

# The Architect's Newspaper

June 2025

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**WHY Architecture at The Met; Small Lots, Big Impacts winners; and more news** page 6

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## Techno-Optimism and Its Discontents

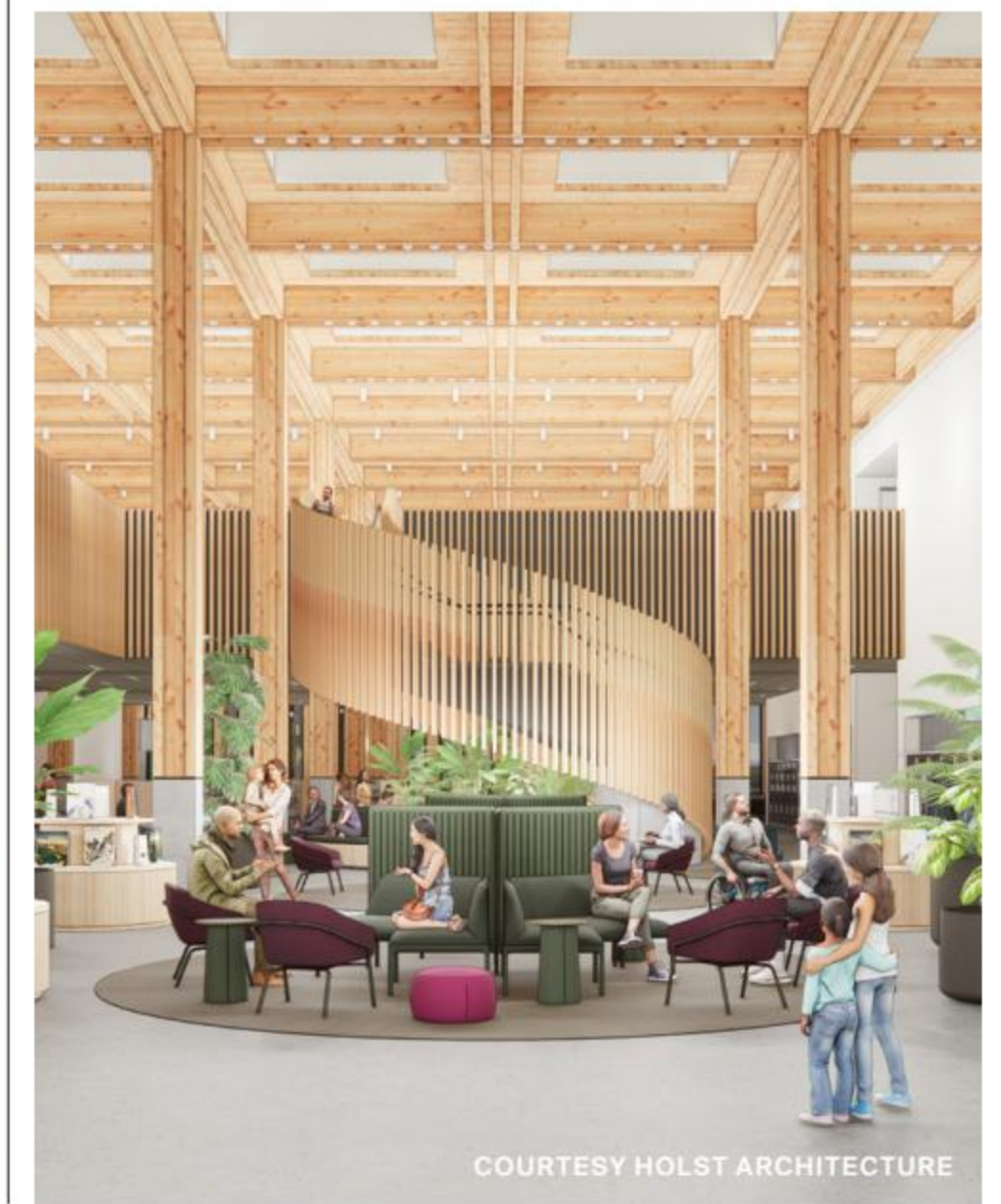
The 19th International Architecture Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia is an extravaganza. [Read on page 15.](#)



ANDREA AVEZZÙ/COURTESY LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

## SOUNDS IN SPACE

Architects and acoustics experts use a multi-fidelity approach when designing the libraries of tomorrow. [Read on page 24.](#)



COURTESY HOLST ARCHITECTURE

## THE MADISONS

A conversation with three generations of architects about their family business. [Read on page 26.](#)



COURTESY RPM

## A Practice of Empire?

AECOM, assessed. [Read on page 65.](#)



JULIUS SHULMAN © J. PAUL GETTY TRUST

## New LPC HQ by MBB Architects

New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) turned 60 in April, and, having reached this distinguished age, it's finally been given a custom-designed home, not for retirement but for more comfortable future labors. The project is by MBB Architects, which has provided the LPC space worthy of its noble work.

Chartered in 1965, the LPC has landmarked some 38,000 properties in New York City during its existence. It keeps adding more, with Marcel Breuer's former Whitney Museum and Paul Rudolph's Modulightor interior the latest happy arrivals, but most of its work is tending to the business of ensuring that districts and buildings already landmarked remain as they are. The commission processes over 10,000 applications for permits a year.

LPC's home for decades was located on the 9th floor of McKim, Mead, and White's Dinkins Building, which has a handsome exterior but whose [continued on page 10](#)

## Getting Lost

Christian Marclay collects entrances and exits. [Read on page 32.](#)



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND WHITE CUBE, LONDON. © CHRISTIAN MARCLAY

## AN FOCUS

## Windows, Walls & Doors

All the apertures that are fit to spec. [Read on page 31.](#)



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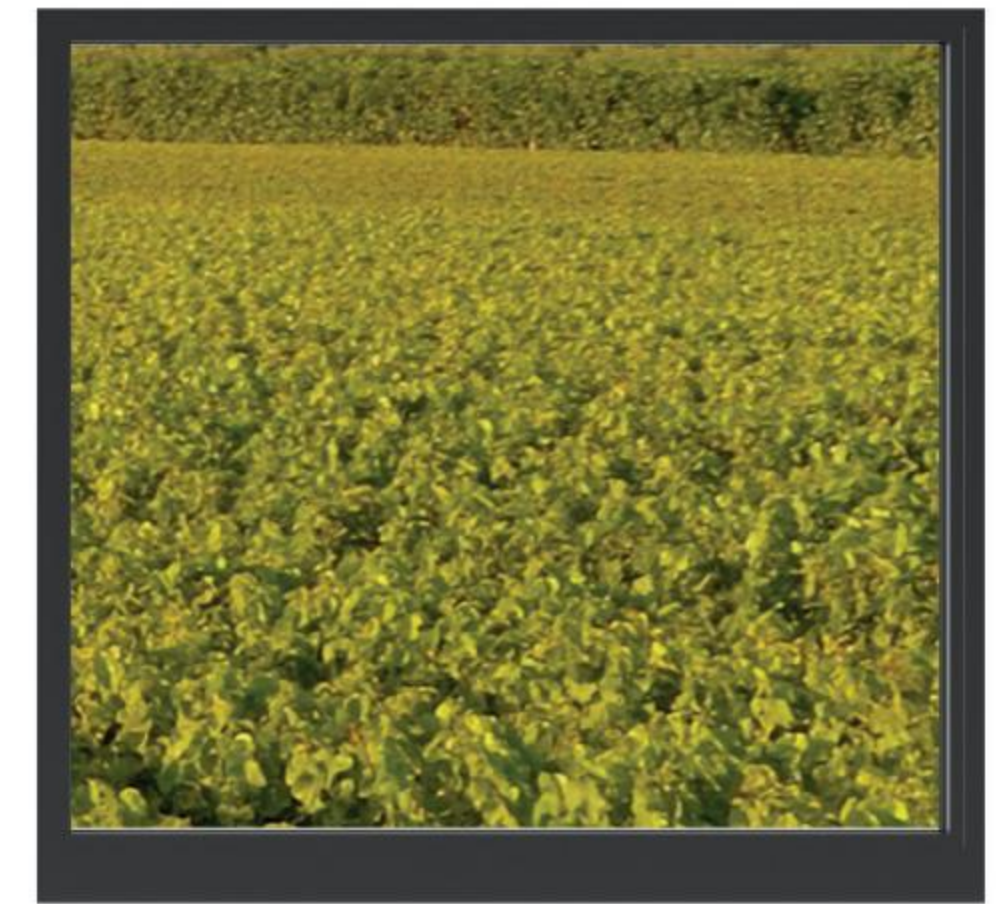
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## Editor's Note



LUCA CAPUANO/COURTESY LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

## Tea Queen

As an MIT alum, I should be chuffed that Carlo Ratti has curated the 19th International Architecture Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia. Of the three curators who have guided the show in the 2020s, two hail from MIT: Ratti, who directs its Senseable City Lab, and 2021's Hashim Sarkis, the dean of its School of Architecture and Planning. And even outside the Biennale, MIT has a strong showing of faculty work at Berggruen Arts & Culture's Palazzo Diedo in Cannaregio as part of *The Next Earth: Computation, Crisis, Cosmology*.

But my smile flattened into a frown as I hiked through *Intelligens*, Ratti's main show. (Turn to page 15 for *AN*'s octet of capsule reviews.) The staging was stocked with work by the world's best architects but at a density that made it difficult to properly appreciate each entry.

As a treat, at the end of the trek an attractive, leggy vision appears in a clearing: It is *Desert Ecofolie*, a "prototype for minimum dwelling in the Atacama Desert and beyond," by Pedro Ignacio Alonso and Pamela Prado. It "brings together eco-technical objects such as fog catchers, photovoltaic cells, a domestic wind turbine, a water wall, a dry toilet, and other appliances that avoid the production of greenhouse emissions," according to its official description, but it does so in a materially rich way—using plywood, cork, and thatch—that is accessible. It is a piece of architecture, so one can actually climb up inside it to walk around its (admittedly tiny) rooms and see the rooftop survival devices arrayed like an open Swiss Army knife.

The techno-optimism was expanded and corrected by the national presentations. There was a shared focus on landscape, renovation, and social gathering. The last theme was present in Bahrain's offering, a chill space literally conditioned by passive cooling, which won the Golden Lion. But it was also celebrated in the activations of PORCH, the United States's offering, which saw crowds gather for a series of talks and performances. It even appeared next door, where Qatar will soon build a new pavilion designed by Lina Ghotmeh. For now, the ground was the site of *Community Centre*, a bamboo structure designed by the Pakistani architect Yasmeen Lari. The mood was welcoming and hospitable, but with a message: "Architects must change. How many rich people are there that they can work for?" Lari asked me.

For many, the work on view was secondary to their primary Venetian objective: gossip. The air was thick with it. Foglike, it came on little cat feet and sat looking over Via Garibaldi. The vernissage is a global destination for hobnobbery, with architects from all over each here to observe, meet, and catch up. At the end of business hours, attendees plunk down in front of a spritz and spout out their bingo card of wired or tired national pavilions to compare notes. It makes me think about how little of architecture's lively exchanges and backstories make it into public view—and when they do, how sanitized they appear. It also reminds me of Hans Ulrich Obrist's 1990s experiment in which he staged a "non-conference" where all the programming was canceled and only the socializing took place. At these types of events, he observed that "the most important things happen in the coffee break. Why do the rest?"

The fun was a welcome distraction from domestic affairs. Back home, a different flavor of real talk permeated, largely related to the ongoing tumult as the Trump administration defunds scientific research, attacks the National Park Service, and spars with higher education, most publicly with Harvard, which is fighting back.

The mayhem—and tariffs—are rocking the economy, which makes it hard to feel secure. In April, Anjali Grant, an architect in Seattle, wrote to me: "I am furious. I have two employees who are not citizens who cannot engage politically for fear of reprisals. I have a project funded by Head Start dollars that may collapse at any time. It is impossible to plan for escalation or to budget. I would like to see the AIA and ALL of the professional and business organizations unite against this blatant disregard for the rule of law." Still, she said she is grateful: "My clients continue to live by their principles, including my own school district. My city and state will resist."

In this issue, we offer stories about practice, from an intergenerational interview about a family-run architecture business (page 26) to Kate Wagner's review of Aaron Cayer's *Incorporating Architects* (page 65), in addition to great case studies and worthwhile products in our Focus section—plus so much more. This varied mix of timely content is what puts the pep in our step. Don't forget to like and subscribe. **Jack Murphy**

## Masthead

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## Information

**General Information**  
info@archpaper.com

**Editorial**  
editors@archpaper.com

**Advertising**  
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## Corrections

In the May issue, the visualization of American porches omitted projects by brg3s architects; Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, Moody Nolan, and Hood Design Studio; El Dorado; and Studio James Carpenter / JCDA and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates. Additionally, the story improperly attributed the project A(t) Home...; it is by DUST. And, Matsys Design should be credited alongside Lake|Flato. An updated version of this map can be found on *AN*'s website, archpaper.com.



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# 6 News

## Morris Adjmi, Jaklitsch/Gardner, and Gensler share renderings of Fenway Corners North

The Boston Red Sox will have a new headquarters in the near future. A masterplan by WS Development, Sasaki, Morris Adjmi Architects, and Field Operations will deliver eight new buildings around Fenway Park, including a 7-story, 250,000 square-foot office building for the Red Sox and Fenway Sports Group directly behind the famed Green Monster in the ballpark's left field. Construction will begin in mid-2026 and complete by 2028. **Daniel Jonas Roche**

## Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at The Cooper Union names Benjamin Aranda acting dean

The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at The Cooper Union has announced Benjamin Aranda is the new acting dean. Aranda steps into the leadership position after former acting dean Hayley Eber, who left for a role as executive director of the Van Alen Institute. Aranda has been a faculty member at the school since 2016. He's also a principal at Aranda\Lasch, an architecture and design studio based in New York and Tucson, Arizona. **DJR**

## Wayfarers Chapel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's son, proposes new site for church

In Rancho Palos Verde, California, the disassembled Wayfarers Chapel designed by Lloyd Wright, the son of Frank Lloyd Wright, has been stored away

since last July, following damage from landslides. A potential site for the ecclesiastical structure has been found. The proposed site would expand the footprint of the serene property and protect its structures from further damage caused by land movement. **July Winters**

## Governor Ron DeSantis signs law protecting Florida's state parks from development

After facing bipartisan backlash, Governor Ron DeSantis has signed a new bill preserving the natural landscape in Florida's state parks and protecting them from development. The bill is an about-face from a plan announced by the administration last year that would have opened nine of Florida's state parks to new development. **JW**

## Andy Byford will lead Penn Station's overhaul as Amtrak board of directors special adviser—what does it mean for the redesign?

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy announced that Andy Byford will be special adviser to the Amtrak board of directors for the redevelopment of New York Penn Station. The news has been hailed as a win for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, through-running advocates, and congestion pricing supporters. **DJR**

## Gensler to convert 5 Times Square, the former Ernst & Young HQ, into housing

Gensler is behind a number of prominent office-to-residential conversions in New York today. The firm will soon

begin converting 5 Times Square, the former office building of Ernst & Young, into residences. Governor Hochul affirmed that of the new 1,250 units, 313 will be affordable. No changes need be made to the building envelope, city officials shared, because the floor plates are already "well-suited" for residential purposes. **DJR**

## Hero Village, a Brooklyn Law School student's grand plan for housing NYPD, FDNY, and EMTs atop Floyd Bennett Field

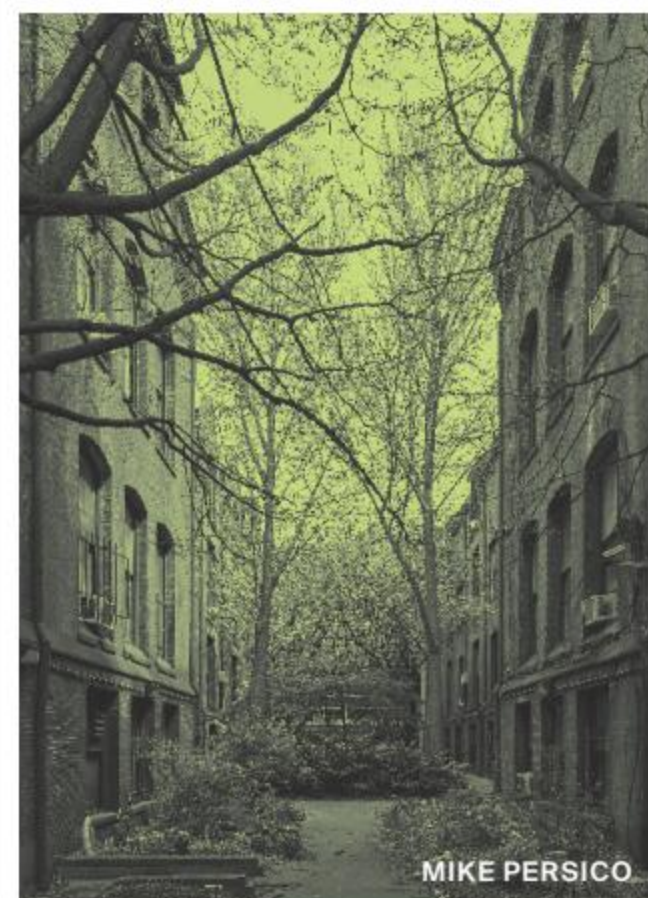
What to do with Floyd Bennett Field has long perplexed planners, and the site now finds itself entangled in an online tug-of-war between competing architectural ideologies. Noah Martz, a Brooklyn Law School student has proposed Hero Village for the site, which would bring approximately 20,000 residential units designated for NYPD and FDNY officers and EMTs to the 1,300-acre plot. **DJR**

## Hans Noë—sculptor, architect, and Tony Smith, Barnett Newman, and Mies van der Rohe protégé—dies at 96

Hans Noë wore many hats—architect, sculptor, Fanelli Cafe proprietor. He was also a Holocaust survivor, and a protégé of Tony Smith, Barnett Newman, and Mies van der Rohe. Noë died in his sleep on May 11 at his home in Garrison, New York, at age 96. From 1963 to 1971, Noë designed and built 12 houses with his partner Richard Schust. He'd often build the homes himself, mostly on Long Island, with a team of friends and apprentices, and then sell them off. **DJR**

The ballpark sales price for Pennzoil Place in Houston, according to the online real estate news website Realty News Report. The 1975 office building, designed by Johnson/Burgee Architects for Hines, was named Building of the Year by Ada Louise Huxtable in *The New York Times*. AN executive editor Jack Murphy wrote about the influential office building hitting the market on archpaper.com, noting, "Depending on how you're keeping score, Pennzoil Place is either Philip Johnson's last modern building or his first postmodern one."

