or insulation, they can incorporate a weight-bearing green roof or a food-producing backyard or basement as answers to some of these challenges." These "nature-based solutions" are nothing new, and the call for individual architects to respond in these ways can feel a bit Sisyphean—like asking people to stop using plastic straws to solve the problem of microplastics. But, as Gordon-Smith notes, "There is policy to support these efforts; zoning is there, and there are credits in green infrastructure builds that are sufficient. But leadership is missing." Architects have an opportunity to provide that leadership to intentionally design these encounters—just like the berry-picking that Robin

Wall Kimmerer describes. The moment is ripe to usher in a paradigm shift in how people relate to the city.

In my neighborhood in Central Brooklyn, my years of writing about food systems have now crystallized into Field Meridians, an artist collective rooted in Crown Heights, with a vision to plant a publicly accessible food forest in our community. Also known as forest gardens, food forests are biodiverse plantings of edible perennial plants and guilds of fruit- and nut-bearing trees designed to mimic natural forests. Last winter, I held weekly meetings at which neighbors and potential collaborators came together to dream about how we might accomplish this feat.

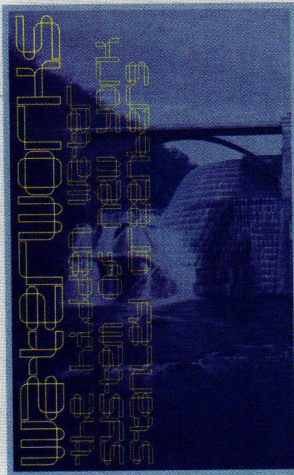
More than 300 people participated over the course of 14 weeks, and together we established a roadmap for decision-making, a rubric for site evaluation, a design, a selection of plantings, a management plan, and a community engagement plan. Our vision is to collectively steward land, increase tree canopy for better social outcomes, and offer a model for climate resiliency rooted in community care. Whether or not we accomplish our dream, sowing seeds of possibility with this collective of architects, planners, policy experts, community organizers, artists, and farmers feels like the most vital work at a moment often dominated by despair—and doing so over a delicious bite grown in the city we love is a healing, Wonka-esque antidote. ■

Today, the Green Guerillas advocate for community land ownership and gardeners across the city, maintaining a larger commitment to food sovereignty and fresh, culturally relevant food.



Lit Review

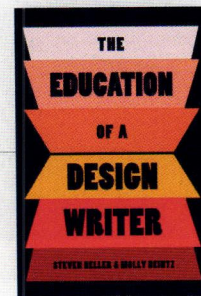
BY THE EDITORS



Waterworks: The Hidden Water System of New York

By Stanley Greenberg
Kris Graves Projects, 2025,
128 pp.

This exploration of New York City’s water supply and wastewater treatment systems was originally published in 2003. A new and expanded edition is a complete reworking of the book, featuring 362 photographs taken between 1992 and 2024, and two new large folded insert maps. Greenberg, who has been photographing the built environment since the early 1980s, visited reservoirs, aqueducts, tunnels, gatehouses, water-supply and sewer-pumping stations, water tanks, wastewater treatment plants, stormwater retention facilities, and maintenance covers throughout the watershed and around the city. The maps identify more than 400 sites in the system, including upstate reservoirs, abandoned systems, and tunnel shaft sites. In the late 1990s, Greenberg received unprecedented access to photograph the system, which made much of this work possible. After 9/11, all facilities were closed to the public. Since then, Greenberg has located hundreds of sites that are in plain view, but are largely unknown and unidentified—anonymous street furniture invisible to most people.



The Education of a Design Writer

By Steven Heller
and Molly Heintz
Allworth, 2025, 312pp.

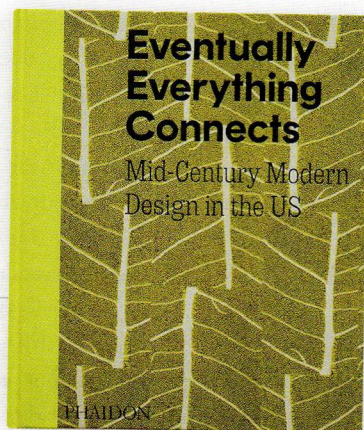
Featuring both acclaimed authors and new voices, this book spans design-related disciplines with examples that showcase a variety of styles, techniques, and best practices for writing about design. Site visits, interviews, personal reflection, and incisive analysis become the basis of stories that demonstrate how design writing can be a springboard for engaging cultural criticism. The book was edited by Steven Heller, co-founder and co-chair emeritus of the MFA Design program at New York’s School of Visual Arts, and Molly Heintz, chair of the MA Design Research, Writing & Criticism program at the School of Visual Arts, and former *Oculus* editor-in-chief.



The New Design Museum: Co-creating the Present, Prototyping the Future

By Beatrice Leanza
Park Books, 2025, 332pp.