## Scout partners with DIGSAU, AOS, and ISA to bring life back to the former UArts campus in Philadelphia



It's been almost one year since Philadelphia's University of the Arts (UArts) announced its abrupt closure, leaving students, faculty, and alumni bewildered, and outraged. Scout—a women-owned, Philly-based development and design company—successfully acquired two campus buildings: Dorrance Hamilton Hall and Furness Residence Hall. Scout recently announced public programming that will soon take place at the former UArts buildings it acquired, the first step in its adaptive reuse proposal for the 19th-century buildings. The long-term vision entails maintaining the Hamilton and Furness buildings as hubs for artistic activity in Philadelphia's center city. **DJR**

## Related Companies and Wynn Resorts scrap casino bid for Hudson Yards West

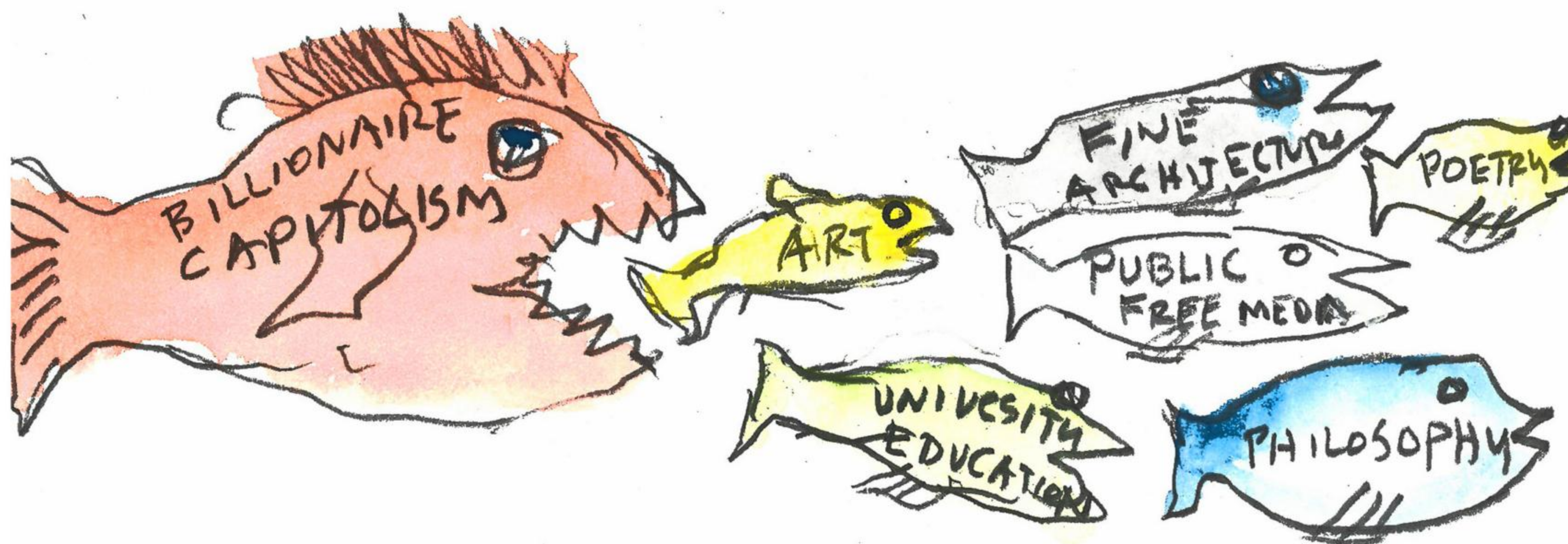
Related Companies and Wynn Resorts, pushing a casino scheme as part of the westward extension of New York City's Hudson Yards, have officially withdrawn from the race to open a casino, citing local opposition to the project. Instead, Related Companies will focus on building luxury housing above the Western Rail Yard site, targeting the construction of 4,000 residences overlooking the Hudson River. Wynn Resorts will exit the project entirely, Michael Weaver, a spokesman for the company, said in a statement. **Trevor Schillaci**

## Landmarks Preservation Commission declares former Whitney Museum, designed by Marcel Breuer, an individual and interior landmark

Marcel Breuer's HUD headquarters may be in jeopardy, but folks who adore the Hungarian émigré's most famous New York work now have good reason to celebrate. The former Whitney Museum of American Art, completed by Marcel Breuer and Associates in 1966, was unanimously designated an individual and interior landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. **DJR**

## Trump administration wants to sell Voice of America, FBI buildings, Marcel Breuer's HUD headquarters, and others

The Trump administration has proposed closing the Voice



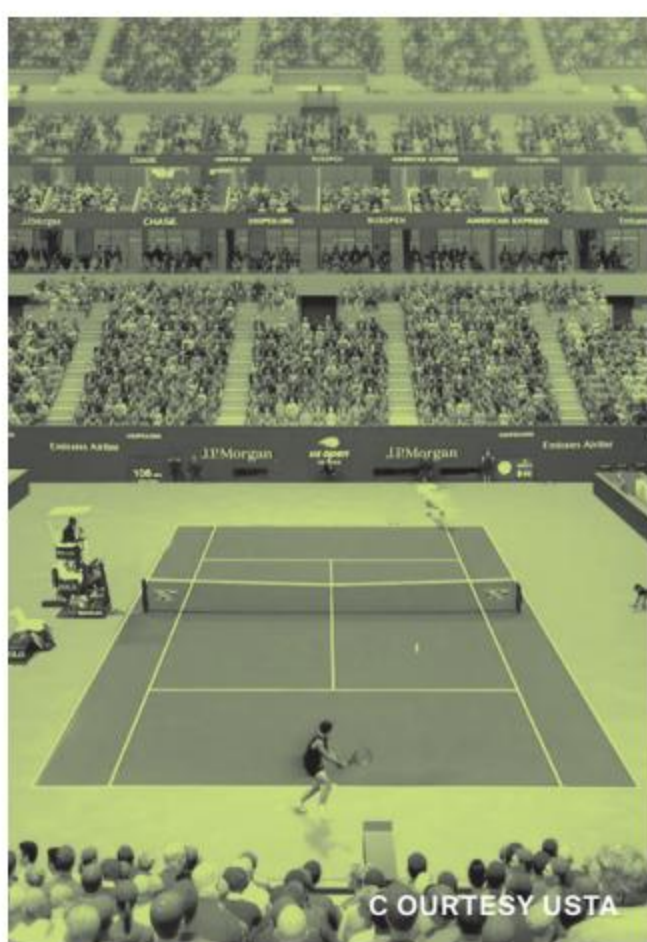
USA CRISIS SITUATION

5/27/25 S. Holl

➤ Steven Holl shared this watercolor about today's state of affairs.

of America building, but that shutdown was temporarily stopped by a federal judge. The announcement comes not long after U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) secretary Scott Turner said he wants to sell HUD headquarters, the Robert C. Weaver Building, designed by Marcel Breuer. The FBI also recently shared its plans to vacate its headquarters in the J. Edgar Hoover Building. **DJR**

**ROSSETTI and the USTA share plan for renovations to the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center**



An \$800 million renovation is planned for the U.S. Open campus and its stadiums by longtime architectural partners ROSSETTI. The project includes significant renovations to Arthur Ashe Stadium, along with a new Player Performance Center. The renovations to Ashe will increase the availability of court-side seating from three thousand to five thousand, allowing more fans to get closer to the action, and feature an overlook bar framed by a curved, sculptural addition by Daniel Libeskind. **JW**

**Trump administration moves to terminate Energy Star program**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy launched the Energy Star program in 1992 as part of the Clean Air Act. The program was passed with strong bipartisan support. It's used to designate and promote energy-efficient appliances and architecture. Energy Star's 33-year run may soon end, however. A recent Office of Air and Pollution meeting alerted reporters to the Trump administration's plan to terminate the program. Lee Zeldin, administrator of the EPA, said the White House's proposed changes to the EPA could save taxpayers \$300 billion. **DJR**

**Buried time capsule discovered under Transamerica Pyramid sheds light on San Francisco's history**

Almost two thousand objects from three disparate geographic areas are back on view at The Met in a light-filled wing overlooking Central Park redesigned by WHY Architecture and Beyer Blinder Belle. Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo were the original architects of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, which opened in 1982. The 40,000-square-foot gallery has been closed since 2021 and has since undergone a \$70 million renovation. The official reopening on May 31 came amid other projects underway at The Met, including updates by Frida Escobedo, Peterson Rich Office, and NADAAA. It likewise poses important questions about the ethics of displaying Indigenous artworks at places like The Met, Nelson Rockefeller's legacy, and decolonization and repatriation more broadly. **DJR**



An email from a San Francisco resident who had read *The Secret*, Byron Preiss's 1982 book about hidden treasures, set off a chain of events that led to a 1974 building plan drawn by architect William Pereira, a visit to an underground pump room, and the eventual discovery, beneath six feet of concrete, of a long-lost time capsule buried deep within the Transamerica Pyramid. The capsule, a 14-by-16-inch metal cylinder, was unearthed during a recent renovation of the building. Buried in 1974, it offers a glimpse into life in San Francisco during the tower's construction and reveals key details about the project itself. Its contents will be displayed in a new exhibit curated in partnership with Foster + Partners in the building's lobby. **Ilana Amselem**

**DOJ launches investigation into EPIC City, a proposed development in North Texas**

In the exurbs north of Dallas, further sprawl rarely receives second thought, much less scrutiny from the state government. However, a new community proposed by the East Plano Islamic Center (EPIC)—the largest mosque in North Texas—has drawn the ire of Texas Republicans, including Governor Greg Abbott. Dubbed EPIC City, the proposal seeks to develop 402 acres of land near Josephine, Texas, delivering over one thousand

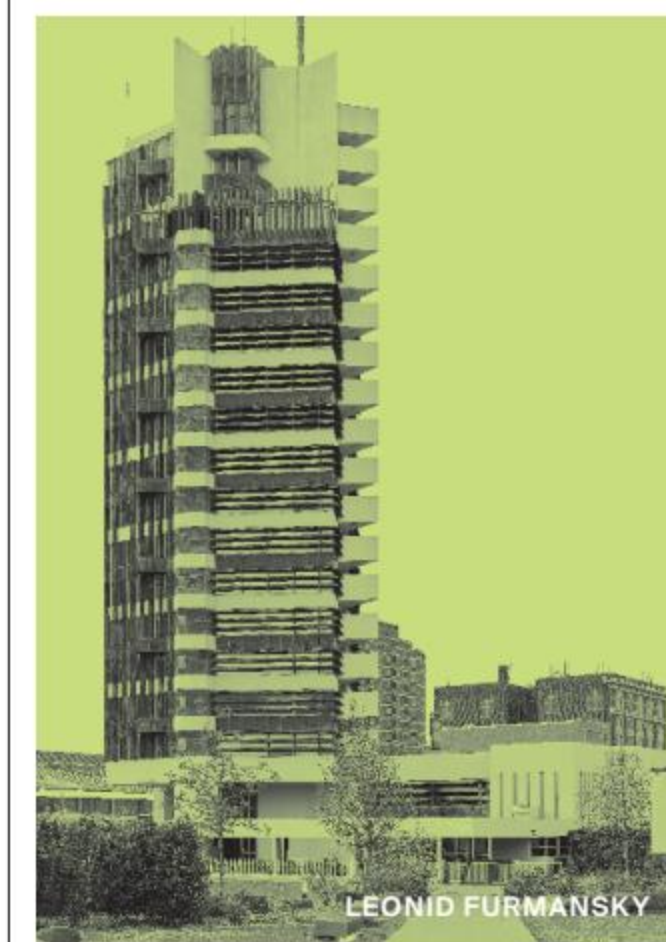
homes and supporting commercial spaces, in addition to an Islamic school and mosque. Because it is located deep within the Bible Belt, the development's explicit ties to Islam have provoked controversy. **TS**

**Sasaki is converting a shuttered San Antonio golf course into a new arboretum**

Sasaki recently released a strategic master plan for

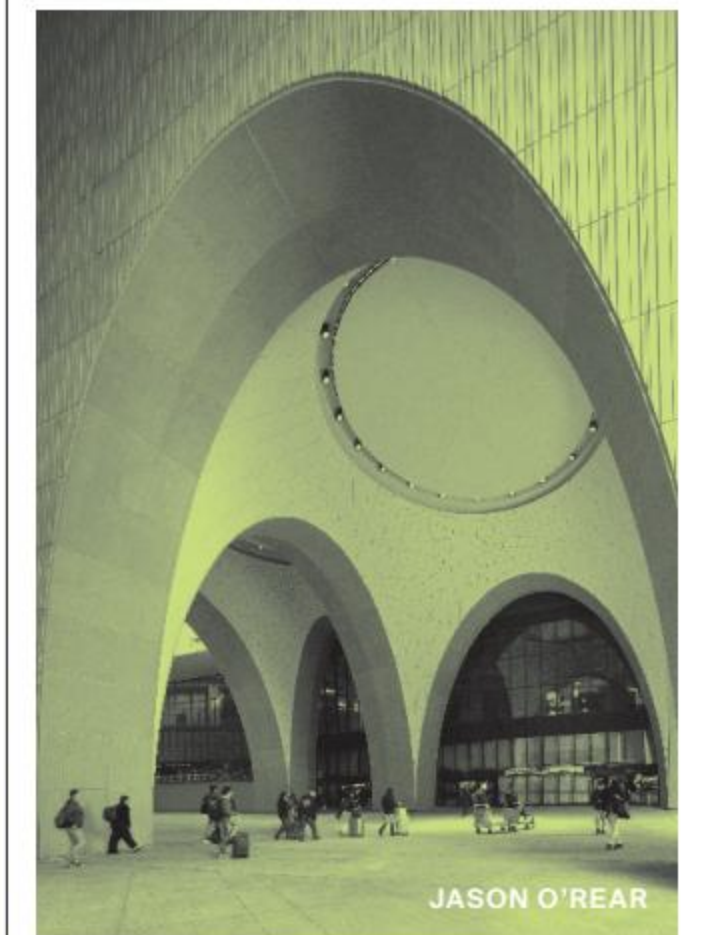
transforming the former Republic Golf Course into Arboretum San Antonio. The campus will have ample green space, but also a "living museum" and a center for tree research. Arboretum San Antonio will total over 200 acres. The strategic master plan will restore the ecology that was destroyed by the former golf course. **DJR**

**Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, sells to McFarlin Building with hope for preservation**



The dust has finally settled in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, following a whirlwind of controversy that arose amid efforts to preserve Frank Lloyd Wright's only built skyscraper: Price Tower. The 1956 building was sold to McFarlin Building, a Tulsa-based company that says it plans to restore the copper and concrete beauty in the heart of the town. **JW**

**Pelli Clarke & Partners completes a handsome, vaulted concourse at Boston's South Station**



A new outdoor concourse at Boston's South Station by Pelli Clarke & Partners replaces a low slung entry that leads riders to the central hall—a vast improvement upon this quotidian scenario so many suburbanites experience daily. This new concourse, dubbed The Great Space, has ten concrete arches that support three domes—each reaches 60 feet from floor to ceiling. The arches delineate passageways throughout the hall, connecting the atrium to the street, bus stops, and other transit connections. **DJR**

**An RFP calls for new uses for Louis Sullivan's Wainwright Building in St. Louis**

Arch to Park Equity, the real estate fund coordinated by Greater St. Louis, Inc., issued a Request for Proposals inviting developers, architects, and preservationists to submit plans for the future of the historic Wainwright Building, designed by Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler. The winning plan will demonstrate alignment with local planning guidelines, practical feasibility, and, most importantly, the greatest benefit to the growing neighborhood. Submissions are due by July 4, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. (CST). **IA**



The City of Los Angeles, LA4LA, and cityLAB-UCLA launched a competition in March to address the need for housing in Southern California, a crisis recently heightened by wildfires. Top firms and notable smaller practices from across the country submitted proposals, with jurors selecting winners in two categories: Gentle Density and Shared Future. Winning proposals in the Gentle Density category envisioned multifamily homes on two small, subdivided lots (sites A and B), while the Shared Future group conceived midrises on two larger plots (sites C and D). Seen above are some of the winning professional proposals: Shared Steps by WORD and SSK (site A, top left); Households by Spinagu (site B, top right); 2B1B by Po-Yu Chung, solo practitioner (site C, bottom left); and Living Together in the Plains of Id by Only If (site D, bottom right). **DJR**

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# 8 Eavesdrop

## Let Them Eat Cake

This year's NYCxDESIGN, New York's design week, was bigger than ever, with openings and activations across the city.



### A Party Set Among Stone

As a pregame to design week festivities, *AN* hosted an intimate gathering at Salvatori's Soho showroom to celebrate ten years of printing *AN Interior* and unveil the new Spring/Summer 2025 issue. Guests included **Steven Holl** and **Dimitra Tsachrelia** of Steven Holl Architects, **Adam Yarinsky** of ARO, **Tal Schori** of GRT Architects, **Nicko Elliott** and **Ksenia Kagner** of CIVILIAN, **Daniel Selensky** and **Yannik Neufang** of Office JDY, **Sebastian Hofmeister** of Henning Larsen, **David Bench** of Bench Architecture, **Sara Lopergolo** of Lopergolo + Bartling, **Jejon Yeung** of Worrell Yeung, **Maurizio Bianchi Mattioli** of Studio MBM, **Michael Yarinsky** of Office of Tangible Space, **Philipp von Dalwig** of vonDALWIG Architecture, **Zeynep Arolat** of Zarolat, **Alda Ly** and **Tania Chau** of ALA Studio, **James Slade** and **Hayes Slade** of Slade Architecture, and **Bea de Uña Bóveda** and **Pej Gombert** of SOL & SOL, among other talented designers. CEO **Gabriele Salvatori** gave remarks, as did *AN*'s CEO/creative director, **Diana Darling**, and executive editor, **Jack Murphy**. Then dessert was served, a white sheet cake with yellow piping outlining the cover of *AN Interior*. It got us thinking about a new business idea: a magazine you can eat. Would you subscribe?

### Vitra Finds a Home

Afterward, Eavesdrop managed to make it to the opening party for Vitra's new showroom, a wide-open, third-floor expanse in Chinatown with views of the Manhattan Bridge. The space is organized by an X-shaped set of curtains that can divide the interior into smaller zones. Pinch Food Design nailed it with the edible spread, notably with a cocktail fountain reminiscent of that famous Kim Kardashian cover for *Paper* magazine. The device's low-flow spigot spouts a stream of tequila-based beverage onto a pyramid of glass coupes.

### Sugar Rush

Eavesdrop encountered that same cocktail fountain the following evening at the opening party for NYCxDESIGN, held under the glass-vaulted roof of The Refinery at Domino, designed by PAU. (Did you hear? It won the Project of the Year Award from our inaugural Faces of Our City program.) **Ilene Shaw** welcomed guests with an encouraging message, and again Pinch Food Design delivered the goods, this time perched on sculptural display boards carried by two servers. The dessert

course was red-velvet cookies suspended like the title characters from the Barrel of Monkeys game. No cake was harmed in the making of this fun event.

### Don't Touch!

Nearby at Zarolat's opening in DUMBO, *AN Interior* designer-to-watch Zeynep Arolat hosted artists from her group show. Eavesdrop chatted with photographer turned designer **Philip Greenberg**, who created a purse out of barbed wire, which he told us is a critique of the current sociopolitical moment. A longtime *New York Times* photographer, he said he maintains his photographic impulses, so his jagged work—which guests at Zarolat couldn't resist their desire to touch, at their peril—also is represented on the wall.

### By Lamplight

Afterward, the late-night crowd piled into Public Records for a night hosted by *Openhouse* magazine and Hello Human. The rush was in part an attempt to see lighting set up within the venue's upstairs chill space by ateliers like Ah Um Design Studio, Devin Wilde, Astraeus Clarke, Frama, Kalon Studio, Ladies & Gentlemen Studio, and others. Vinyl selections by **Renata Do Valle** jumped from speakers designed by **Devon Turnbull** of OJAS. Attendees included **Nathan Rich** of Peterson Rich Office, **Justin Donnelly** of Jumbo, **Manuel Cordero** and **Galen Pardee** of CoPa, and a gaggle of New York's best design writers. Tea was spilled.

### Noshes in Nomad

On our way up Madison Avenue on Friday evening, **Greg Melitonov** tipped Eavesdrop off to the pasta at Porada's showroom, the first single-brand store in New York for the Italian furniture brand. The company flew in Michelin-starred chef **Mauro Elli** of Il Cantuccio in Albavilla, Italy, for the occasion.

Blocks away, the Blu Dot store was hosting Dudd Dot for *THIS IS NOT A STRUT*, a collaboration with JONALDDUDD (JD) to showcase eccentric furniture and lighting in the space's vaulted back room. (The event also marked 20 years of production for Blu Dot's Strut table.) In alignment with JD's brand values, hot dogs were served.

### Mercer Street Mayhem

The youth were out in Soho. At Orior, its creative director, **Ciarán McGuigan**, hosted guests who

were there to observe new lighting designed by **Peter B Staples** of Blue Green Works. (They were also there to drink from the portable Guinness tap operated by The Dead Rabbit.) Nearby, **Tyler Hays**'s BDDW was a crazy scene, with some sort of carnival-like target shooting game set up in the back, complete with a taxidermied bear for decoration. Though Orior had a Mister Softee truck parked outside to distribute soft-serve cones, there was no cake in sight.

### Shelter Was the Place

The brainchild of **Deirdre Maloney** and **Minya Quirk** of online home goods platform Afternoon Light, Shelter launched this year with a strong showing of furniture and home goods brands arrayed on a floor of the Starrett-Lehigh Building. There were bigger players like Blu Dot and Moooi alongside individual makers, and a long installation, set on shag carpet, by the aforementioned JD. The vibes were on point at the chore jacket convention, and it seems likely Shelter will return for round two in 2026.

*AN* was there to present The Library by *AN Interior*, a chill space stocked with magazines from media partners; books curated by *AN*'s executive editor, Jack Murphy, offered for sale by Brooklyn architecture and design bookstore Head Hi; and furniture by supporters like Harry Allen Design, Kasthall, and Stellar Works. Over the weekend, Murphy was in conversation with **David Michon**, who edits the *Substack for scale* and whose second print issue dropped as a guide to Shelter; and **Alexandra Hodkowski** and **Alvaro Alcocer**, Head Hi's visionary founders.

### Units for Sale

Two furniture shows at the SO – IL-designed, Tankhouse-developed 9 Chapel building offered nerds a chance to check out its cool wavy metal facade up close. Musings, a project by **Olivia Sammons**, took over one apartment with works by artists and designers. (The show is on view by appointment through July 15.) And on the ground floor and in a 2-story penthouse, VERSO gathered an eclectic set of furniture, lighting, and objects.

### Javits Slay

Hats off to **Odile Hainaut** and **Claire Pijoulat**: It was another strong year for ICFF, with a big set of emerging talent on view at WANTED. The scenography, visioned by **Rodolfo Agrella**, was great. A standout spot: Rarify's *Form & Forest* exhibition next to the Be Originals lounge. It was designed with Office Office and Auburn University's School of Architecture to showcase wood construction and furniture. The demountable timber display structure will now travel to Auburn to be used as a showcase for the school's work. It won the Sustainable Design award from the judges, which included *AN*'s design editor, **Kelly Pau**.

### In Our Renaissance Era

A discussion moderated by former *AN* editor **Sophie Aliece Hollis**, which included **Jean Lin**, founder of Colony; **Mirkku Kullberg**, Kasthall's CEO; and **Omar Nobil**, creative director of Design Within Reach, touched on hot topics in the furniture industry like lead times for high-quality pieces; how neutral designs reigned during and just after the pandemic, before color returned; and the importance of resurfacing vintage pieces and traditional craft methods. Held in Kasthall's Soho showroom, it featured drinks that matched the decor: The evening's floral specialty cocktail was concocted to align with the firm's new Anemon rug collection.

### Snakes and Bikinis

At Herman Miller's space on Park Avenue South, a packed house listened to a stacked panel discuss creative collaboration in the Land of Enchantment: **Wendy Goodman** moderated a

chat with **Giustina Renzoni**, director of historic properties for the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum; **Aleishall Girard Maxon** and **Kori Girard** of Girard Studio (and Alexander Girard's grandchildren); **Eames Demetrios** from the Eames office (and a grandchild of the Eameses); and **Kelsey Keith**, Herman Miller's creative director. **Jerry Saltz** even lobbed a query during the Q&A portion of the event.

The gathering was a launch for a drop of collaborative furniture: An occasional table inscribed with a circular snake graphic resurfaced from a 1967 collection called The Girard Group and an Eames wire chair with a "bikini" seat pad in ocher/dark sienna strips. (The table, an edition of 100, sold out within hours.) Downstairs, guests could check out the goods and hang around for a slice of a large circular cake decorated with the very same 🐍 design.

### Scandi Chic

On Monday evening, a VIP reception was held at the Residence of the Consul General of Sweden in New York. The reception promoted Nordic creativity and showcased products by Sweden's Bolon, Design House Stockholm, and Mizetto; Finland's Made by Choice; and Norway's Vestre. And the award for the tallest participants at NYCxDESIGN goes to...

### Fine Communion Wine

The Architectural League hosted its annual President's Medal Dinner to honor **Elise Jaffe** and **Jeffrey Brown** in the Crossing of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in front of a who's-who crowd of New York architects (and beyond). Before remarks from people like **Deborah Berke** and **Michael Maltzan**, The League's executive director, **Jacob Moore**, let folks know that despite losing NEA funding, the organization was strong financially: It had achieved the reach goal for the evening's event. It was admittedly a new—and pleasant—experience to dine and drink in a cathedral. After the program, bite-sized desserts were distributed (no cake), and guests paraded across the echoing space.

Once outside, attendees splintered into the night, with some revelers hopping trains to make the long trek back to Brooklyn. At one stop close to home, a station kiosk was taken over by a dinosaur to become Rex's Dino Bodega, which stocked the *Maul Street Journal* and sold Snarlboros. A drunken, pun-infused hallucination? Apparently not: It was still there in the morning when Eavesdrop slunk back to the office.

### Amenitize That Curb!

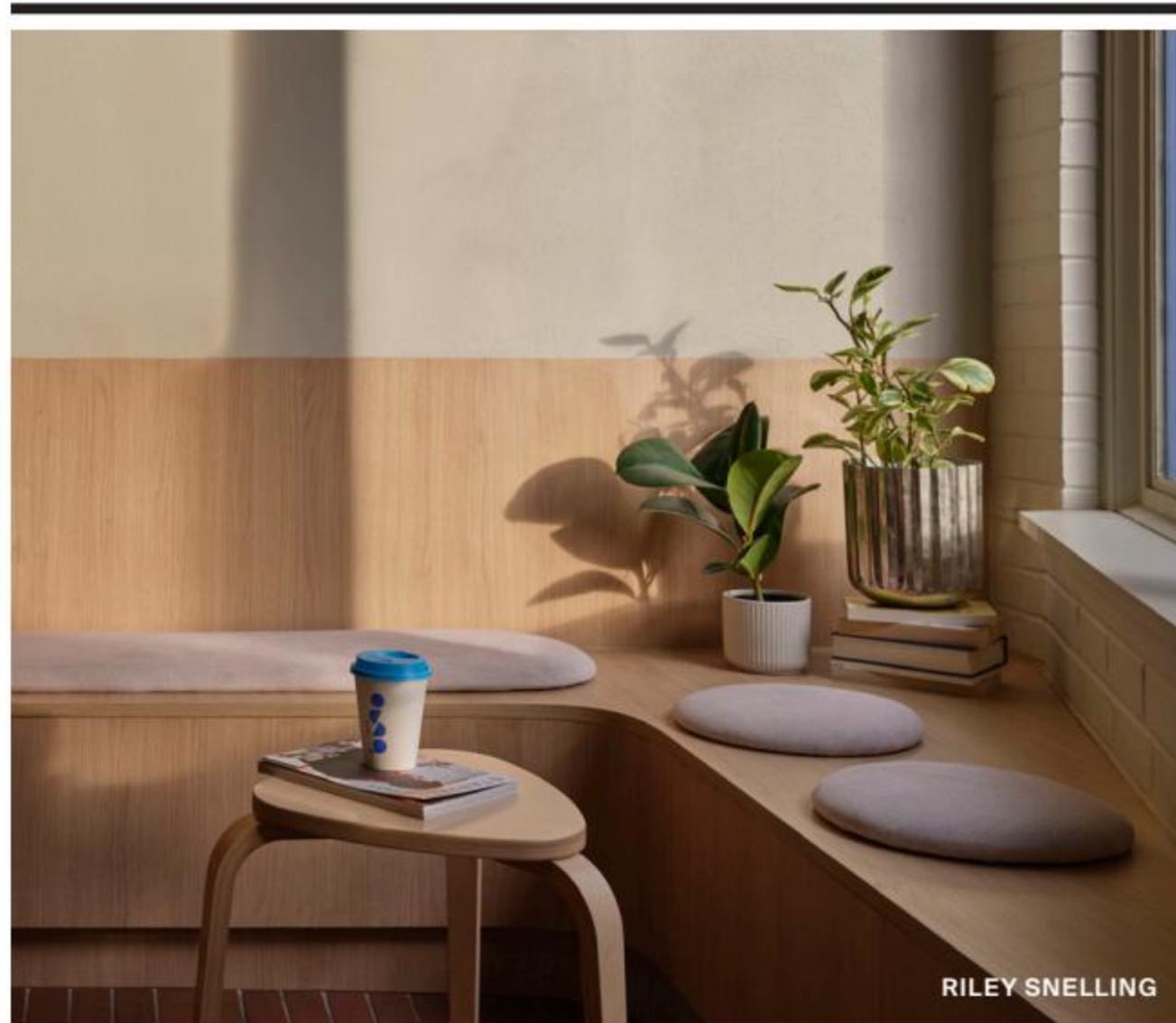
On a rainy morning, a group led by **Kristoffer Vestre** of Vestre; **Mike Lydon** of Street Plans; and **Jeffrey LeFrancois**, executive director of the Meatpacking District, descended on 14th Street to witness its transformation into a series of parklets. Planned as part of ongoing improvements to the neighborhood, the decking, 16 feet wide on either side of the street, utilizes Vestre furniture to add more space for dining, gathering, working, and observing. It should be ready for peak summer promenading later in June.

### Closing Remarks

NYCxDESIGN finished strong in DUMBO. After a discussion at BIG's office, the designerati migrated to Space Theory's new showroom in the historic Stable Building (Henrybuilt will open upstairs later in the year) before continuing to an open studio at Post Company, the official closing party, a *For Scale* issue launch at the Ace Hotel, and a bash at Reform. The last affair had a towering, 6-tier cake made by **Lauren Schofield** and finished in cream and rhubarb pieces both stacked upright and running horizontally to cap each layer. Its serving method quickly turned messy, giving Tower of Babel energy, which felt right for these trying times. At least we have a vibrant local community of architects, designers, makers, and brands—oh, and cake.

## Understated and Underrated

These coffee shops, lounges, and casual culinary spots put an elevated spin on third spaces.

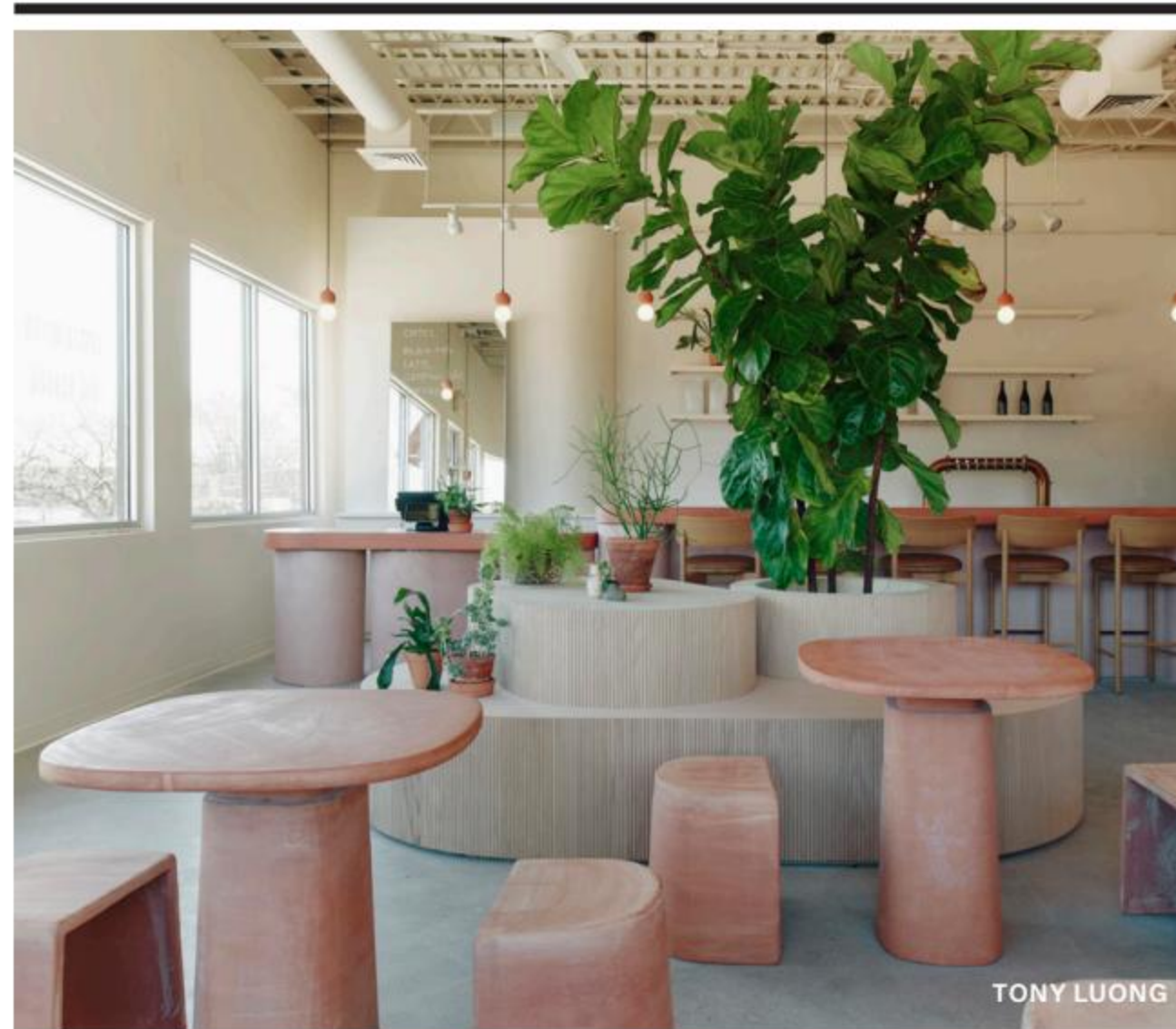


RILEY SNELLING

### Buno Coffee by Architecture Riot

1048 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6J 1H7

Blue-painted brick marks the signature facade of Buno Coffee, but beyond the exterior, warmth and spare materiality take over. Architecture Riot led the design with a focus on sculptural precision and a quiet palette. Brick, plaster, and oak make up the 550-square-foot interior. The space begins with a service counter defined by horizontal planes with rounded corners. Opposite the counter, custom-built millwork creates seating with small tables integrated within, all continuing the forms set by the countertop. Below, retained and reinterpreted brick flooring grounds the coffee shop to the site's previous spaces. Above, lighting continues to gesture toward curvature. Above the service counter, Santa & Cole's cylindrical pendant, clad in Japanese paper, lights the space. Shaped sconces by Luminaire Authentik brighten the walls. Together, the fixtures, materials, and forms coalesce into a subtly elegant space to grab coffee.



TONY LUONG

### Kaffeology by CO-G

48 Hillside Road, Cranston, Rhode Island 02920

The owner of popular Rhode Island cafe Kaffeology wanted to expand the Garden Island City outpost to include an evening tapas-style menu. Local studio CO-G designed the space to accommodate this phase change with a warm, natural tone. Thus, the new material palette—terra-cotta, wood, site-formed concrete, and plaster—establishes an earthy, welcoming interior. Rotund geometries complement the muted colors. Plaster walls billow out from the perimeter and curve to create a private nook for the owner to work in, while also concealing bulky coffee machinery. The area blends into the terra-cotta seating. Pill-shaped millwork pieces serve as the service counter, including a display for baked goods, and create high-top seating for laptop-using guests in the daytime and a bar during the evening. In the middle of the space, fluted islands are stacked atop each other to create overflow seating that transitions to retail display for local women-owned vendors.



BRIAN W. FERRY

### GreenBurg Café by LOT Office for Architecture

55 Franklin Street, Brooklyn, New York 11222

LOT office for architecture maximizes on a minimal color scheme and sculptural simplicity for a new coffee shop in Greenpoint. The 1,000-square-foot space begins with an espresso bar that stretches the length of the front room. The bar, a rectilinear volume of soft white topped in steel and lit with a custom light box that hangs above, reflects the color and material motif of the interior while contrasting against the dominant curvature within the design. Case in point: Nearby, a waving counter integrates the trash cans and water station. A sleek, shiny textile partition from Dooor guides traffic to the back lounge, where the white-painted brick and more curving banquettes frame the space. Steel stools and slim tables in a bolder white add contrast. On the patio, the sculptural seating is continued alongside the Cloverleaf Sofa designed by Verner Panton in 1969.

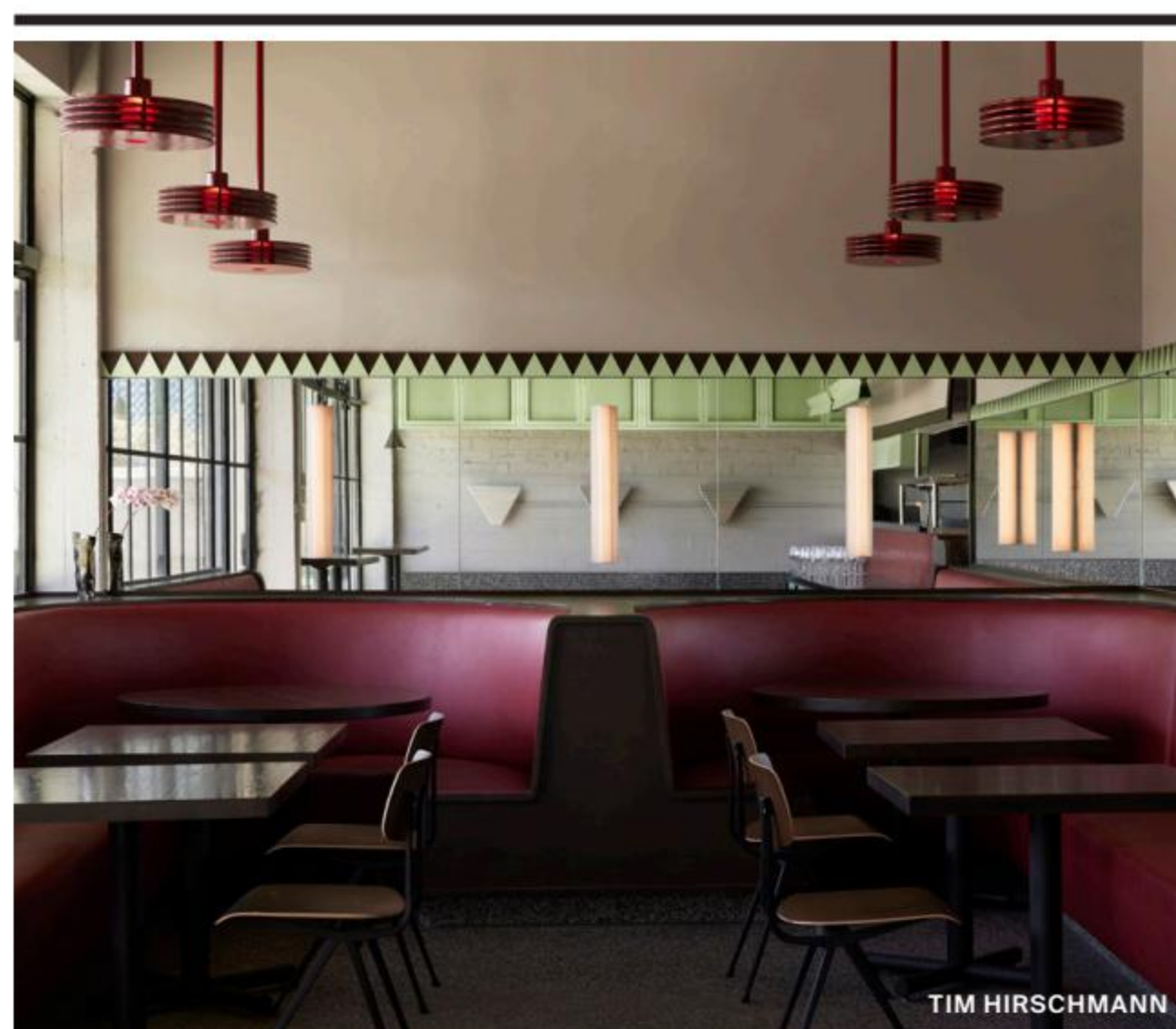


EKATERINA IZMESTIEVA

### Side A by Studio AHEAD

2814 19th Street, San Francisco, California 94110

Side A is a bistro, listening bar, and weekday coffee and doughnut joint serving The Coffee Movement. Studio AHEAD collaborated with Parker and Caroline Brown, cofounders of Side A, to transform the space while paying homage to its former life as Universal Cafe. The original space featured custom galvanized steel, a marble bar counter salvaged from a historic bank, and bentwood plywood banquette seating. The new design keeps these features but layers modern elements: a custom brushed-aluminum DJ stand with metal shelving behind it to organize the record collection, rounded acoustic panels crafted from upcycled sheep's wool felt, and metal seating with cushions finished in industrial waxed canvas. A raw canvas curtain helps divide the space. The mix of textiles, metal, and wood coalesce into a soft yet sleek interior. It's finished by an equally contemporary sound system by Good Question Sound and 280 West, utilizing a Tub's Audio speaker.