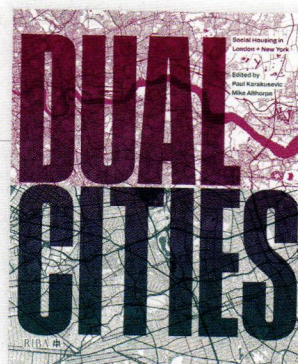
Theories and voices from leading international institutions and independent initiatives address the transformed—and continually transforming—nature of design in the 21st century, and its planetary scope in both practical and discursive dimensions. By mapping a new landscape of institutional practices across different geographical locations, this volume reveals how spaces of culture dedicated to design need transformation—of their missions, programs, and outreach platforms—to respond to an ever-expanding outlook on design as a field that is moving beyond its traditional presentation as an object-based practice.



Eventually Everything Connects: Mid-Century Modern Design in the US

By Andrew Satake Blauvelt
Phaidon, 2025, 464pp.

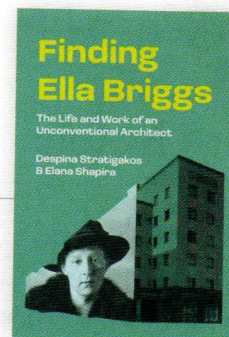
This is a surprising and joyful visual tour of American mid-century modernism through hundreds of photographs, drawings, and pieces of ephemera organized by the art museum at Cranbrook, Michigan, where the movement began. Essential figures such as Charles and Ray Eames, Harry Bertoia, Florence Knoll, and Eero Saarinen are represented alongside other women and designers of color who have been historically eclipsed, including Joel Robinson, Ray Komai, Ruth Adler Schnee, Olga Lee, Miller Yee Fong, Lucia DeRespinis, Dorothy Liebes, and many others. The book offers a fresh perspective on this influential movement.



Dual Cities: Social Housing in London & New York

Edited by Paul Karakusevic and Mike Althorpe
RIBA Publishing, 2025, 256pp.

Offering a practical guide to the past, present, and future of housing, *Dual Cities* explores social and affordable housing models in London and New York. Illustrated case studies showcase best practice in parallel, demonstrating how the cities have inspired and learned from one another. Complemented by a set of thoughtful essays and interviews with experts from both sides of the Atlantic, the book demystifies current policy, delivery mechanisms, and ways of working, providing valuable lessons in creating better and more resilient cities through improved housing.



Finding Ella Briggs: The Life and Work of an Unconventional Architect

By Despina Stratigakos and Elana Shapira
Princeton University Press, 2025, 312pp.

Despina Stratigakos and Elana Shapira bring together an international team of historians to provide the defining biography of this boldly unconventional designer. Whether she was fighting for integration at Europe's architecture schools or writing about innovative houses for American women's magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, Briggs embodied the transatlantic flow of modernism. This panoramic book uncovers new findings about Briggs and her networks and projects, recovering the many facets of a life that spanned global borders and cultures.

Building for the essential workers who make our cities livable

BY PAUL BAUER, AIA

When we think of essential workers, images of police officers, firefighters, nurses, and doctors come to mind. We don't often think about others who are essential to making urban life possible, such as sanitation workers. These public servants keep our city livable, collecting our trash, clearing snow from our streets, and answering the call in a crisis. Yet, all too often, they must work in aging, run-down facilities. As development encroaches on the areas where these buildings are located, our city's crumbling infrastructure and the subpar working conditions of our essential workers become highly visible. We know the built environment holds immense power to uplift, inspire, and connect individuals and communities. Excellence in design is not a privilege for a few signature buildings, but a responsibility that architects must embrace for the public infrastructure and essential workers who support our cities. It is our responsibility to create facilities that are transformative to worker dignity, represent the aspirations of communities, and become a catalyst for placemaking.

For too long, our public infrastructure buildings were designed and built at the lowest cost possible. These utilitarian containers offered little to the surrounding neighborhoods or the staff working there. They often fell into disrepair when municipal budgets couldn't support their upkeep. The deterioration of our public infrastructure has a deleterious effect on the community and the mental and physical well-being of essential workers. Conversely, evidence shows that design excellence—thoughtful attention to the surrounding context, worker environment,

daylight, space, acoustics, and materials designed within available resources—has a profound effect on the neighborhood and the physical and mental health of essential workers.

I became acutely aware of this situation while working with the Sanitation Department of the City of New York (DSNY), supporting its efforts to rehabilitate its crumbling portfolio of buildings and leading the design of new DSNY garages. The department's buildings are, by necessity, big and robust, but also take a beating from daily operations. For new facilities, DSNY's motto is simple: "We want to be the best building in the neighborhood." The department values design excellence and works with architecture firms that share its goals and respect its operations. Its projects confront well-organized NIMBYism, but DSNY's willingness to listen to the community and reimagine what a sanitation garage could be improves the working environment and transforms public opinion from NIMBY to YIMBY.