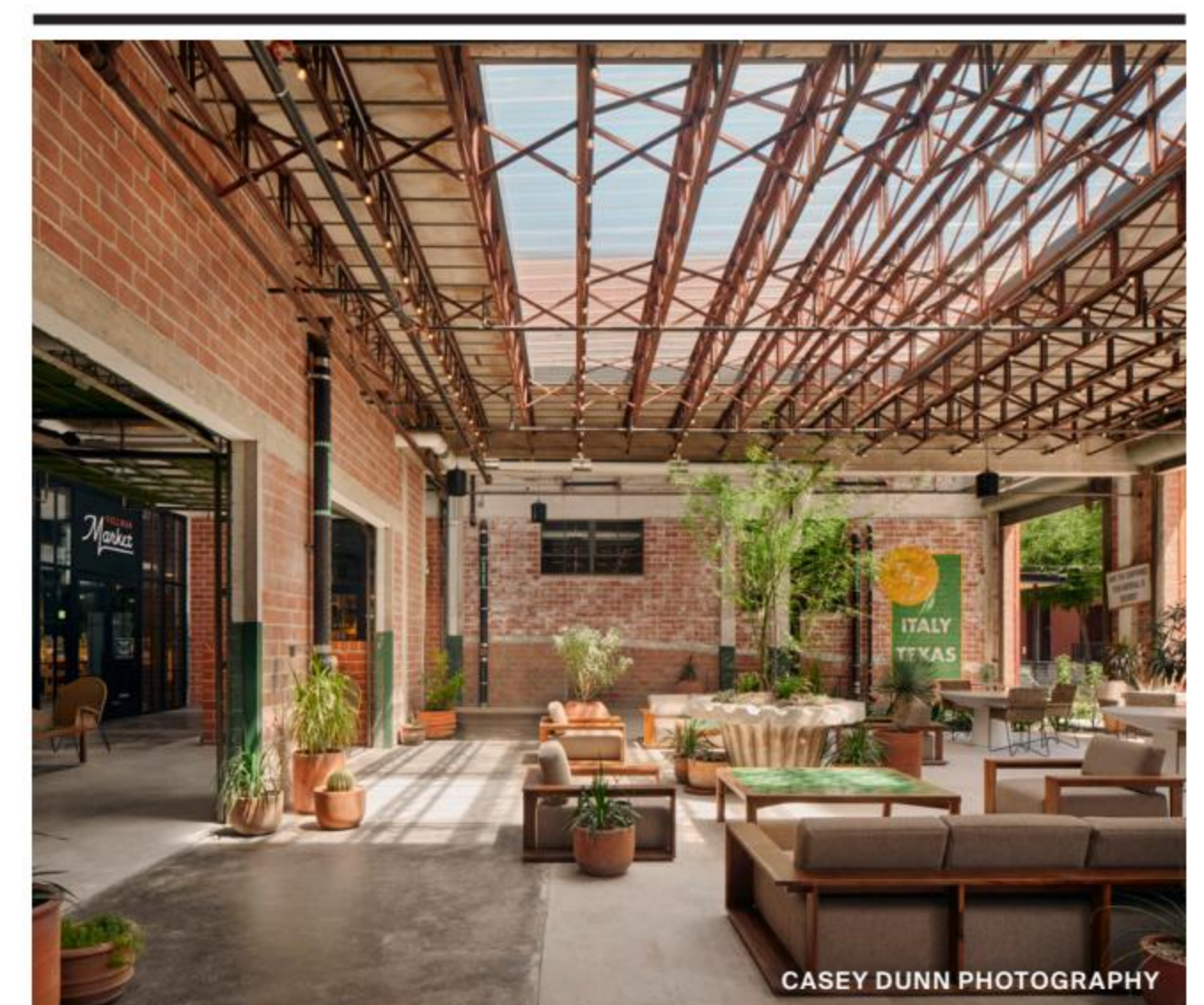


TIM HIRSCHMANN

### Wildcrust by Jared Frank

4705 York Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90042

Milanese modernism informs the design of chef Miles Okabayashi's pizza parlor Wildcrust. He conceived the outpost as a rejection of both New York's upper echelon fine dining scene and the unelevated connotations of running a pizza shop. Translating this concept, Jared Frank looked to Piero Portaluppi and Aldo Rossi. The rich patterns and material palette of PoMo styles are certainly felt in the triangular trim that lines the wall, the red and black tiling used in the counter backsplash, the tiered red pendants, and the custom ziggurat sconces. The color range of the interior is derived from pizzas but in a chic fashion: The mint green that makes up the cabinet fronts stems from basil, the red banquettes and triangular base for the communal table are an ode to marinara sauce, and the aluminum detailing references the pizza pans.



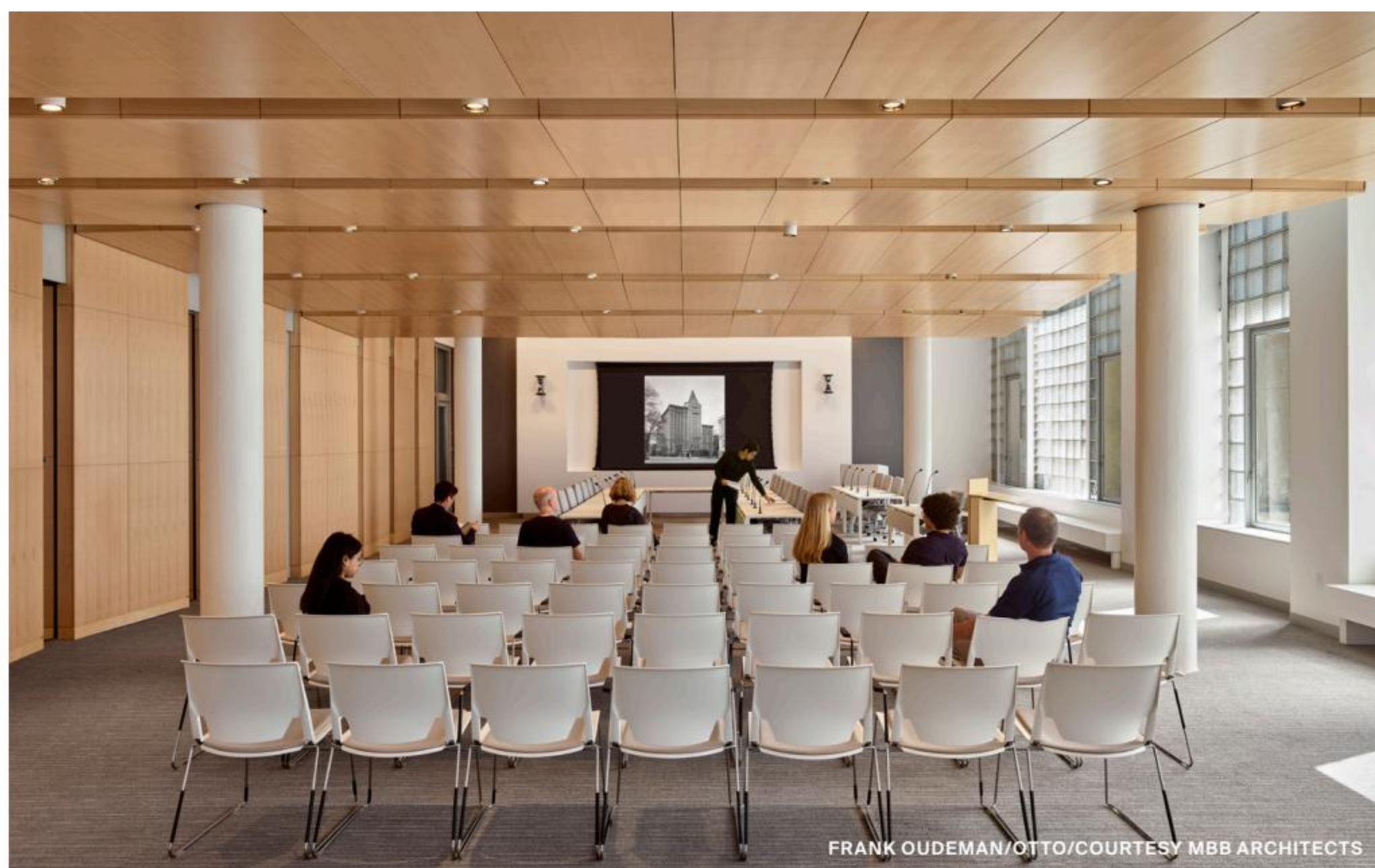
CASEY DUNN PHOTOGRAPHY

### Pullman Market by Clayton Korte

221 Newell Avenue, San Antonio, Texas 78215

Located within the 1948 Samuels Glass building, Pullman Market is a new 53,979-square-foot culinary destination in San Antonio. The historic building remains visible despite the new era. Clayton Korte maintained the building's original materials, even those with patinas, including the exposed brick and marred columns. The architects used infill between structural elements to stitch together patios where skylights situated above exposed beams and plush seating create a relaxing lounge area, allowing for continuous flow within the space. Despite the warehouse-like scale, the market remains inviting and elevated as it accommodates millwork-clad booths, chandeliers, plaster-wrapped walls, and a variety of plants from Word + Carr Design Group. The lofty ceiling heights and generous light monitors allow verticality from trees and planters to direct sightlines and incorporate new life into the building. **Kelly Pau**

# 10 News



FRANK OUDEMAN/OTTO/COURTESY MBB ARCHITECTS

## Farewell, Bureaucracy

**MBB Architects renovates a functional new home for New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission.**

continued from cover interior, to borrow a John le Carré line, bore "that unmistakable air of controlled dilapidation which characterizes government hirings all over the world." Courtney Metakis, director of communications for the LPC, explained to *AN*, "It was not a space we were ever intending to occupy. It was not designed for us; it had a very small public hearing room and waiting area."

It was especially ill adapted for the regular torrent of property owners trooping in for meetings and hearings. There was also a sort of discordance in experiencing punctilious review of architectural appearances in a shabby space, like a doctor lighting up a Lucky Strike during a physical. Jeff Murphy, the MBB partner in charge of the project, explained the paramount aim accordingly: "The LPC wanted to set a high bar for design in their own space."

This has been achieved with the move of the LPC across City Hall Park to new offices in the landmarked Home Life Building, which consists of the building originally of that name by Napoleon LeBrun and Sons and the conjoined Postal Telegraph Building by George Edward Harding & Gooch. It too is landmarked.

MBB was selected under the aegis of the city's Design Excellence Program, a streamlined process for contracting that has provided the city work from Steven Holl, Snøhetta, Studio Gang, and others that usually operate outside the realm of typical lowest-bid civic fare. MBB was an apt choice given its experience on the other side of the table, previously renovating such landmarks as St. Patrick's Cathedral and Trinity Church.

Murphy recalled the prior LPC hearing room, occluded save for small glass door panels: "You'd be frantically sticking your nose up against the glass wondering if it was your turn to go in," Murphy told *AN*.

This circumstance has been comprehensively eradicated with the new hearing room, located on the second floor of the Postal Telegraph Building, easily accessible by elevators and a single flight of stairs. It occupies a unique space, a later-but-still-historic intervention, a former location of the swank Longchamps restaurant chain, designed by Ely Jacques Kahn in the late 1930s. It had fallen to inglorious use as a construction

staging area when MBB found it, but deco glass block windows and other fragments of history remained, just requiring, as Murphy put it, "peeling back some layers" to again showcase.

The architects designed the space at the commission's request to create a less intimidating space; literal light and internal transparency accomplish much of that.

Applicants do not arrive to be blindsided by pedantic commissioners about the shortcomings of their dime-store windows; the applicants' proposals are always vetted by staff members prior to a hearing. The vast majority are just handled by the staff. Of those that do go before the tribunal, almost all are approved at a single hearing. There are, of course, avaricious developers out there, but most of the LPC processes are easily settled.

MBB partner Sara Grant commented: "It was really important that we were designing for homeowners to feel welcome in the space

and to feel that the LPC was not their enemy. We're used to it. We're architects, but for a regular citizen it was a very anxiety-ridden experience to go in there and present a project. They wanted a space that was friendly, welcoming, and put the public at ease."

Appropriately, preserving the glass block perimeter height was the commission's paramount aim, with drop ceilings yanked out and mechanicals requiring lower ceilings clustered toward the center. The windows bore "80 years of gunk," Murphy said, which required cleaning up. He added: "In some cases we cannibalized glass block from other offices and filled in cracked and mismatching modules." Original Longchamps column capitals were discovered hidden above a drop ceiling; the architects were able to retain one and replicated two others in the waiting room.

The space now includes a generous waiting area with three new, smaller conference rooms, generally used for meetings with staff before and after hearings; these were previously conducted in sotto voce tones in the Dinkins Building hallway. There's also a television live streaming the proceedings inside the hearing room.

Vertical glass panels provide a view into the hearing room to provide additional assurance that you're not about to miss your hearing. This logic led to the larger scheme of the chamber's insertion itself. Wooden panels form a sort of preservationist pavilion consisting of this wall and an angled ceiling concealing mechanicals—which stops short of the glass block wall, permitting its full height to endure. Grant referred to it as a "welcoming wrapper" designed to act "almost like a piece of furniture."

There are other lively touches, such as pointillist supergraphics of notable landmarks on conference room walls: the Guggenheim and the Chrysler Building, designed by C&G Partners. There are photos of other landmarks throughout as well, standardized in size and framing.

The commission's office spaces are located upstairs, on the building's 11th to 13th floors. On the 12th floor, the architects found an initial surprise. Murphy recalled, "When we first visited this floor, the drop ceilings were set at 8 1/2 feet. We pushed a tile up and saw another 10 feet of clearance

up there, so we brought back that double-height space." This section once housed the Postal Telegraph company's huge switchboards and now provides a ceiling that's still 16 feet high even with new mechanicals inserted—an unusually lofty entryway by the standards of city offices. A mezzanine overlooks this.

These office floors were plotted with the aim of optimizing the layout of different portions of the LPC's staff, assembling research and legal and grants departments in coherent spaces. Murphy explained, "We made a diagram: When someone drops off a set of drawings at the front desk, we asked, 'Where does that go in the office, and how could we situate people to make that process as efficient as possible?'"

There were other tweaks; MBB stripped asbestos-laden plaster from a unique brick-and-terra-cotta-lined steel frame and opened up views to historic stairways with glass panels. The floor plates of the two buildings are slightly off, varying between two and four feet. Previously connected only by steps, they're now ADA accessible with ramps.

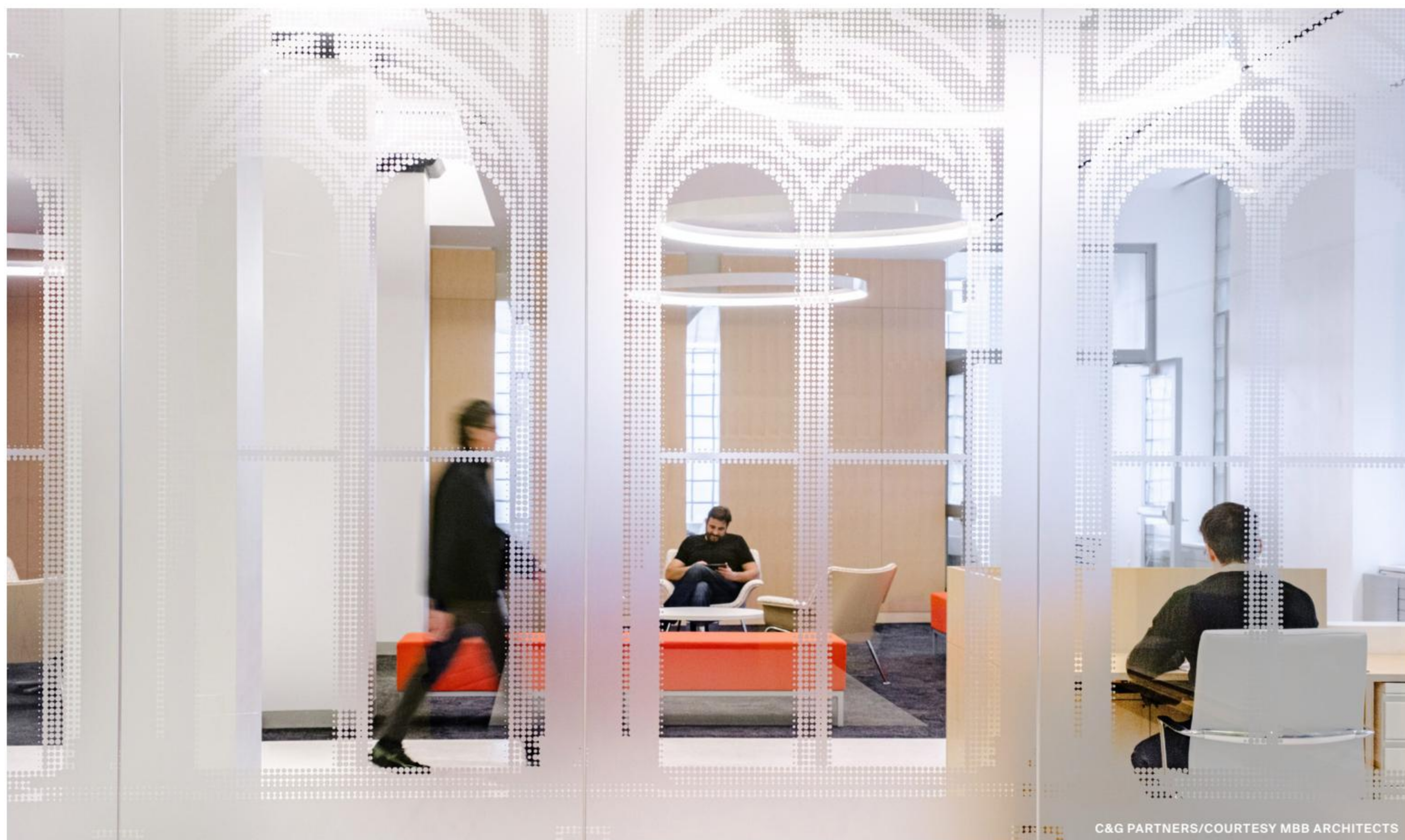
MBB had some fine ideas—such as re-creating original mirrored surfaces on former Longchamps columns—that couldn't fit into the budget. There is a sense of economy to the project, but MBB has done quite a lot within that frame.

Sarah Carroll, the LPC commissioner, declared the commission "thrilled" with the outcome. "The beautiful space, including a redesigned public hearing room and other meeting areas, fosters collaboration and accessibility in support of the agency's commitment to provide the best possible service to the city's landmark building owners across every stage of the application process and highlights how New York's historic buildings can be thoughtfully updated to meet modern needs."

**Anthony Paletta is a writer living in Brooklyn.**

Top: MBB Architects designed a new home for New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission in Lower Manhattan.

Bottom: The commission requested a less intimidating space; the architects responded by bringing light and transparency to the interiors.



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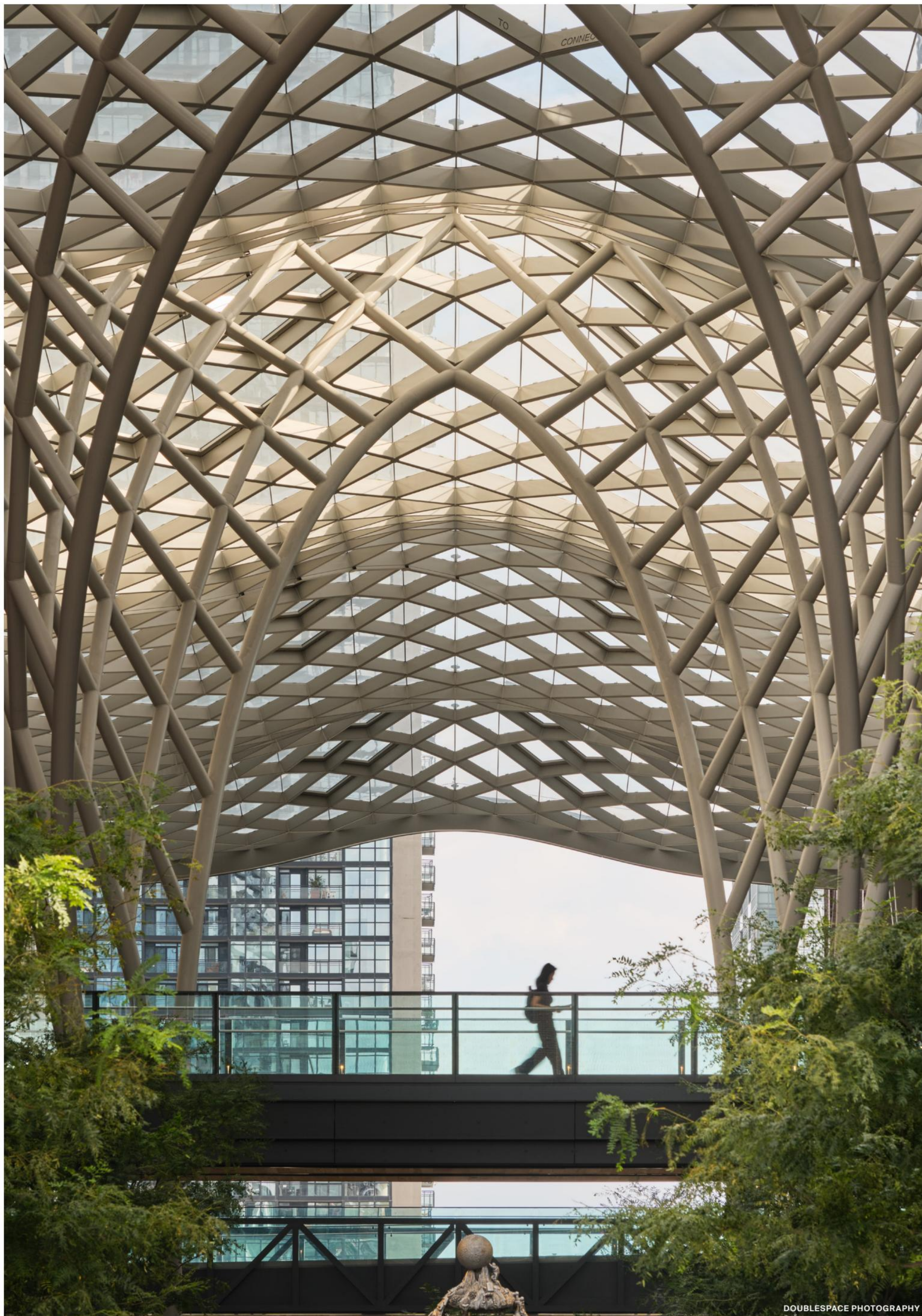
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VITROCSA®

# 12 Studio Visit

## Culture and Commerce

At Hariri Pontarini Architects, designers strive to create beauty with a capital “B.”



Hariri Pontarini Architects (HPA) is one of Canada's leading architecture and urban design firms. The 130-person Toronto office was founded by Siamak Hariri and David Pontarini. It just turned 30 years old, a major milestone. Today, Hariri runs the firm's cultural projects, and Pontarini helms the commercial work. “I had about ten years of experience at two very, very good firms before we started the office,” Hariri told *AN*. “We started out with small projects. It was a slow, gradual thing. We didn't have mercurial success. We built our infrastructure and studio—and the soul of our studio—quite slowly. We tried to figure out our voice and who we were for a long time. David's been the best partner in the world.”

The firm's portfolio is expansive. Among HPA's most prized buildings is the Bahá'í Temple of South America, completed in 2016 in Chile. That space of worship has since become an emblem of Chilean pride and identity and has attracted more than 2.5 million visitors since opening, according to Bahá'í World News Service. Today, HPA is on track to deliver Canada's tallest building, Sky-Tower, in Toronto. It's also adding on to the Royal Ontario Museum, a lauded institution that also features contributions from Daniel Libeskind. “I'm always interested in what people are attracted to. Attraction is a very important part of why people hire us,” Hariri said. “Clients hire us because they want to create a place that attracts, which is what the project with Royal Ontario Museum is all about.”

“I really like the fact that we focus on building. We're builders,” Hariri added. “We're not theoreticians, right? We don't have a blueprint for a brave new world. We're not sitting here criticizing and sulking. We're right here in the trenches! We care deeply about beauty. We think about beauty with a capital ‘B,’” he continued. “It's very important to have an emotional connection with architecture. It should lift you somehow.”

Hariri Pontarini, along with Adamson Associates Architects and Claude Cormier + Associés, designed the Well, a mixed-use hub in Toronto's emerging Fashion District.

## Tom Patterson Theatre, 2020

Due west of Toronto is Stratford, a city of 33,000 people in Perth County on the Avon River. It's full of nice old buildings, walkable streets, parks, and even Shakespearean gardens. Stratford Festival is a top-tier theater and music event that has taken place annually since 1953, attracting thousands of attendees. Tom Patterson Theatre is a new performing arts venue by HPA, sited right on the banks of the Avon River,

that adds to Stratford's cultural offerings. HPA conceived the building as a "seductive jewel" wrapped in a shimmering bronze veil. It was completed in 2020, but programming didn't commence until 2022 due to the pandemic. "We won an international competition that invited 92 architects," Hariri said. "The *New York Times* theater critic [Jesse Green] later called it the best new theater he had seen in years."



## SkyTower, 2018–2026

On a clear day, with the right view, it's possible to look out over Lake Ontario from Toronto and see New York. That is, if you're standing atop SkyTower, Canada's first supertall, designed by Hariri Pontarini Architects. The 106-story skyscraper is part of a major redevelopment, Pinnacle One Yonge. That tower will have 950 units and ample amenity spaces. A community

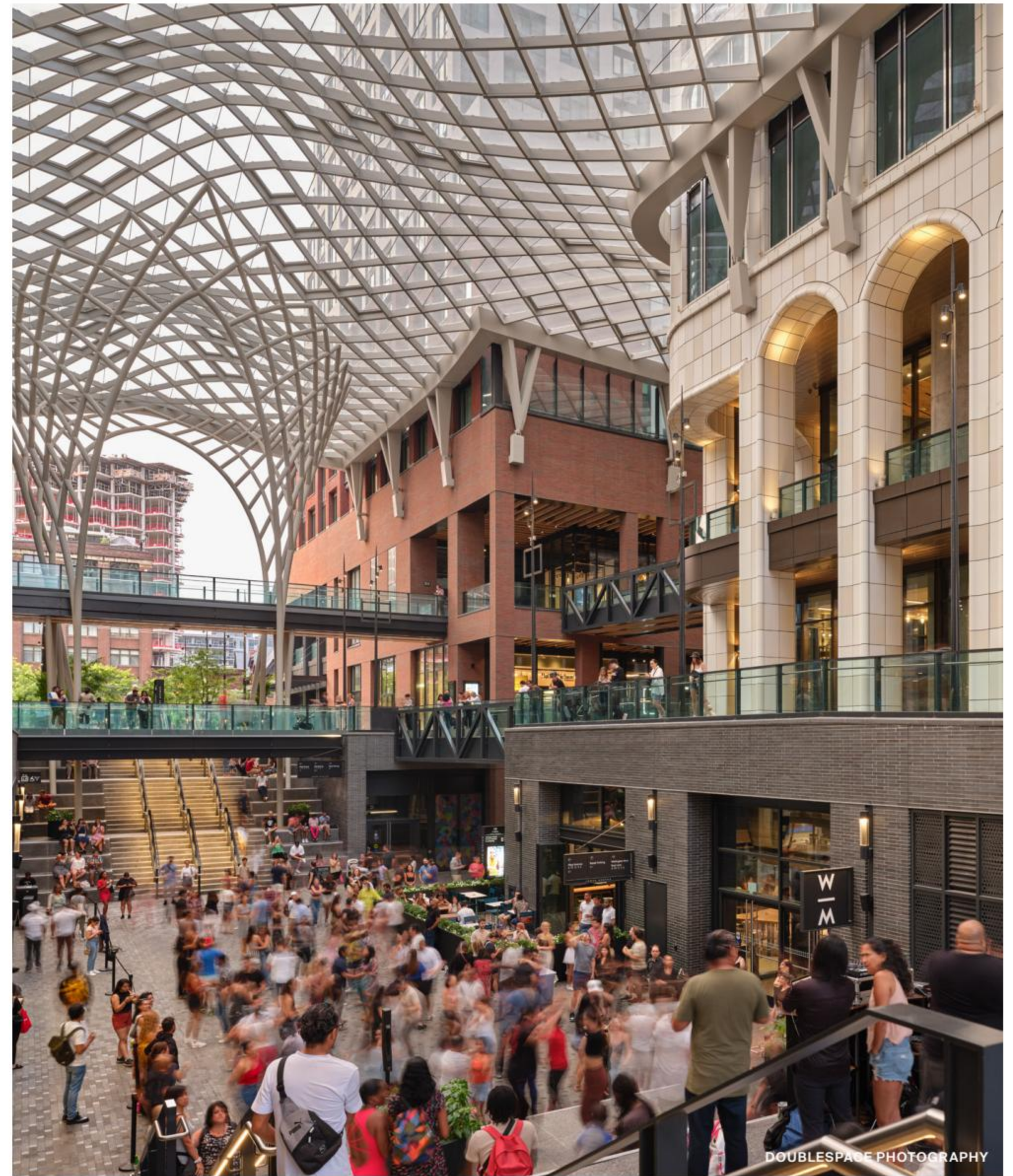
center and affordable housing will occupy the podium level. Phase one of Pinnacle One Yonge, a 65-story tower called the Prestige, is already occupied. In the coming years, the Brutalist Toronto Star building will be cleared to make way for the rest of the development. Pontarini is steering that project, together with HPA's Nadine El-Gazzar, Jodi Buck, and others.



## The Well, 2024

The west side of Spadina Avenue used to be a light-industrial area dotted with small factories and tiny wood houses. Now it's Toronto's Fashion District, a burgeoning mixed-use core with much larger buildings. The Ace Hotel, designed by Shim-Sutcliffe Architects, and a forthcoming mixed-use complex by BIG are standout features in the area. The Well is another mixed-use hub west of Spadina, designed by HPA,

Adamson Associates Architects, and Claude Cormier + Associés. The 3-million-square-foot complex spans several blocks and is stocked with a bevy of retail options. A 36-story residential tower makes the Well recognizable from afar. The complex was finished in 2024 and was shepherded by David Pontarini; it's been described as "Canada's answer to Hudson Yards."



## Royal Ontario Museum Welcome Project, 2019–2027

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is a building made of buildings. The original venue was designed by Darling and Pearson; it opened to the public in 1914, an Italianate and neo-Romanesque ensemble much later added on to by Daniel Libeskind. Now, Hariri Pontarini is making its mark on Canada's largest museum with the ROM Welcome Project, Plaza and Public Realm, otherwise known as Open ROM. HPA has already improved the Blue Street and

Queen's Park sides of ROM in past phases. This next phase is about improving interior circulation and expanding gallery capacity, vital steps toward helping ROM accommodate its 1.4 million annual visitors. "The big move is opening up the entire center and creating a really important gathering place for people within ROM," Hariri said. "It's a big deal to be a part of this wonderful institution. ROM is a really important project for us at HPA." DJR



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Carlo Ratti's architecture exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia attempts totality.

# Everything and Nothing



MARCO ZORZANELLO/COURTESY LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

As the opening installation within the Corderie, *Terms and Conditions* seeks to physically locate attendees within a warming world. Here, the waste heat generated from cooling other rooms is collected as a reminder of how the planet is becoming hot, noisy, and damp.

One of the first things attendees will tell you about *Intelligens*, Carlo Ratti's architecture exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia, is that there is So. Much. Content. Like a hoarder's warehouse, the Arsenale's Corderie is packed with artifacts. This condition is perhaps influenced by the Giardini's main pavilion being closed for restoration, but it is mostly due to Ratti's wide-angle, big-tent staging, which locates architecture as a form of survival in response to a hostile climate. Pitched by Ratti as a laboratory in which researchers can "experiment with intelligence beyond today's limited focus on AI and digital technologies and demonstrate how we can adapt to the world of tomorrow with confidence and optimism," the showcase begins with the ambitious goal of staging a flexible and inclusive view of how architecture relates to other forms of knowledge.

Upon arrival, one leaves the outside world and enters a dark, hot, humid room of HVAC fan units suspended over a shallow pool, a comment on our hyperreliance on air-conditioning. This is *Terms and Conditions*, developed by Transsolar with TU Munich and ETH and designed by Bilge Kobas, Daniel A. Barber, Dehlia Hannah, and Alexandra Auer. It prompts the question: Who gets to be comfortable, for how long, and at what cost? (Lesley Lokko's Biennale used a similar dissociative room as its opening scene.) Beyond this experiential piece—and after *The Other Side of the Hill*, which materializes our population J-curve and microbial reliance, created by Beatriz Colomina, Mark Wigley, physicist Geoffrey West, and biologist Roberto Kolter, and designed by Patricia Urquiola—some of the works are given ample real estate for a variety of one-to-one experiments, but many are relegated to boards or screens at the edges of the show. "It's an exhibition flanked by a magazine," Aric Chen correctly observed, as reported in the first of *AN's* daily dispatches from the vernissage.

If you linger and pay attention, there are inspiring examples of the world's top architects experimenting with natural building materials, sharing technological achievements, and presenting research on the social spaces of cities. Each of these flavors of intelligence—natural, artificial, collective—is rich enough to power a Biennale on its own, but here they are packed in all together. They're followed by an epilogue called *Out*, about outer space, which, despite showing thought-provoking pieces, feels fully untethered from the main show. If we ask nicely enough, maybe HAL will open the pod bay doors?

In Ratti's own language, the showing is alternately a chain reaction, a superorganism, and a fractal. Critics had other descriptors: Olly Wainwright called it "a high school science fair on steroids," Rowan Moore dubbed it a "a hot mess of pretension," and Edwin Heathcote compared it to a "teen's fantasy bedroom." Perhaps the only fully positive review came from Patrik Schumacher, who wrote on Facebook that it was "thrilling to behold after so many years of an increasingly annoying woke take-over of our Biennale."

Ratti's intention to focus on architecture's capacity for adaptation to our changing climate over wider societal attempts at mitigation may strike some as fatalist. Still, his search query yielded entirely too many results. The open curatorial framework, though admirable, led to a presentation that has an overabundance of moving parts. The show's density frustrates both navigation and comprehension: There are more than 750 participants, and they delivered around 300 projects. For context, Lokko's official exhibition in 2023 included 89 participants, and Kazuyo Sejima's in 2010 had just 48. Is this Biennale a case of conceptual manspreading?

Another component in bringing architecture closer to the sciences was the attempt to broaden our idea of authorship; though welcome, this direction abrogates the duty of the curator, which at its core is selection. The Latin root of *curate* is *cura*, meaning care. Curation requires taking care in finding and presenting the work that matters. The open-source technique refuses the key activity of making a decision about how to proceed when facing the real limitations of time, space, and money that structure architecture, exhibitions, and life at large.

One more time for the people in the back: Responding to our climate crisis is not a matter of technology but of politics and desire. (We already have our techno-dystopia today, "just add morality," as William Richards advises on the next page.) The ongoing existential relevance of architecture is one through line that related this show to its predecessor. Like Ratti, Lokko wrote that "the survival of the profession will ultimately depend on our ability to adapt to changing circumstances, intelligently, thoughtfully, ethically, and resourcefully." *Intelligens*, in its totalizing display, is ultimately too smart for its own good. Maybe the next curator will dare to be stupid.

The national pavilions fared better, with showings that ranged from provocative to forgettable. What follows is a series of capsule reviews from *AN* correspondents. Like Ratti's Wikipedia biennale itself, this multiperspective aggregation gives a lively sense of what's on view in Venice. **JM**

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## EPCOT Futures



Is “the vernacular” having a moment in Venice?

Thirty years ago, EPCOT's Spaceship Earth, a geodesic dome in which people sped through the history of telecommunication, peddled the future miracle of video chat, sponsored by AT&T. To me at the time, video chat seemed more amazing than the moon landing because it wasn't heroic and it wasn't abstract—it was interactive and productive. As a 9-year-old, video chatting with a pen pal was clearly so much better than writing to one. Riders at EPCOT passed through a blinding laser field at the story's apex, mimicking the video's signal itself; we traveled at the speed of light, dazzled, and blissfully unaware of what this miracle would one day require from all of us.

Today, we know too well the costs of technology and its latest harbinger, AI, because they encroach on our independence, and we have become the signal itself, on our wrists, in our pockets, and around our homes, quite frequently on a video call. I used to read books on planes. Now I dream about reading a book anywhere.

The mien of this year's Biennale Architettura 2025 is not the one of hope AT&T peddled in 1989 at Spaceship Earth, but it's not exactly one of despair, either. We all got the video future we dreamed of; now we just need morality.

Some exhibitors faithfully interpret the three subthemes of Ratti's *Intelligens*, like the UAE partnership Design and More International, in its “Probiotic Tower,” a proposal to use bamboo cross-laminated

timber, algae bioreactors, solar arrays, and shrubby barnacles called food trees to adapt a water tower to greater social and environmental goals. Others push a looser interpretation, like the Brooklyn-based designer Olalekan Jeyifous, whose photo collages in hyperreal colors called “Even in Arcadia” conflate verdant scenes of an aquifer-obsessed society interested in replenishment and renewal. (He won the Silver Lion in the previous architecture Biennale.) These imagined futures don't really seem as happy as the one AT&T promised us via EPCOT—and yet, here we are in the exact future it promised, and all too often abused by the urgencies of FaceTime, Signal, Slack, and WhatsApp. So, we pine for spruce and pine (or bamboo), and we must imagine ourselves happy as we consider digging wells with our children for fun and, evidently, survival.