For the Manhattan 1/2/5 Garage in Lower Manhattan, Dattner Architects led a design team that included WXY. We designed a facility that set a new standard for design excellence in public infrastructure. We internalized operations and wrapped the building with a high-performance façade. Glazed curtain walls connect workspaces to views of the Hudson and allow the community to see in, demystifying operations. Thoughtful organization of personnel spaces with distinctive colors fosters camaraderie and connection. Materials are durable but not institutional, and the vibrant color palette makes spaces joyful and safer, contributing to resilience.

Public architecture is an expression of values. When we invest in design excellence for our essential workers, we affirm the worth of their labor and their personhood. A thoughtfully designed workspace says, "You matter. Your work is indispensable. Your well-being is a priority." This affirmation is not abstract.

When essential workers feel respected and comfortable, retention rates rise, and team cohesion improves. Dattner Architects's soon-to-be-completed DSNY Brooklyn 3 Garage brings these lessons learned from Lower Manhattan to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Brooklyn 3 is on the dividing line between residential and manufacturing zones. Daily operations were moved to the industrial side, minimizing impact on adjacent residences. Ample glazing floods workspaces and the garage with natural light, opening the interior to the community and enlivening the street. Internalizing operations and incorporating cost-effective sustainable strategies reduce the building's impact on the community and environment.

Why, then, do so many public infrastructure workspaces remain uninspired? The answer lies partly in budgets, inertia, and the undervaluation of both design and essential work. Cost-effective design excellence is not an oxymoron. Simple design moves that prioritize the worker and the community are achievable within available resources. Manhattan 1/2/5 and Brooklyn 3 are proof. What is needed is commitment from the design community and a shift in perspective, a recognition that the people who make our cities livable matter.

As we navigate from one crisis to the next, we must reckon with who and what we value most. It is time for a new social contract—one that includes design excellence for public infrastructure. We must demand spaces that reflect the dignity, creativity, and resilience of essential workers, while also extending these benefits to the communities they serve. In doing so, we build possibilities for a better future. ■



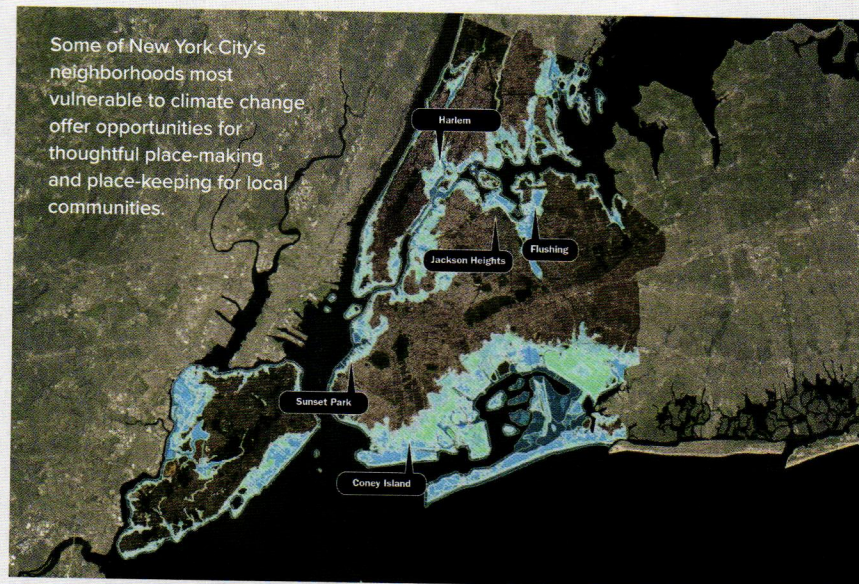
Paul Bauer, AIA, is a partner at Dattner Architects. He has devoted his career to designing public infrastructure that elevates and inspires.

From Shorelines to “Shore-places”: How Climate Response Can Improve Urban Accessibility, Equity, and Resiliency

BY ISHITA GAUR, AICP

Many cities are responding to climate change by creating flood protection plans for vulnerable urban areas. But we need to think more broadly about flood defense—it’s more than just drawing a line on a map. While zones of protection are often represented as lines, we could flip the script: since they occupy physical space in our cities, why not consider these borders as design opportunities for creating public places? In this way, we can embrace future climate change responses by turning urban shorelines into shore-places.