Ratti comingles exhibitors who explore high and low technologies, so nothing really seems as if it belongs squarely in some untouchable realm. Nothing seems outlandish or dreamlike. There's a robot this year with a milky-white polymer mask that can respond to our prompts in any language. That's uncanny. Hempcrete takes center stage in one part of the show. That's unusual. Banana leaves that can be woven into super-strong rope are featured in another. That's unexpected. Even the AI-generated text that accompanies each exhibitor's statement, novel as it seems, offers the kind of alacrity you'd see in a decently reported news story by a human being assigned to the metro desk.

Where comingling high and low technologies gets interesting is in the work itself—and you can escape the closed loop between what's noisy and uncertain and what's familiar and tactile in examining firms that are sharply attuned to vernacular traditions by designing and building in them.

Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler created a large-scale research visualization that explores how technical and social structures co-evolved over five centuries in *Calculating Empires: A Genealogy of Technology and Power Since 1500*. The project earned a Silver Lion for Best Participation.



LUCA CAPUANO/COURTESY LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

Take MASS Design Group's work with the Rwandan Institute for Conservation Agriculture and the Dian Fossey Foundation; Kazunori Hamana's restoration of abandoned Japanese homes; Antonia Rossi's multifamily homes in Ostana, Italy; and So? Architecture's floating A-frame houses called “Hope on Water.” (In the national pavilions, Oppenheim Architecture's projects in Anneke Abhelakh's Albanian pavilion and Arquitectura Camps Felip's Las Tejedoras in Tarragona, exhibited in Spain's pavilion, come to mind, too.) Shigeru Ban was also in Venice at the invitation of the European Network Architecture for Health to talk about his experience working between high and low technology.

Hovering above these projects is the specter of Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 book *Architecture Without Architects*. The vernacular traditions Rudofsky chronicled were meant to be an antidote to modernism. (Its original subtitle was “a short introduction to non-pedigreed architecture.”) After its publication 60 years ago, we all started using “the vernacular” as a shorthand for received traditions in design and building rather than the appliqué of a design strategy or a theory. But one of the qualities of “the” vernacular is that it reflects a cultural and social process, not a style. It's meant to be wisdom in wood and stone; it is a method suited to context; it adapts. The vernacular is the signal itself, full of nameless architects and builders.

Maybe the best Rudofskian moment of this show was outside the main exhibit hall in the crook of the courtyard, where an unadorned wooden pergola hovers over a gleaming outdoor escalator, whose treads ascended evenly into dappled sunlight. This isn't an installation; it is literally an outdoor escalator, an invention whose basic form and essential function have remained unchanged for almost 150 years. Although its materials have been improved over the years, it demands nothing from us. It just works.

As I was appreciating this device, I saw Bjarke Ingels taking a phone call in its shade. He was in town to see the Bhutanese carvers his firm, BIG, hired to etch motifs into glulam beams alongside a robotic arm—except the robotic arm was stripped of a blade in favor of a brush, owing to safety concerns. In the end, then, only the humans were left holding the weapons.

**William Richards is a writer based in Washington, D.C., and Paris and the cofounder of Team Three, an editorial and creative consultancy.**

## Reading Between Worlds



Considering regeneration and decolonization in *Intelligens*

Walking through the Arsenale was, simply put, one of the most spectacular architecture experiences I've ever had. But spectacle came with saturation. I heard electronic dance music, synthetic field recordings, AI-generated narrations, and solemn textures of tonal soundscapes, and chirping digital crickets echoed, overlapping in loops throughout the halls. The result was immersive but at times disorienting—a tangle of spatial propositions and sonic excess.

Still, beneath the sensory overload was a powerful argument. *Intelligens* is deliberately misspelled, its etymology combining *inter-legere* (to read between, the root of *intelligent*) and *gens* (people), suggesting a collective reorientation of discernment and generative capacity. Intelligence here is not just about AI, but about the necessity of regeneration as a conceptual and material response to an altered world. These conditions—climate instability, ecological depletion, the failures of extractive modernity—are systems not just to adapt to, but to actively unmake. “Adapting” is insufficient if we do so on the terms of the systems that caused the rupture.

Many of the most resonant works take up this challenge. *Before New York*, a project by Eric Sanderson, Lucinda Royte, Annie Fu, and Jesse Moy, reconstructs precolonial Manhattan and reflects on what was lost in the territorial erasure of land and life. *Soft Infrastructure*, by Jaakko Heikkilä and Emil Lyytikä, explores common reed as a regenerative, locally available material for erosion control. *Forest Gens*, by POLES | Political Ecology of Space and AO | Architects Office, a cartography of Amazonia, dismantles the myth of a pristine, untouched wilderness and reveals a landscape deeply shaped by Indigenous practice. In *We Are All Woven*, a two-channel video installation by Fundacion Organismo, a speaker proclaims: “My body is the first territory.... The forest must teach us to regenerate ourselves.” Perhaps most forceful is the award-winning *Calculating Empires*, where Kate Crawford and Vladan



MARCO ZORZANELLO/COURTESY LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

*Elephant Chapel* by Thai architect Boonserm Premthada uses discs made from compressed elephant dung to create an arched structure. The project received a special mention from the awards jury.

Joler trace a genealogy of five centuries of techno-social infrastructure that undergird colonialism, automation, and enclosure.

What threads these works together is not a fetish for solutions, but an investment in refusal, generational knowledge, and presence. As Biennale president Pietrangelo Buttafuoco writes in the Biennale's introduction, the contemporary "is the time of divestment"—but architecture must rediscover its regenerative capacity to dwell in the world, not escape it.

This is precisely what the exhibition's "Out" section risks forgetting. Projects speculating on habitation in space—liquid Martian skies, lunar inflatables, orbital biospheres—seem to rehearse the same logics of expansion and extraction that created the climate crisis. Rather than critiquing empire's extraplanetary reach, they *enshrine* it in new frontiers. This final act feels less like cohabitation with disruption than its sublimation.

Still, *Intelligens* offers a critical reckoning with architecture's role in shaping and surviving an unstable world. It acknowledges architecture's divestment from extraction but also displays its inability to alone mitigate the crises we contend with today.

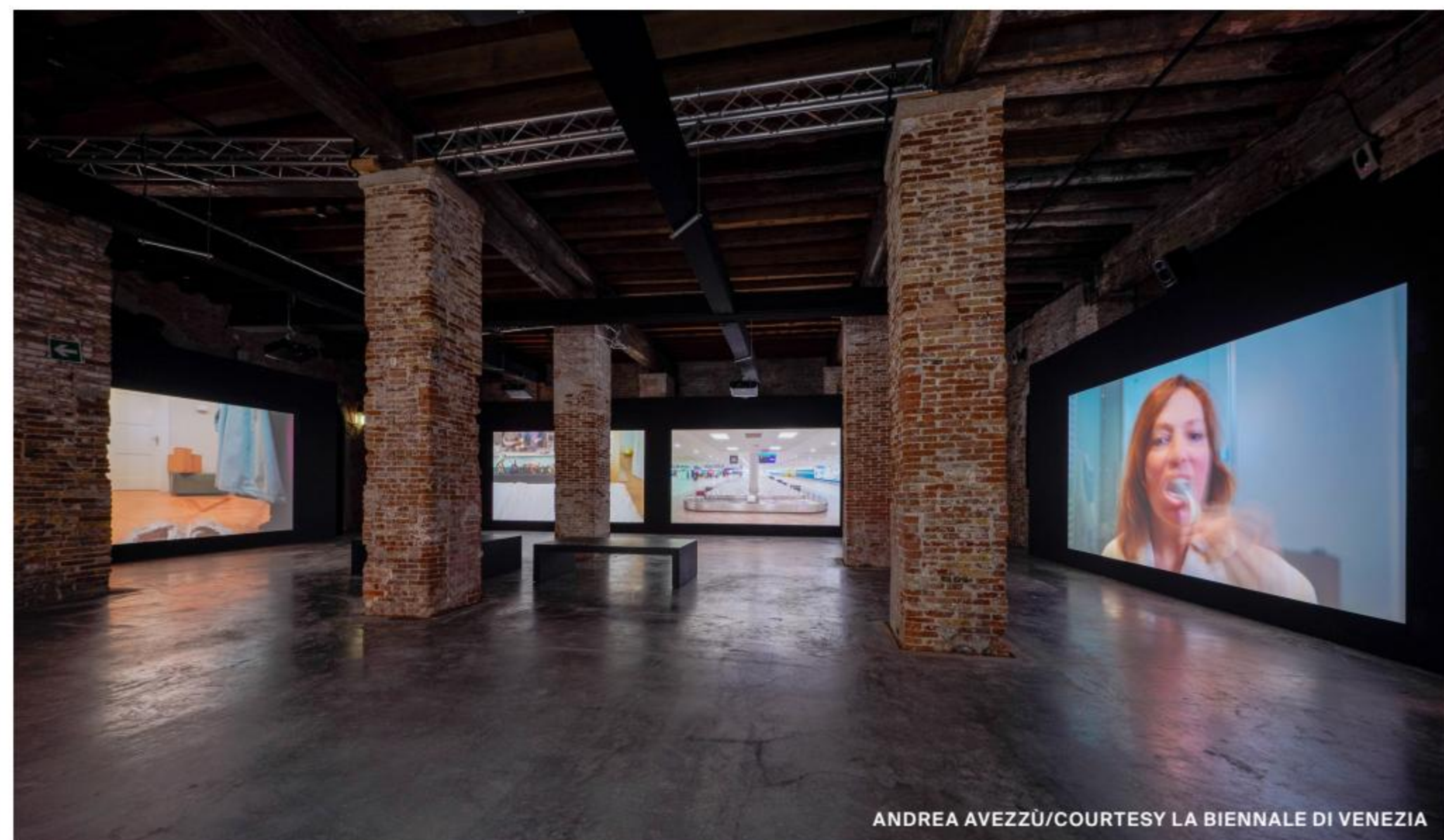
**Paul Mosley is a writer, educator, and designer and an assistant professor of architecture and urban design in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio.**

## Too Much Stuff ↓

**A film directed by Liz Diller teased the now-open V&A East Storehouse, designed by DS+R.**

"Sometimes you gotta move. Why? Too much stuff." That's the opening riff for a George Carlin bit from 1984 that greets visitors to the exhibition *On Storage* within the Biennale's Applied Arts Pavilion.

The exhibition is curated by Brendan Cormier of the Victoria and Albert Museum, with contributions from Diller Scofidio + Renfro. This year the institution opens two new sites in East London, including V&A East Storehouse, an open-archive facility that is designed by DS+R and curated by Cormier. The museum has, right now, too much stuff.



Within the Applied Arts Pavilion and as a way to celebrate the V&A East Storehouse, the museum screened *Boxed: The Mild Boredom of Order*, directed by Liz Diller. It follows a toothbrush on various adventures from a factory to an apartment and, eventually, the dump.

Preparing for the move led Cormier to explore the very notion of storage. "It is like a series of Russian dolls: things that contain things that contain things," he said. "And because we are an applied arts museum, so much of our collection is itself storage: a dish, a box, a container. And once you begin to view architecture as storage, you can see the world as a system of nested and interlinked storage system."

The Venice exhibition includes an elaborate study model by DS+R of the Storehouse and a heavy book of process drawings—including a precedent image of the military warehouse from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and screenshots from DS+R's server that reveal its own storage system. This witty presentation is accompanied by documentary photos of the V&A's archives showing what's in some of its archival boxes: a Walkman, street wear, thigh-high leather boots.

The centerpiece is a six-channel film directed by Liz Diller of DS+R, *Boxed: The Mild Boredom of Order*. It follows a toothbrush from its birthplace in Yangzhou, China—"the world capital of toothbrushes," Cormier explained—to an apartment in Central Europe, then a vacation in Venice, and then a barge trip to the local dump. At each stage the toothbrush occupies some kind of storage: box, delivery truck, apartment, suitcase.

The film is inspired by the Eameses' *Powers of Ten*, but it also occupies a favorite rhetorical mode for DS+R: a love of contingency and a playful testing of architecture's disciplinary boundaries. The 172,000-square-foot storehouse will bring the same energy. Visitors can now move through stacks and archives and look down into a central atrium where objects (such as a chunk of facade from Alison and Peter Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens estate, now demolished) will rest on display. Guests will also be able to request up to five items for a custom up-close viewing, collaborate with curators on quick-build exhibitions, and witness impromptu demonstrations from conservators.

The installation in Venice is spacious and serves as a respite from the chaotic smorgasbord of the Arsenale. Here, the restraint is deliberate. For Cormier, the density of an archive like the V&A's presents possibilities but also "the classic discovery problem: If you don't know what you're looking for, where are you going to start?" For that, you need curators.

**Alex Bozokovic is the architecture critic of *The Globe and Mail* and the author of books including *305 Lost Buildings of Canada*.**

For *Build of Site*, Søren Pihlmann repurposes the waste material from the renovation of the Danish Pavilion to create new objects, including the table supports and tops that support this rubble-rich installation.



## Buildings Are Messy ↑

**Søren Pihlmann leads a renovation and shows us what an architecture exhibition should be.**

What should an architecture exhibition be in an age of ecological collapse, resource exhaustion, and information fatigue? Architecture is a profession that often struggles to convince the general public of its value; though its impacts are long term, its processes are opaque and its authorship diffuse. In Venice, the question is further obfuscated by its world's fair structure, with national pavilions acting as stages for often nationalistic architectural self-definition. For Søren Pihlmann of Pihlmann architects, the curator of *Build of Site*, the Danish Pavilion's offering at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, the answer lies not in the finished building nor the glossy rendering but in architecture as an act itself. It is a gritty, ongoing labor of care—a work in progress of repair and aspiration. "Buildings are messy," Pihlmann insisted during the vernissage—and rather than tidying that mess for the sake of display, he invites us in.

This year, the renovation of Denmark's Peter Koch-designed, midcentury building is the exhibition itself. The work began in December 2024 and will complete after the Biennale closes. As steward of this aging structure, Denmark positions itself as a caretaker of its built heritage—countries with pavilions in the Giardini own those structures and are responsible for their upkeep—and a critical voice in confronting the environmental and ideological limits of modernism. The pavilion has been deteriorating over the years, as flooding has caused surface damage to the concrete floors and inadequate services create high humidity and dysfunctional electrical systems, evidence of the bygone architectural eras' blind spots. "We didn't bring an exhibition from Denmark," said commissioner Kent Martinussen. "We did it here, from what was here."

"Of course, we introduced small things like tools, molds, some small components sometimes," Pihlmann clarifies. "But I would say 99-point-something percent of the things that you see in here were here before, and nothing will leave the pavilion either." This ethos of self-recycling echoes much of Pihlmann's practice. Most recently, he completed Thoravej 29 in Copenhagen, a project in which a former factory was reconfigured over the space of three years using only its own materials—not demolished, just rearranged.

*Build of Site* proposes renovation not as restoration, but as rethinking: of material

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value, authorship, and permanence. Where the Biennale often traffics in polished provocations and speculative futures, *Build of Site* plants its feet firmly in the present: The site is the display, and the process is the vision. We see the pavilion at the point at which its materials and systems have been carefully picked apart and new forms created from the rubble. "It is a real renovation that we are doing first and foremost," Pihlmann noted. "We thought this was a great opportunity to actually do a renovation to shed light on how important it is to take care of our existing buildings."

And so, the concrete floor that was so strongly pointing to the pavilion's need for repair has been taken up: It was carefully incised and removed in textured slabs that show the layers of aggregate and cement. The objects created from these extracted tablets create new places to sit in and walk through the space, as well as describe the exhibition in ways that reveal the renovation of the pavilion and the opportunities it is creating from the rubble.

Working with what was there when they arrived, very subtle reconfigurations have been made: Most notably, one of the original picture windows has been carefully removed and transformed into a pivoting door by Venetian carpenters.

The exhibition tables are constructed from a corrugated sheet material that, at first glance, resembles carbon-heavy cement board, but they are made from excavated earth from the site mixed with gelatin to bind it. Along the walls, material tests document the development of these panels in a gradient of natural hues. A deep red board is composed of crushed bricks and a yellow one from powdered stone. Some are made from pure earth and others clay, so these earthy tones shift and are drawn directly from the soil's composition. These elements, though experimental, are entirely of the place, materially grounded, and low impact.

This is what an architecture exhibition should be. *Build of Site* is about urgent themes to which we do not have all of the answers, but it marks a tangible path through. It speaks to architects and non-architects alike by making its process transparent, its labor visible, and its intentions clear. It reminds us that buildings are messy and complex—and that architecture is an act of staying with the trouble, not resolving it.

Ellen Peirson is a London-based writer, editor, and designer.

## Jungle Boogie →

**Bas Smets and Stefano Mancuso install a self-aware ecosystem in the Belgian Pavilion.**

Walk through the art nouveau doorway of the Belgian Pavilion at the Giardini in Venice, and you step directly into a jungle. *Building Biospheres*, the installation curated by Brussels landscape architect Bas Smets and neurobiologist Stefano Mancuso, fills the central hall with a dense, rectangular cluster of four hundred tropical understory plants. Sensors throughout the display monitor plant behavior in real time—data that, in turn, drives the building's lighting, irrigation, and ventilation.

"We see the building as a microclimate, and we see the plants as a possibility to interfere with that climate," Smets said during the preview. "The plants are cooling the temperature in summer and heating it in winter."

It's not just a metaphor. The prototype demonstrates a new model for climate control in architecture, employing the "natural intelligence" that Biennale curator Carlo Ratti cites as one of the Biennale's themes. Instead of ornaments, the plants here are agents in a calibrated feedback loop. The installation is a working system, developed with Ghent University ecophysicologist Kathy Steppe and engineer Dirk De Pauw.

The key premise is comfort: If the plants are comfortable, people are comfortable. Tropical species were chosen for their environmental preferences, which align closely with human thermal comfort. However, this prototype system is not perfect: Smets notes that humidity is still a challenge using only natural ventilation. A series of adjunct proposals from emerging Belgian practices—like a hemp-lime wall system or bamboo-based humidifier walls—expand on the idea, exploring how to stabilize interior moisture levels through architectural materiality.

More provocatively, the team imagines how to deploy these ideas in existing buildings. For a 1967 residential tower in the Pacific housing complex, a scheme would convert several floors into "climate rooms," lush green environments fed by water pumped from a belowground aquifer. These plant-filled spaces would act as living lungs for the building, distributing cool, clean air throughout the apartments.

Another pilot project targets the former office building of glass manufacturer Glaverbel, a ring-shaped 1960s structure whose empty courtyard would be enclosed to create an interior biome. Plants like king ferns and giant taro—species from Southeast Asia's humid forests—will anchor the system.

"Architecture has always been about survival," reflected Smets, whose public projects, including a new square at Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris, increasingly engage with

Poland's *Lares et Penates* fuses two forms of everyday security: that of architectural accoutrements—think fire extinguishers, signage, and CCTV—with the realm of superstition. The result is a fantasyland of tableaux that is quickly understood and fun to explore in a deeper way.



JACOPO SALVI/COURTESY ZACHĘTA ARCHIVE

the impacts of climate change. "It's about protecting us from wind, rain, and snow. But over time, architecture began to produce its own artificial climate—sealed off from the biosphere that allows life." *Building Biospheres* argues for reversing that separation, engaging with the natural world in an intimate form of collaboration. **AB**



Bas Smets and Stefano Mancuso install a landscape that uses sensors to regulate the interior environment.

## Household Gods ↑

**Poland's superstitious exhibition about security is a real winner.**

When I was a kid, I was told it was bad luck to walk under a ladder, and to this day I will go out of my way if I even get near one. Among the many architectural and design projects dealing with the environment and human shelter at the Biennale Architettura 2025, only one team of multidisciplinary researchers sought to question the role of superstitious practices alongside practical architectural applications. *Lares et Penates*, the main title of the Polish pavilion's exhibition, curated by Aleksandra Kędziorek, is a reference to the two Roman deities meant to vigil over Roman families and their households. The presence of these two gods was thought to bring good fortune.

I don't think there are any statistics on lives saved by not walking under ladders, but I am sure the admonition is not completely meaningless. A horseshoe above the entry foyer, covering up mirrors during a funeral wake, or painting a door red are rituals most of us are familiar with, but the brilliance of the Polish pavilion's posture on domestic conventions is that it treats with equal value all that is incredulous along with all that is rational—in other words, horseshoes and fire extinguishers become equally indistinguishable components in the construction of an everyday house.

Kędziorek and her team—Krzysztof Maniak, Katarzyna Przezwańska, and Maciej Siuda—came up with a strategy to illustrate this rather simple premise by combining

basic domestic technologies with rudimentary magical-like objects in a way the public could readily comprehend. This is what I found most beguiling about their approach. The Polish pavilion, which in previous iterations has been packed to the ceiling with interesting but largely invasive installations, has settled into some kind of tranquil existence, where a bowl of milk cohabits with a CCTV camera, a candle on a windowsill maintains a stable presence much like the little ceiling smoke detector, and a fire extinguisher niche is given a celebratory mosaic treatment.

*Lares et Penates*, *On Building a Sense of Security* accomplishes a real miracle: The exhibition is neither annoyingly rhetorical nor overly obsequious. Naturally the narrative is based on deep Eastern European traditions, but this odd fusion of modern and archaic hits a very contemporary existential chord. When I talked to Kędziołek, I asked her what inspired her to explore these multiple dimensions of homemaking. Was it something from her childhood? “Yes, if I were to forget something in the house,” she responded after giving it some thought,” and I would have to go back home to retrieve it, my father told me to take at least 10 seconds before leaving the house again.” Why the 10 seconds? Kędziołek wasn’t sure, but she thought it might have something to do with the possible presence of evil spirits and the need to prevent them from finding a chance to sneak inside.

There is, of course, an anthropological undertone to the Polish pavilion’s exhibition that could serve similar investigations elsewhere. Superstition is based on common-sense actions and as such plays a role in dispelling fears while providing the public with some form of peace of mind. It’s possible that when you visit Poland’s offering you will come away with a special sense of protection.

**Peter Lang is a curator, writer, and educator focusing on architecture and the arts.**

## Care for Our Common Home →

**Matt Shaw interviews Pope Francis about the Biennale Architettura 2025.\***

**Matt Shaw (MS)** Thank you for joining me today, Your Holiness. I have enjoyed your 2015 encyclical text, *Laudato Si’*. It bridges the gap between the progressive discourse of the environmental movement and the often-overlooked progressivism of the Church.

**Pope Francis (PF)** Our planet is a homeland, and humanity is one people living in a common home. An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan.

Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation.

Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships— with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin.

**MS** *Intelligens* seemed to address these topics you speak of. An architecture exhibition can’t really solve the world’s problems. Ratti’s invitation of “different types of intelligence to work together to rethink the built environment” sets an agenda and surveys responses. I think that is what a Biennale can do: Identify a large issue, make it legible, and publicize it through media—in this case, an exhibition and a book. What do you think of Ratti’s agenda for architecture and urbanism in the era of climate change?

**PF** On many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views.

**MS** You say that we need all the expertise and solutions we can get when tackling climate change, which includes technology. But you also warn of “a blind confidence in technical solutions.” What do you see as the role of technology in making a better world and, more specifically, helping to curb climate change?

**PF** It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us, for science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity.

Techno-science, when well directed, can produce important means of improving the quality of human life, from useful domestic appliances to great transportation systems, bridges, buildings, and public spaces. It can also produce art and enable men and women immersed in the material world to “leap” into the world of beauty. Who can deny the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper?

The basic problem goes even deeper. It is the way that humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an *undifferentiated* and *one-dimensional* paradigm. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object....Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational.

**MS** Ratti’s third type of intelligence, its collective version, could have provided critique or more of an explicit counterpoint to the optimism of the technological. The “collective” is a generic way of theorizing architecture. Everything falls under this rubric. In the case of *Intelligens*, it acts as a catch-all, with even less aesthetic and intellectual rigor than the natural and artificial sections.

What would you think of this alternative spiritual intelligence? The general watering down of the “collective” in our current secular, social media–poisoned world perhaps parallels a general loss of spirituality.

**PF** The accumulation of constant novelties exalts a superficiality which pulls us in one direction. It becomes difficult to pause and recover depth in life. If architecture reflects the spirit of an age, our megastructures and drab apartment blocks express the spirit of globalized technology, where a constant flood of new products coexists with a tedious monotony. Let us refuse to resign

ourselves to this and continue to wonder about the purpose and meaning of everything. Otherwise we would simply legitimize the present situation and need new forms of escapism to help us endure the emptiness.

**MS** In this spirit, I particularly enjoyed your country’s contribution, the Holy See pavilion, *Opera Aperta*, curated by Marina Otero Verzier and Giovanna Zambotti with design by MAIO Architects and Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO. It is a deft, long-term renovation of the Santa Maria Ausiliatrice complex. The project does what you mention, as it does not replace a structure but rather learns from it, inhabits it, and draws on it to extend its life. It embraces a building’s cracks as a productive space of ecological thinking.

It seems to embody so much of what you call “cultural ecology”—a way of working outside of our current techno-scientific paradigm to foster community among people, nonhumans, and their environment. What do you mean by this?

**PF** Together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic, and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat. This patrimony is a part of the shared identity of each place and a foundation upon which to build a habitable city. It is not a matter of tearing down and building new cities, supposedly more respectful of the environment yet not always more attractive to live in. Rather, there is a need to incorporate the history, culture, and architecture of each place, thus preserving its original identity.

**MS** The programming of *Opera Aperta*, an ongoing series of performances and events, will bring that culture into that “living... participatory present” you speak of. In this sense, it was good to see that the Biennale was still deeply aesthetic, perhaps unavoidably so. It easily could have eschewed beauty for simple problem-solving in the face of crisis, as is sometimes the case.

**PF** The relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked. By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple.

**MS** What do you see as a path forward?

**PF** Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.

*\*All of Pope Francis’s responses are quotes from his 2015 Laudato Si’ text. He died on April 21. The new pope, Leo XIV, an American, was elected on May 8, which coincided with the opening days of the Biennale.*

**Matt Shaw is a New York–based architecture author, editor, and curator, and a former executive editor of AN.**



*Opera Aperta* undertakes the long-term renovation of the Santa Maria Ausiliatrice complex in Venice. MAIO Architects and Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO are its lead designers. During the vernissage, the space was wrapped in scaffolding and yellow light. The pavilion receiving a special mention from the Biennale’s awards jury.



LARA SWIMMER



COURTESY RPM



JON SOOHOO/COURTESY LOS ANGELES DODGERS

# PRACTICING PRACTICE



RYAN SCAVNICKY/COURTESY ROUTLEDGE

As Anne Marie Duvall Decker of Duvall Decker recently told *AN*, “The most important project for a design studio is the design of the practice itself.” In this section, read a range of stories that explore the operational outer edges and the emotional inner core of the key services that architects provide: *Jett Butler* outlines how architects can better communicate with their clients (opposite page), *Richard Martin* reports about the latest project from an architect who has dedicated her career to baseball stadiums (page 22), *Nicolas Sowers* listens to the aural environments of contemporary libraries (page 24), three generations of the Madison family speak with *Kelly Beamon* about their family architecture business (page 26), and an excerpt from a book chapter by *Ryan Scavnicky* argues for serious consideration of virtual spaces as sites of architectural concern (page 28).



JON SOOHOO/COURTESY LOS ANGELES DODGERS

A client once told me they hired a practice from a group of prospects because their architect poured them a glass of water on a hot day; other candidates had failed to do so. I've coached a firm to simply shake hands and introduce themselves *before* presenting to a community board, not during. I've seen a furious client sack a firm during their presentation because the architect asked them to make consequential decisions (affecting tens of millions of dollars) without the benefit of a look-ahead or a pre-read—in other words, without context.

When clients lament their experiences working with architects, they often say that the architects seemed distant, dismissive, or too cerebral. They speak of firms that charged too much or too little, offered too many or too few choices, sent too many or too few people or even the wrong people, had too many revisions or didn't offer enough.

And I've experienced the truly fatal assessment by a client: My architect was brilliant; *they just weren't listening to me.*

## THE MYTH OF THE GOOD CLIENT

Few people hire an architect in pursuit of mediocrity, and even fewer seek to design for novelty's sake. There are no uninvolved patrons—those who fund imagination without offering criticism. Many architects wish for mythical, unicorn “good clients”: the ones who pay handsomely, on time, and offer no resistance to concepts.

Such clients do not exist. But real ones—curious, passionate, and engaged—do. The best of these clients want to participate. They're excited about working with you. They want to be heard.

The most consistent breakdowns in architect-client relationships stem less from aesthetic failures, missed timelines, or blown budgets than from a failure to translate. Design is no one's mother tongue; even plain English can go sideways in a meeting. Any language form we use is inherently unstable. Thus, the built environment we all celebrate—and which we criticize—is a precise reflection of our ability to listen and communicate with one another and arrive at a shared language.

## ARCHITECTURE IS TRANSLATION

As the founder and chief creative officer of a multidisciplinary design studio, I've had a rare window into the profession. I've worked as an architect, brand strategist, client representative, consultant to architects, vendor to their practices, and educator. I'm as likely to be invited to speak at an AIA function as I am to provide a critique at an art school.

We can speak of architects as visionaries, problem solvers, or place makers, but from what I've witnessed, the better analogy is to translators. Like the brilliant polyglots who stand behind an ambassador at the United Nations, the architect holds the unique honor and obligation of hearing things first, clarifying their meaning, and choosing the word that best captures each speaker's intent. Architects translate intention into a form with a degree of utility.

Like all acts of translation, what we say is never quite what's heard. Trust breaks down where communication fails, and while we can always revise a drawing, we can't always repair trust.

## THE EMPATHY GAP & THE INSTABILITY OF LANGUAGE

Like all humans placed in unfamiliar spaces and conversations, the clients who hire design professionals are often uncomfortable doing so. Approximately 2 percent of Americans who build their own homes employ an architect. Of those, most will do so only once in their lifetime. Commissioning an architect will likely be one of the most expensive decisions they ever make.

CEOs, executives, and boards selecting architects for commercial and institutional commissions are similarly unfamiliar with many of the processes involved in building projects. Only seasoned developers have iterative architectural experience.

Regardless of sector, once hired, architects often overlook the fact that the process itself can be overwhelming, disorienting, and intimidating—even for that rare client with knowledge or experience. It is scary to pay to build something from scratch with no clear sense of the outcome as you ink a contract.

Never mind fenestration, codes, physics; the problem is language itself. You don't have to be a French philosopher to understand that language is unstable. Even ordinary banter can be misunderstood as easily as professional jargon can.

# TRANSLATION AND HUMILITY

A design studio founder argues for architecture firms to create more meaningful, deeper-rooted relationships with clients.

Psychologists Adam Grant and Brené Brown offer practical applications: Brown points relentlessly to the need, value, and results that come from vulnerability in the workplace. She speaks not of being right but of getting it right. Grant writes: “Your ideas are not your identity—they're just hypotheses.”

Take that humility a step further and apply Klosterman's Razor: The best hypothesis is the one that reflexively accepts its potential wrongness to begin with. In a few years, with more study, we might find that every word of this essay was wrong or only partially correct. One should have “strong opinions, loosely held,” as the principle goes.

## A LANGUAGE OF TRUST

Architects: You must meet both clients and colleagues where they are—with kindness, empathy, and compassion. We must acknowledge that hiring architects is a rare occurrence. We must begin each meeting, each text, each call knowing that language is inherently unstable.

Translation is not just a soft skill, but a technical one. Here are a few examples of ways we've found how language itself can support a better design process for both us and our clients. And, yes, the specificity and word sequence matter.

### 1. “Let me make sure I heard you right.”

A tactical pause affirms the client's voice, removes assumption and mirrors Voss's notion of tactical empathy. It turns a moment of ambiguity into an opportunity for connection.

### 2. “This idea is a starting point, not a conclusion” or the more brash “You're encouraged to say no to our ideas.”

This embodies an iterative mindset, keeping the dialogue open and ongoing. A “no” advances the process faster than a “yes.” The confidence to encourage a critical dialogue builds more trust than the pursuit of rightness.

### 3. “Would you object if I ask a few clarifying questions to be sure we're solving the right problem?”

Clients tend to present symptoms rather than causes. Slow things down for active listening—it is fundamental to mutual understanding. Note the obligation of a negative word for a positive affirmation. The listener must say no to move the process forward.

### 4. After critique: “Thank you — your critique helps us get closer to the right outcome.”

Critiques sting. Signal gratitude for input. We're allies, not adversaries. Do this often enough, and critiques lose their bite.

Language is not an ornament to design; it is a core material.

## WHEN THINGS GO SIDEWAYS

I've worked with clients who approved visually stunning work that was catastrophically wrong for their needs because they didn't feel safe challenging their architect. I've seen projects spiral out of control because the architect took the client's comments literally rather than figuratively: “Make it Bigger” doesn't always mean make it bigger.

My studio was removed from a project to market high-rise Class A office space when our grand ideas strayed too far from the norms of selling architecture. We won a competitive pitch, interviewed the AOR, and worked hand in hand with the real estate agents. We brought in talented illustrators from Kansas City to create hand-drawn vignettes, hired MIR in Bergen, Norway to render dramatic views, wrote engaging copy, and proposed delivering the entire thing in oversized newsprint. All very cool.

And yet, we failed to ask the right questions about the decision-making process, level of risk they were willing to take, and who the actual decision makers were (surprise: the developer). We got caught up in the hubris of having won the pitch. We didn't just bungle the translation; we never even put our earpiece in.

Recently, as I struggled to find the voice of an architect for a brand and messaging effort, it occurred to me that changing the venue might aid the dialogue. On a whim, en route to the meeting, I invited the principal of the firm to join me not for lunch, coffee, or golf; I took him to an art museum.

What followed was an opportunity to watch and ask questions about what resonated with the architect and what didn't. As we wandered the galleries, we were able to capitalize on the power of the walk-and-talk, discarding the formality of a conference room. From one conversation, we found the seed of the messaging and brand revision he sought, pulling the first parts of their promise from the very words used to describe what was seen that afternoon.

I've come to learn over the years that when an idea is forced—and rejected—it just means we haven't asked the questions that reveal our shared language.

## TRANSLATE, DON'T TRANSMIT

In my experience, the aesthetics are rarely the problem. It's the delivery.

The design work is one thing. The job is how we talk about it—and to whom. Firing off emails, texts, and documents is transmission; the vital work is translation.

None of this is complicated, yet it is often hard.

Good clients come from good translators. Better architecture comes from better translators.

Let's begin.

Jett Butler is founder and chief creative officer of FÖDA, a multidisciplinary design studio based in Austin, Texas.



# POLISHED DIAMOND

In Los Angeles, Janet Marie Smith leads improvements to Dodger Stadium as a model for how to update historic ballparks.

Much of the talk going into this year's Major League Baseball (MLB) season was about the Dodgers, winners of the 2024 World Series, somehow getting even better. In January, the team signed a sought-after free agent pitcher from Japan, Roki Sasaki, a move that is expected to make the champions even more formidable. The rest of the baseball world treated the event like an existential plague on the national pastime. As an ESPN headline complained, "Are the Dodgers ruining baseball?"

Meanwhile, Sasaki, Shohei Ohtani (another Japanese superstar, who is now a three-time MLB MVP), and their new teammates were about to get a first look at the updated clubhouse—the centerpiece of an estimated \$100 million renovation—that the organization built in the offseason. Construction began literally the day after their championship parade in early November and continued right up to opening day in late March. The team's approach to continually upgrading Dodger Stadium, which opened in 1962 with a midcentury modern design by Emil Praeger of Praeger-Kavanagh-Waterbury, Engineers-Architects, could inspire an entirely different question: Are the Dodgers saving baseball stadium architecture?

This latter inquiry is less hyperbolic than it may seem. Dodger Stadium is now the third oldest Major League Baseball stadium, behind only Boston's Fenway Park

(1912) and Chicago's Wrigley Field (1914). As baseball has become a bigger and bigger business, the teams' billionaire owners have tended to tear down older buildings to build more heavily amenitized offerings with luxury suites, retractable roofs, and state-of-the-art clubhouse facilities for the players and team personnel.

It would be easy to imagine the Dodgers joining the trend to jettison their current home for a flashier new model along the lines of BIG and HNTB's design for Las Vegas's new MLB stadium, the future base of the Athletics franchise, which has earned comparisons to the Sydney Opera House and which BIG's Bjarke Ingels has dubbed a "spherical armadillo." (Online observers noted its white-painted roof ought to be changed, as the color will make it hard for outfielders to track fly balls.) It is supposed to be ready for the 2028 season, when Dodger Stadium will turn 66.

## BECOMING A (MIDCENTURY) MODERN CLASSIC

Architectural preservation is not something normally associated with professional sports, though in Fenway and Wrigley, baseball has two well-known examples.

(New York's famed Yankee Stadium and Madison Square Garden are on their third iterations, including extensive renovations and complete rebuilds.) Dodger Stadium, with its hexagonal scoreboard, sunset-colored seating, and open views to the San Gabriel Mountains, seems to be joining these more centrally urban counterparts.

Janet Marie Smith, executive vice president, Planning & Development, for the team, argues that it is time for Dodger Stadium to earn proper recognition. "It's interesting that if you look at books on architecture in Los Angeles through the 2000s, [they] don't even give Dodger Stadium a mention," Smith told AN.

Since earning a BArch and a master's in Urban Planning, Smith has dedicated her career to designing baseball stadiums: As the Orioles' vice president of Planning and Development, she drew on her training to deliver Camden Yards in Baltimore, which became the blueprint for the intimate, urbanized ballpark.

Smith has developed a theory about why the landmark in Chavez Ravine hasn't earned the status of local art deco standouts such as Griffith Observatory or the Wiltern Theater or even Frank Gehry's swooping Walt Disney Concert Hall. "Architects are such snobs," she said, with a laugh. "Like, how could a stadium be important?"

She added that when she went to work for the Dodgers after Guggenheim Baseball Management purchased the team in 2012, she consulted what she called "that pink book," Charles Moore's 1984 classic *The City Observed*, about Los Angeles's built environment, to see how he ranked her new home base. "It doesn't even mention Dodger Stadium," she noted.

By contrast, Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic Paul Goldberger, author of *Ballpark: Baseball in the American City* (2019), declared Dodger Stadium "wonderful" in a recent call with AN. "I think they've taken really good care of it and generally made it better, getting rid of a few things that didn't fit that well and continuing to build off the strengths of it."

Goldberger was referring to a flurry of activity that Smith undertook after joining the organization when veteran MLB executive Stan Kasten—with whom she worked transforming the 1996 Summer Olympics stadium into Turner Field for the Atlanta Braves—became CEO and convinced her to join the team.

Janet Marie Smith, an executive with the Dodgers, oversees a team of architects that continues to update Dodger Stadium.