While flood defenses protect the properties and places within their boundaries, they should also be considered as opportunities to create public spaces that reinforce cultural identity, promote equitable access to the waterfront for all,

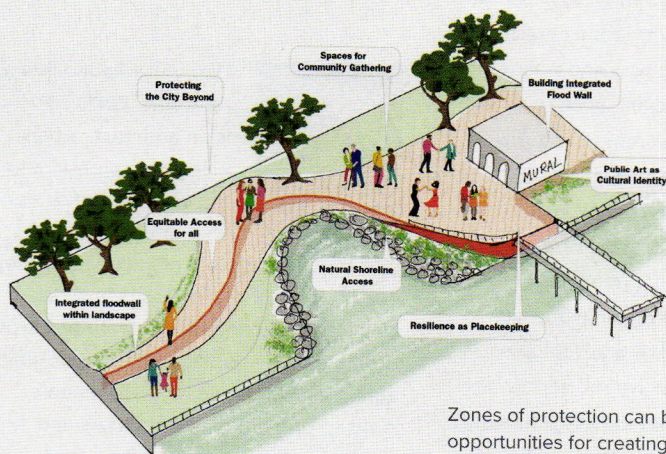


and provide educational opportunities for future generations. As designers and planners think beyond the “line,” we can transform flood protection systems into floodable open spaces—raised berms, accessible ramps, flood walls integrated into landscapes and buildings, elevated lower levels of buildings, and more. Each of these elements contributes to the public life of cities and can serve as tools to create richer public realms.

Efforts like this are already providing much-needed public space in Lower Manhattan, especially in neighborhoods with limited open space, such as the Lower East Side, Chinatown, and the East Village. It is imperative that we continue to emphasize the rich cultural history of these largely immigrant

neighborhoods, which are vulnerable not only to coastal flooding, but also to cloudbursts and pluvial flooding. For example, the new Pier 107 in East Harlem is raised for resiliency and also incorporates flexible spaces and seating areas based on community input. The primarily Latinx community in East Harlem expressed a desire for gathering spaces for salsa nights and fishing along the edge of the pier. These spaces were included to reflect and celebrate the cultural identity of the neighborhood and its local population.

By integrating shore-places with design features that address gaps in local amenities—such as play areas, parks, and community facilities—while also offering educational opportunities for future generations to learn about climate change and its impact on the urban environment, we can create a more resilient and inclusive city for all residents. ■



Zones of protection can be design opportunities for creating public places and embracing future climate change responses by turning urban shorelines into shore-places.



Ishita Gaur, AICP, is a director at Marvel, specializing in urban design and planning for community-focused projects. She creates

master plans and design studies through inclusive stakeholder engagement, using the social, climate, economic, and cultural dynamics of each neighborhood to shape urban spaces.

Public Realm Green and Gorgeous: Broadway

BY DAMYANTI RADHESHWAR, FIIA,
AIA, LEED AP

Broadway needs a *big think*.

The campaign for a Car-Free Broadway Linear Park, or BLiP, from Columbus Circle to Union Square, is a reimagining of Broadway in five acts: Columbus Circle, Times Square, Herald and Greeley Square, Madison Square, and Union Square. With this plan, we expect the visitor experience for both locals and tourists to flow smoothly from one square to the next, and more than seven acres of public space to be created in the heart of the city's busiest area.

BLiP was envisioned by our volunteer team, which includes urbanists, architects, and advocates for fairer street use, including myself and my co-leaders, Andrew Hyatt and Rudrika Rathore. As most city dwellers know, Broadway is very inefficient for vehicle traffic, therefore, we recommend fully pedestrianizing it. Our surveys show that very few cars use the thoroughfare—only 1% to 5% of street users are in vehicles—and this number drops further with congestion pricing. Starting on January 5, 2025, during the first six months of congestion pricing, vehicle entries into the Congestion Relief Zone in Manhattan decreased by 11%, which was over 10 million fewer vehicles than the previous year.

Our vision supports “The New New York—Making New York Work for Everyone,” outlined by a panel of 59 community and business leaders in December 2022. The plan envisions New York's Commercial District as a vibrant 24/7 destination, enlivening “the area's public realm through open spaces and pedestrian infrastructure.” The New York

City Department of Transportation's current design concept seems to favor vehicle traffic in shared streets with lanes for cars, parking for cars, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian paths adjacent to one another. This vision calls to mind architecture critic Karrie Jacobs's words in *The Nation*: “Change occurs almost overnight but tentatively, without conviction.” In other words, we need to commit to a pedestrian-focused design.

Our proposal is also motivated by safety concerns. We recommend removing cars and parking along the entire 2.3-mile stretch of Broadway to enhance safety for everyone by creating a continuous barrier between pedestrians and bikers, and rerouting bikes away from public squares.

The introduction of cars in the 20th century transformed urban transportation and dominated city streets. Rethinking safe public spaces is essential today. Vehicles, e-bikes, and scooters pose safety risks for pedestrians and riders. Our plan includes a continuous, planted barrier to protect pedestrians and bikers along bike paths.

The BLiP plan can also support a surge in residential development. Under the proposed zoning changes, the Midtown South Mixed Use Plan is expected to add nearly 10,000 new residential units to the area, increasing demand for green public spaces and community amenities along the Broadway corridor. New Yorkers for Parks's “Open Space Solutions” emphasizes community-led initiatives to improve, expand, and better connect parks and the tree canopy in districts lacking green space. Broadway's 2.3-mile park and walkway will be vital for achieving open space goals. A 2017 analysis by community boards shows Manhattan has roughly 2,206 acres of designated parkland. New York City aims for an open space goal of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents. Currently, the city ranks low in total parkland per capita.

The park and walkway would also help enhance air quality and address the increasing cases of respiratory issues, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma. Planting a diverse range of

trees would be highly beneficial: trees help filter pollutants, improve the urban environment, and raise the overall quality of life for both residents and visitors.

As Jane Jacobs said, “Strong attention to the relationship between people and their living environment is a must.” BLiP would integrate public space with the surrounding built environment to create seamless indoor-outdoor public amenities, enhancing safety, security, perception, sociocultural engagement, and ease of movement in the process.

To date, the BLiP volunteer team has received support from the non-profit advocacy group Transportation Alternatives. Over the past few years, through active community engagement, several social events in public spaces have been organized to promote the team's efforts, including Jane's Walk, the Musical Bike Ride Down Broadway, and the Improv Everywhere MP3 Experiment. Presentations were given to AIA New York Chapter committees and the Community Board involved in BLiP. Going forward, our group is considering a three-pronged approach, including political outreach, scheduling meetings with Business Improvement Districts in the “Broadway in Five Acts” squares, and finding resources to advance the initial concept to the next stage of design.

Please take our Street Usage Survey to make sure your voice is heard:
broadwaylinearpark.nyc/blip-survey ■



Damyanti Radheshwar, FIIA, AIA, LEED AP, is an architect, urban planner, strategist, and the architecture design lead of BLiP. Guided

by her conviction that planning is for the public good, Damyanti focuses on the historical and contemporary attributes of Broadway, developing feasible, plausible, equitable, adaptable, and sustainable ideas to present to stakeholders and city agencies, aiming for a broader consensus and future implementation.

The Commuter Comes First: Designing for Enjoyment and Efficiency in Transportation

BY TIFFANY-ANN TAYLOR

To say the pandemic changed everything is quickly becoming cliché, but everything—including working patterns, healthcare, home deliveries, and the planning and designing of major public transit hubs—has truly been revolutionized since 2020. Prior to the pandemic, making travel efficient was one of the biggest priorities for transportation planners. Today, the public's increased focus on the travel experience is forcing the industry to rethink long-held precedents.

For decades, “good” transportation planning assumed punctuality and speed. But today, good planning for mobility is much more than that. It must be inclusive—making all desirable modes accessible, efficient, safe, and reliable for all. While these goals are still essential, enjoying the trip tends to be a bonus if all the other elements align perfectly.

In a post-pandemic world, much has changed about how people and goods move around. Many things are obvious: hand-sanitizer stations and face masks to protect each other from harmful germs are a more common sight; unfamiliar terms like “supply chain” were added to the colloquial lexicon; and New York saw a dramatic rise in the use of micromobility to make longish connections between transportation hubs much shorter.

Other less obvious, yet important changes happened, too. Transportation planners saw peak travel time windows

shift, and an increase in people using public transportation on the weekends—both signaling that more riders have a choice in how and when they make their trips. No longer beholden to the typical patterns or schedules of travel, customers and planners alike began to place comfort and service higher on the list of planning priorities.

The quality of time spent on transportation is no longer being reserved as a luxury for some, but rather as a baseline for how to think about future investments in our regional infrastructure for the many. If we believe that transportation is the “third space” (the term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1989)—with home and work being the first and second spaces—then doesn't it matter *how* we spend time there?

In 2025, there are many examples of how the customer's experience has been prioritized as an element of transportation planning and investments. LaGuardia Airport has gone from being a national scourge to the “Best Airport in America,” as declared by Skytrax, for two years running. Adding Newark Liberty Airport's Terminal A to the list makes our region home to two of only three airports in North America to earn five-star ratings. A noticeable component of LaGuardia's award-winning design includes a mesmerizing water fountain that performs an aquatic show. It won't help you catch your flight on time, but it does enhance the experience for travelers of all ages.

This past summer, Amtrak debuted its newer fleet of Acela trains. In addition to providing more efficient service, the new cars have upgraded interiors, lighting, and finishes to add to the customer's comfort. To enhance the human connection with systems of travel, your favorite transit agencies or providers are likely active on social media. You can find them all on very active accounts via LinkedIn, X, Instagram, and even TikTok, where you can learn about everything, including service changes and

celebrations. While these changes are cute and informative and foster transparency, there is still more to be done.

Despite recent investments, our regional transportation systems still face challenges to provide better customer service: the lack of inclusive, accessible design, and enough opportunities for respite. These networks are also saddled with infrastructural baggage due to climate change (i.e., the cracked trans-Hudson commuter rail tunnels damaged by Superstorm Sandy, and the now-infamous subway flooding that captivates social media during every downpour). Famous complaints involve a lack of seating in Moynihan Train Hall; largely vacant retail spaces in Grand Central Madison, with minimal options for food and drink for commuters; and a lack of visibility from the windows of NJ TRANSIT rail cars. Improving these items would not only add some excitement to the ride, but also signal that comfort and accessibility are considered more holistically in transportation planning.

At the Regional Plan Association, we have been advocating for safe, efficient, and accessible transportation for over a century. And as we do that, we will continue to push for better station design and more inviting spaces that enhance the riders' experiences. A safe, comfortable, and enjoyable ride is just as important to the system as materials choice and method of construction. Each component is an important investment in the health, equity, prosperity, and sustainability of our region. It matters how we get to wherever we're going. ■



Tiffany-Ann Taylor is the vice president for transportation at the Regional Plan Association, which develops ideas

to improve the economic health, environmental resiliency, and quality of life in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan area.

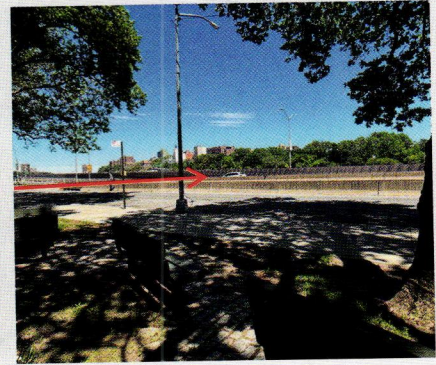
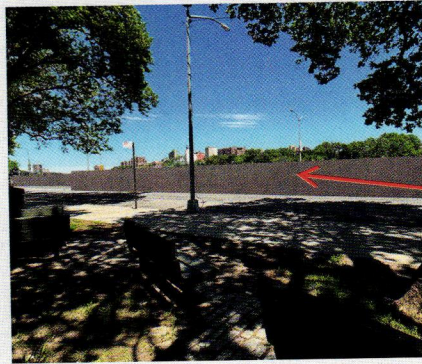
When Is Enough Not Enough?

BY JIM WRIGHT, AIA

Thirteen years after Superstorm Sandy devastated the region, a series of ambitious coastal resiliency projects are starting to transform low-lying areas along Lower Manhattan's shoreline with a ring of parks, playgrounds, pedestrian walkways, and bikeways that protect adjacent communities from coastal flooding and sea-level rise. These include the recently completed South Battery Park City Resiliency Project and the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project. Other projects planned for North/West Battery Park City, Battery Park, Lower Manhattan's Financial District, and the Two Bridges neighborhood will provide a contiguous, multilayered coastal flood protection system from Chambers Street on the west side up to 23rd Street on the east side of Manhattan—the Big U, as it was dubbed.

Earlier this year, the New York State Department of Transportation initiated community outreach on planning studies to reconstruct the West Side Highway (Route 9A) from Battery Place up to 59th Street. At community workshops, participants expressed support to include coastal flood protection measures that integrate with the adjacent Hudson River Park as one of the project goals. Meanwhile, low-lying coastal areas in East Harlem along the East River and Harlem River remain vulnerable to the same flood and sea-level risk hazards, but with no detailed protection system proposed until summer 2025.

Stepping back to 2017, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) initiated a comprehensive coastal flood protection study called the NY & NJ Harbor & Tributaries Study (NY/NJ HATS) to provide flood protection for sea-level rise and coastal flood risks to the year 2100 for the entire New York and New



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers renderings of inland floodwall and seawall from Polo Grounds Towers park.

Jersey Harbor region. The initial feasibility study included one option, among others, for a massive levee and operable flood gate stretching across the mouth of the New York Harbor from the Rockaways in Queens to Sandy Hook, NJ. The second round of the feasibility study, released in 2022, highlighted the need for near-term implementable strategies by selecting an option with a more localized approach to flood protection based on a combination of seawalls, floodwalls, landscaped barriers, and other flood-control elements. The selected NY/NJ HATS option recommended a continuous seawall and/or floodwall to protect the shoreline of East Harlem from 88th to 165th streets.

Fast forward to this July, the USACE released a follow-up Actionable Elements Draft Report that proposed three localized near-term projects: a wetlands and beach sand restoration project at Oakwood Beach, Staten Island; a stabilization, widening, and deepening of the East Riser tributary to the Hackensack River in an industrial area of the Meadowlands, NJ; and an off-shore seawall or inland seawall running from 150th to 165th streets on the East Harlem shoreline. This last element would be the first segment of the East Harlem coastal protection system to be completed.

The Harlem River Actionable Element project would protect the New York City Housing Authority's Polo Ground Towers and its adjacent Rangel

Houses facilities. This site, which lies within a low-lying flood zone at the foot of the High Bridge Park bluffs, was subjected to coastal flooding during Superstorm Sandy in 2012, and is cut off from direct access to the Harlem River waterfront by the six-lane Harlem River Drive. The USACE proposed two barrier options to work in combination—an offshore seawall and an inland floodwall with operable flood gates across the Harlem River Drive and on/off ramps. The combination of Harlem River Drive and the flood barriers would further block access and views, separating the Polo Grounds/Rangel Houses community from the waterfront.

While an earlier iteration of the USACE study incorporated a prototype elevated pedestrian and bike esplanade on top of the floodwall, this integrated concept was not pursued with the latest proposal, effectively leaving a gap in public access to the Harlem River from 145th Street to 163rd Street.

It is encouraging that the USACE is moving forward into more detailed design studies for its resiliency projects. However, the draft report flew under the radar with limited outreach to local community groups, legislative representatives, and advocacy organizations, and an abbreviated 30-day public review period to comment on the proposed designs.

Unfortunately, by adopting a reductive approach to implementing flood protection along the East Harlem

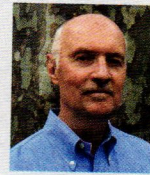
shoreline, the USACE is missing out on lessons learned from other urban coastal resiliency projects along NYC's shoreline. These other waterfront interventions provide park-like settings with waterfront access to adjacent neighborhoods, incorporate pedestrian and bike esplanades, and tackle challenging environmental hazards—all while protecting vulnerable communities from sea-level rise and coastal storms. These complex urban infrastructure projects were many years in planning and construction with robust community outreach and

sometimes contentious debate, and even some setbacks along the way. We should not deny the communities of Harlem the benefits from the same community-driven design process.

Every site that is vulnerable to sea-level rise and coastal flooding is unique, with its own constellation of opportunities and impacts. The question that all coastal flood protection projects need to answer is: Is holding back floodwaters enough...or is enough too little?

Stay tuned for more debate on this question when the next phase of the

NY/NJ HATS Actionable Elements study is released in January 2026. ■



Over his 40-year design career, **Jim Wright, AIA**, has focused on uplifting public spaces, public transit stations, and civic infrastructure. He currently serves as AIA New York's Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Advocacy Director, collaborating on the development of strategic advocacy initiatives for the committee and Chapter.

Call for Winter 2026 Op-Eds: Architects as Advocates

While this Fall's focus on infrastructure highlights how the built environment underpins civic life, our Winter issue will look at the people shaping those systems and best practices. We invite op-ed submissions that explore the role of architects as advocates—for their cities, for equity, and for positive change.

Architects have always worn many hats: designers, problem-solvers, and collaborators. Increasingly, they are also called to be advocates for safer streets, sustainable construction,

equitable working conditions, more inclusive public space, and communities that have been underserved or overlooked.

We welcome op-eds that reflect on how architects are using their voices and expertise to push for change. This might include:

- Advocacy for equity and justice in design, planning, and material acquisition.
- Efforts to improve sustainability and resilience at the building, neighborhood, or city scale.

- Ways architects are partnering with policymakers, communities, or activists to move projects forward.
- Personal reflections on moments when professional practice intersected with civic advocacy.

Submissions should be approximately 800 words and express a clear point of view.

Please submit op-eds to editor@aiany.org by December 2.

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What Does It Mean to be a New Yorker in 2025?

BY **JESSE LAZAR**, ASSOC. AIA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
AIANY/CENTER FOR ARCHITECTURE



The pace and direction of change we are living through at this moment are alarming. Nationally, we are witnessing the fraying of bonds that have held politics and society together, while an aggressive federal administration and political movements are attacking civil society and basic freedoms, sowing economic chaos, and challenging many communities in our country. Locally, we feel tides of change, too, as we head into a consequential mayoral election, characterized by new ideas for what our city can and should be, who is welcome here, and how to make desired changes real.

It's against this background that positive transformation, driven and influenced by architects, continues to advance in spite of so many obstacles. For many years, we have debated and sought to steer the future of public space, seeking better design, greater access for more people, and new ways of achieving these goals. We have worked to advance our collective understanding of the climate emergency, deepening our commitment to resiliency and collaborating with partners to imagine how to protect the city from the effects of climate change. We have pushed for public transportation that meets the needs and aspirations of the millions

Colleagues at 15 design-related organizations, including AIANY, came together this summer to create a network for collaboration called the Public Design Alliance.

of people who rely on it, and helps the city function better for all of us. Our mission to advocate for more just and sustainable communities means we always strive to foreground the people who both create and experience architecture, asking how design can elevate, solve problems, and result in more equitable access and outcomes for the spaces we design.

You've seen this work reflected in the pages of this issue, in the programs you've participated in at the Center for Architecture, in the way our AIA New York Chapter committees convene conversations and create and disseminate knowledge, and in the policy and government affairs work we are constantly trying to advance. These efforts always rely on many hands: the

broad and deep support of our members and larger community. And at this moment, we are rightly concerned that some changes happening around us threaten the future we hope to bring into being.

AIANY and the Center are civic institutions that are an expression of our community's values and interests. We operate in civil society, that web of institutions that exists between government and private businesses and individuals. That web holds together much of what we value about our city and our relationships to one another, and, while it has never been perfect, it is worth defending and supporting.

This is why colleagues at 15 design-related organizations, including AIANY, came together this summer to create a network for collaboration called the Public Design Alliance. As that group coheres and explores ways to work together in this fraught moment, it's my hope that everyone in our community thinks of how they can empower themselves and the institutions of which they are members or contributors. It's not always clear how to do that, nor is it easy, but these institutions need you and one another—and New York needs all of us.



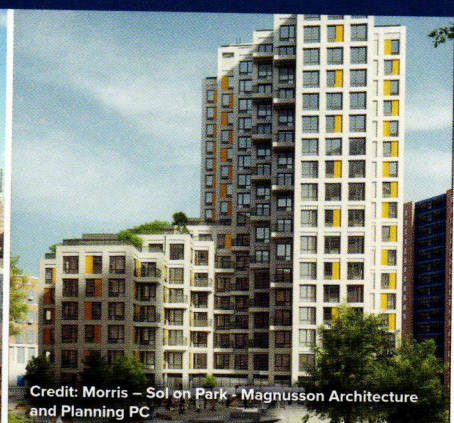
Buildings of Excellence



Credit: River Commons - Bernheimer Architecture PLLC



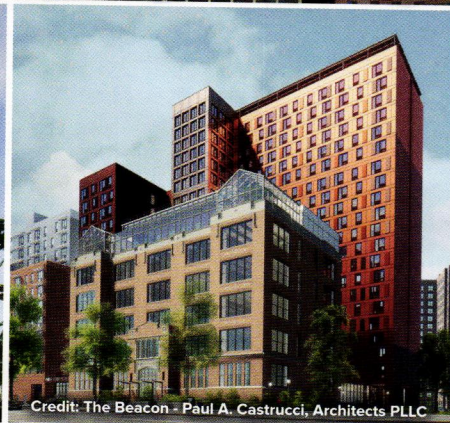
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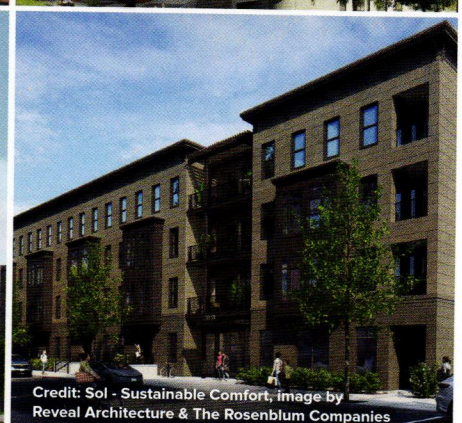
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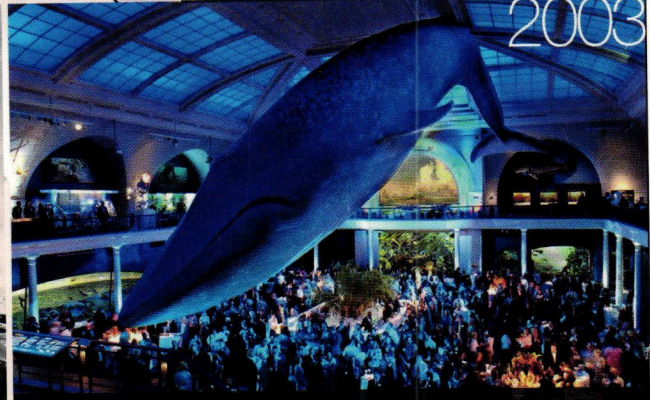
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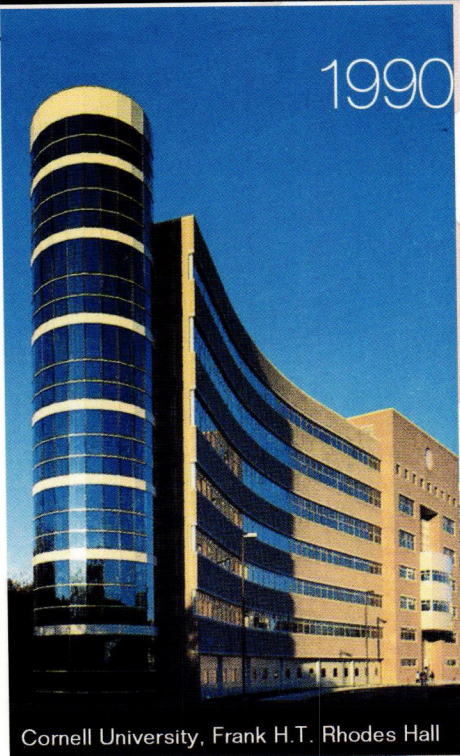
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