## ADAPTING BASEBALL'S BIGGEST BALLPARK

With its capacity of 56,000, Dodger Stadium is an outlier in today's baseball-as-entertainment landscape and an unusual deviation from typology both for its time and for the current day. In the 1960s, as professional football rose in popularity, stadiums were frequently built to accommodate both sports and their respective fan bases. This involved changing the configuration of the fields and in many cases creating less-than-ideal sightlines for some spectators. Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers who infamously moved the team west, insisted that Dodger Stadium be built exclusively for his team.

Goldberger said that this is a main differentiator today. "It was a baseball-only ballpark, built at a time when most others were baseball-football combinations, which were almost always terrible and almost always to the detriment of baseball."

Over time, these hybrid stadiums became outdated, in part because they were too small for the National Football League games and too large for baseball fans, who began to prefer more intimate experiences. For instance, the New York Mets' Shea Stadium and the Seattle Mariners' Kingdome were both torn down in the 2000s and replaced

with comparably cozier environs: Each new field reduced seating capacity by over 10,000.

The size of Dodger Stadium and its siting are two of the factors that appealed to Smith when she took the job, she said. For the first set of upgrades under her watch, Smith worked with DAIQ Architects, Levin & Associates, landscape architects Studio-MLA, and Hunt Construction Group (now AECOM Hunt) to improve the fan experience and to make upgrades that would impress the players. “We did something like 35 new restrooms, four new team stores, big new plazas, retail, and food and beverage from foul pole to foul pole, around home plate,” she recalled. The lineup worked, and Smith brought back most of the same team to execute the latest round of renovations (PCL Construction replaced Hunt in 2014).

When the 2021 season—which welcomed fans back after the 2020 season was played in empty stadiums due to COVID-19—began, Smith and her architectural and design team showed off the most significant glow-up: a \$100 million project centered on a new center field plaza that included an entry point for fans and hospitality areas that leaned into the midcentury modern style. The architects also improved the circulation flow for fans entering and maneuvering around the stadium in search of restrooms and Dodger Dogs (which debuted the same year as the stadium). Smith said that the team hired AECOM to study the movements of fans from the parking lot through the entry and around the stadium, and its research informed the build-out of the plaza and led to other strategic changes.

## CONSTRUCTING A 21ST-CENTURY CLUBHOUSE

This past offseason, the extensive renovations involved excavation: The architects and engineers went underground to create a luxurious clubhouse experience for the home-team players. Officials, including Smith, are tight-lipped about the clubhouse upgrade, citing player privacy (hence why the team declined to offer interior photography for this article). In an interview with MLB radio, Kasten divulged that the clubhouse and common areas increased in size by 40 percent, adding an extra batting cage, meeting rooms, and chill-out spaces so that stars such as Mookie Betts could take naps. “We had to change the geography inside our clubhouse,” the CEO said.

Smith laughed about the evolution of the old-school idea of a locker room to today’s more thought-out clubhouses, adding that the new facility at Dodger Stadium was intentionally designed for what she called the “whole athlete.” “One of the things our chairman, Mark Walter, has said is that he wanted the players to feel that this was a place they could go year-round—that it wasn’t just a home during the season or a place to go pregame,” Smith said, mentioning Guggenheim’s CEO.

As for the new nap rooms and state-of-the-art batting cage outfitted with technology to help Ohtani and Betts maintain their Hall of Fame-worthy batting swings, Smith explained that the overhaul reflects a new approach to player development. She called the cage “sort of the heart of the clubhouse,” and noted that today’s generation of professional baseball players require places “for both physical and mental recovery.”

Here is where Dodger Stadium’s age worked against the team’s ambitions. Smith explained that the project resulted in the creation of a massive construction site—photos circulated online of the baseball diamond surrounded by cranes and mounds of dirt. “You might say, ‘Why did you need a landscape architect for the clubhouse?’” Smith said. “But whenever you do a project this large in Los Angeles, you must meet certain requirements for water retention and how you handle the LID [Low Impact Development] planters, for instance. And so, there are planters that have been added on the Dodger Stadium perimeter in a way that is very artful and yet meets the requirements.”

The tight timeline for the project resulted in at least one shortcut: While this year’s renovations added space for similar improvements to be made on the first base side of the stadium, which includes the visitors’ clubhouse, there are no plans yet for that project.

## BUILDING A LEGACY ON THE FIELD AND FOR THE STADIUM

Regardless of critical consensus about its architecture, baseball fans consider Dodger Stadium a temple. Sitting in the stands as twilight engulfs the mountains in the distance, creating a fiery glow, while watching a ballgame in the warm Southern California air is as revered an experience as peering out at Fenway’s Green Monster—the 37-foot-tall left field wall that is one of Boston’s great

landmarks—or walking through Chicago’s vibrant urban neighborhoods to go root for the Cubs amid Wrigley’s famed ivy-covered outfield walls.

Today’s Dodger Stadium is a remarkable result for a complex built amid a bicoastal series of upheavals. The organization that became the Dodgers started playing in Brooklyn in the late 19th century, and O’Malley became an all-time villain in the borough when he uprooted the team to L.A. in time for the 1958 season. (They played at the L.A. Coliseum for those first few years.) O’Malley wasn’t exactly a darling in his adopted hometown at first; the team was awarded the site of Dodger Stadium by the city after nearly a decade of displacing Mexican American residents for an affordable housing development that was never built, leading to heated protests.

Goldberger noted that this era has yielded two recommended books about the circumstances around the building of Dodger Stadium: *City of Dreams: Dodger Stadium and the Birth of Modern Los Angeles* (2017) by Jerald Podair and *Stealing Home: Los Angeles, the Dodgers, and the Lives Caught In Between* (2021) by Eric Nusbaum.

“If nothing else, Dodger Stadium has inspired a lot of really interesting writing and research, because it is a fascinating story,” Goldberger said, adding, “Within it is almost every issue about the 20th century city.”

Goldberger alluded to the lack of public transit, which affects the experience of attending a Dodger game; it’s clearly something Smith has grappled with, given her previous roles creating and renovating stadiums in walkable urban environments. Smith is now part of a championship organization whose historic stadium will continue to change. Her team of architects, designers, and artists have contributed to the Dodgers’ winning culture, on the field and in the built environment that surrounds it. **Richard Martin**

Opposite page, left: A center field plaza added in 2020 leaned into the stadium’s art deco origins.

Below: Now the third-oldest ballpark in Major League Baseball, Dodger Stadium continues to impress with its design details and siting in Chavez Ravine.



COURTESY LOS ANGELES DODGERS

# LIBRARY VOICES

Architects and acoustics experts use a multi-fidelity approach to respond to the changing needs of a crucial community gathering space.



On a Wednesday morning, I climbed up the iconic bright chartreuse escalators in the OMA-designed Seattle Central Library. Before I had reached the Living Room—the main public room on the third floor—I could hear the din of lively conversation, as though I were arriving at a restaurant in a hotel atrium. The library was hosting a “Community & Coffee” event. Weekly on Wednesdays, staff members provide free coffee and snacks to patrons. A crowd gathered beneath the faceted-glass skin of the building, talking at volumes that felt unnatural in a library.

Should libraries even be quiet? I sat down at a table and participated in the mix, striking up a conversation with a “social services” librarian. She explained that Community & Coffee stemmed from a need to encourage more conversation about the issues that matter to the library’s patrons. Some of those concerns revolve around access to basic needs like the internet and outlets to charge phones for those who lack amenities in their home. Quiet is also a public resource, although it might run counter to some of these lively activities that communities are demanding and that libraries are actively promoting. Libraries now must redefine what “quiet” even is. A library is a roof over a public square, and it might get loud in there.

I spoke to architects, consultants, library directors, and patrons to better understand how libraries are meeting an evolving public need and responding to a changing definition of quietude in the library. The conversations illuminated a clear point: A library must be designed to meet a wide band of needs. A teenager’s wants and needs will be different from a retiree’s, yet they will use similar rooms and resources. How does a single building take care of such a diverse range of users?

## HIGH FIDELITY VERSUS LOW FIDELITY

There is an audio analogy that can help us unpack this question. Consider high fidelity versus low fidelity in terms of public architecture. Hi-fi architecture is a concert hall, calibrated to provide ideal listening characteristics for a variety of music types. The experience of music is tuned through a combination of room geometry, material finishes, and in some cases, technology, which alters room characteristics via precise loudspeaker projection.

On the other end of the spectrum are lo-fi environments like subway stations. If acoustics are considered, it is for the purpose of absorbing unwanted sound. Public address systems are notoriously lacking in clarity in places like subway stations because of large spatial areas and hard surfaces. To feel comfortable in these environments, we are left to find solutions that involve cutting ourselves off from the community around us: namely, earbuds.

A library is a third type that I will call a multiple-fidelity environment, or “multi-fi” architecture. Some of the experiences need to be highly tailored to specific groups, like neurodivergent people. “Sensory rooms” are now devised to permit fine control of lighting along with adaptable furniture, soft materials, and noise-canceling headphones. Machines like braille readers permit blind patrons to read books and surf the internet. The fidelity for such groups is comparatively quite high thanks to the resources of some modern libraries.

A multi-fi environment can house a lot of activity where it is OK to be loud. The buzz of a community hub helps to generate more connections among library patrons and staff. Overheard conversations can lead to meeting new people or joining a community group or gaining access to public resources like housing applications or children’s story time hours. We go to a library to open ourselves up to these opportunities. Multi-fi architecture is a wrapper for a kind of environment that provides controlled acoustic environments but is also open and diffusive. Everyone needs to find a seat where they feel comfortable, and it is the architect team that must provide those opportunities.

## FINE-TUNING ACOUSTICS FOR TODAY’S LIBRARY NEEDS

Dave Otte, a principal at Portland, Oregon-based Holst Architecture, applied his learnings to the East County Library in Gresham, now under construction. During



the design process, he toured a library in Austin that had a teen room, but no teens were using it. It turns out they were all tucked into window alcoves in the main space that were not programmed for anyone in particular. “Teens operate in a world where they don’t feel like they belong. They don’t want to use the one-size-fits-all room that was designated for them,” Otte told AN. They needed a more nuanced arrangement of seating options and acoustic niches that would permit them to find where



they can fit in. So Otte has been working in detail on the East County Library's teen room, providing differently furnished nooks in the space, with a high attention to acoustic diversity.

The lo-fi aspect of a large community gathering space is important to a library experience, but it cannot be left to chance or circumstance. Brandon Cudequest of Chicago-based Threshold Acoustics recently worked on the Cleveland Public Library Martin L. King, Jr. Campus. Designed by J. Kurtz Architects and SO – IL and opened to the public in January 2025, the library features a concrete folding-plate structure that deflects and diffuses sound. The geometry adds to the acoustical liveliness of the space without reinforcing the standing waves, which would otherwise make a library unbearably loud.

The acoustics of libraries work best when aligned with the structural design. The Seattle Central Library is an example of a large volume that isn't oppressively reverberant, Cudequest pointed out. The irregular geometry together with the deep mullions of the diagrid glass skin help to scatter sound. "You can't value engineer – out the acoustics, because it is integral to the building," Cudequest said. Especially as we get into the age of mass timber, where architects want to see the wood exposed, we can do well to build a better understanding of how to diffuse sound without necessarily having to absorb it. Allowing for a library to be loud is also a cultural construct that can be reinforced by architecture. Another Portland architect, Jeanie Lai with Bora Architecture & Interiors, recently completed the Holgate Library, a mass timber-framed building located in one of the most racially diverse neighborhoods in the city. "The community wanted to feel like the library was a place where they could meet friends, have conversations, and share food—without being shushed or disturbing others," Lai said. In response, Holgate's design offers a variety of spaces, beginning with a welcoming lobby that feels more like a hotel than a traditional library. The architects took care to provide isolated sound spaces as well. Lai echoed a point made by Otte that library visitors like to occupy edge spaces, and she used furniture to help carve out quiet niches. The patrons have said that they "could not believe this place was for them," she said. That is the success of multi-fi architecture.

Providing quiet for a diverse group requires creativity on the part of library directors. In Camas, Washington, library staff created the "Silent Book Club" where patrons could come into the building after hours and sit and read in absolute quiet, with an option to stay later and talk or just be there for the rarified experience of a nearly silent library. The Camas Library also has a pollinator garden in its courtyard, providing a respite from city sounds and the buzz of bees to read by. Multi-fi architecture is a function related to time as well as space, and it is not an architectural solution alone.

Portland's Multnomah County bond measure, a \$387 million project approved by voters in 2020 to construct new libraries and update many others across the Portland area, is instrumental in the introduction of multi-fi architecture into these spaces. Many of the buildings, such as Holst's East County Library, have already broken ground, and others are now open, including Bora's Holgate branch. According to Library Capital Bond deputy director Katie O'Dell, "Such a large bond measure provides the resources to make a system-wide exploration into what makes a library more equitable."

Part of that exploration pushed the library's IT department to evolve from "just finding what is cheap and good [in library technology to] what is most inclusive and equitable," Multnomah County IT program manager Jacob



COURTESY HOLST ARCHITECTURE



COURTESY HOLST ARCHITECTURE

Farkas said. The department built prototypes of displays and had user groups test them out, helping to shape the final designs. The IT group has planned for a wi-fi-based assistive-listening system in the auditorium at the East County Library, which will enable visitors with a hearing aid or implant to receive a clear version of a spoken word or musical performance broadcast. Multiple-fidelity architecture is inclusive architecture.

Architectural experiences centered intensively on a visual experience can be radically noninclusive. After the Community & Coffee event, I found myself on the fourth floor of Seattle Central Library, up a set of stairs painted head to toe in "yummy lipstick red," in the words of the late architecture critic Herbert Muschamp. The shiny coating follows the stairs up to cover the walls, floors, ceilings, and doors. While some Seattleites said they adore that floor of the library because it provides a respite from the reflective glass and cavernous spaces, I learned from a librarian who assists with accessibility that some patrons find they cannot use the spaces at all. A combination of highly reflective surfaces, glaring lights, curved walls, and nearly monochromatic paint creates a challenging space

for them to navigate. Unfortunately for those patrons who have a hard time finding their way through this level, all of the private community meeting rooms that comprise any library's most in-demand resources are located there.

Space is, in fact, what architects and library directors must maximize in a library, and it is a space that has many overlapping user groups. The recently retired library director from Portland, Vailey Oehlke, said, "Libraries started because what they had was precious and rare, and only the privileged few could access it." Books were locked in cages, and scholars would sometimes view items chained to a reading desk. Today, Oehlke said, "what has become precious is space; space that is free, open, and available." The fidelity of that space to the patrons of the library and the redefinition of *quiet* is an ongoing effort that continues to yield exciting design work in this most cherished of building typologies.

**Nicolas Sowers is a Seattle-based architect and founder of Timbre Architecture & Sound, who collaborates with architects and designers to imagine the future sound of the built environment.**



COURTESY SO – IL



LARA SWIMMER/ESTO

**Opposite, clockwise from left:** At the Seattle Central Library, irregular geometry with the deep mullions of the diagrid glass skin helps scatter sound; Bora Architecture & Interiors recently completed Holgate Library in Portland, Oregon, with a children's play area that shows off the mass timber frame; Holgate Library includes a diversity of spaces to serve different needs.

**Far left:** J. Kurtz Architects and SO – IL designed the recently opened Cleveland Public Library Martin L. King, Jr. Campus, with geometrical features that add acoustical liveliness while dampening sound.

**Top and above:** Holst Architecture principal Dave Otte studied how teenagers used specially designed spaces at a library in Austin, applying his learnings to the design of East County Library in Gresham, Oregon, which will include acoustic niches; East County's design aims to blend into its Pacific Northwest landscape.

**Left:** The "yummy lipstick red" staircase, as architecture critic Herbert Muschamp described it, is part of an area at Seattle Central Library that presents challenges to patrons with accessibility needs.

# FAMILY BUSINESS

Three generations of architects at Robert P. Madison International reflect on the history and current state of their shared company.



COURTESY RPMI

Like a household, architecture firms can benefit from having multiple generations under one roof. Elders establish values and identity, midcareer leaders possess enough experience to weigh both traditional and new ideas, and young professionals provide a steady flow of fresh insights.

Award-winning 70-year-old firm Robert P. Madison International (RPMI) is an excellent example that shows that a generational mix works. Already the story of its founder Robert Madison is celebrated in a 288-page memoir (*Designing Victory*) and a documentary (*Deeds Not Words: Conversations with Robert P. Madison*). Both record how he defied the odds of surviving active duty during World War II only to face another battle at home—to exercise his right to earn an architecture degree.

But an equally powerful story is how Madison intentionally cultivated a family-led practice with each generation, first with his engineer brothers and later with his daughter, nephew, and in-laws. If working with family began as a maneuver to overcome segregation, Madison turned it into an elegant tool for growth and succession planning decades after. He encouraged his and his siblings' children to take an interest in architecture and lobbied them to return to RPMI for internships and promotions.

That paid off. In 2016, Sandra Madison, Robert's niece by marriage, became the firm's CEO, chairperson, and a majority owner, along with co-owners R. Kevin Madison, the firm's president (Sandra's husband and Robert's nephew), and Robert Klann. Sandra Madison's role marks the firm as Ohio's largest Black-female-owned architecture firm, and RPMI's women-led environment includes Robert's daughter Jeanne Madison, the firm's business manager, and Sandra and Kevin's daughter Maya Madison, a project manager.

Retired but still providing his successors with input, Robert, 101 years old, joined his family on a recent video call with *AN* to reminisce about his journey, marvel at the firm's new women-led chapter, and comment on the future of African American architects.

**Kelly Beamon (KB)** Have you been approached by anyone to acquire the firm? Or was Robert?

**Sandra Madison (SM)** We have been approached, and I just dismiss it. In recent years, since we've been involved, we don't even answer the call, because we just know the answer is no.

**KB** Why has that been the best choice for you?

**Kevin Madison (KM)** A lot of times when firms acquire smaller firms, the purchased entity kind of loses its identity. They just become additional labor, and sometimes they are acquired for certain contracts. It wasn't in our interest, because we have a tradition going that we want to maintain for as long as we can.

**SM** If we were ever acquired, there wouldn't be a legacy. That's what I've seen with a lot of firms that have been acquired. We've been watching these mergers, and usually one company is swallowed up and forgotten about. After a while, we don't hear about them. That's not our model; our model is to preserve our family legacy.

**Maya Madison (MM)** I think the importance of keeping the office in the family and keeping it African American-led is that our values will remain rooted within the company. It's important to be a firm that works with marginalized communities, so if we're able to keep African American leadership and family leadership that continues to move forward across generations, then that's one of the most important things for us as architects.

**KB** Robert, what do you think?

**Robert Madison (RM)** When I started practicing architecture, my father had been a practicing engineer for years. And after I came of age and had worked for other firms to get some experience, I decided to open Robert B. Madison International for architects as a Black architect. We did that because it was not easy to get a job at any other place. There were young Black people studying architecture who had no place to go. We provided an employment opportunity for young people who wanted to be architects and who were Black or a minority.

My father was a civil engineer. He was born in 1899, so when I came along, there were no Black architectural firms, certainly not in Ohio. But I studied architecture because my father was an engineer who had his own business. So when I became an architect, my father eventually joined me, as did my brother. Back in those days, there were not many Black architects anywhere; there were three [that I knew of] who preceded me in the U.S. One was in New York; one was in Washington, D.C.; and the other one was in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Starting an architecture firm was unique, and the initial impetus came when nobody would hire me, even though I had a degree from Harvard University.

**Jeanne Madison (JM)** Robert was teaching architecture at Howard, and he quit to start the firm so that young Black men who were being educated as architects would have a place to work.

My mother was a teacher, so she provided a base income as my father got started. Robert did a lot of work with the churches in the early days—porches and basements, as I recall.

Robert's first big break, if I'm not mistaken, came when Carl Stokes became the first Black man elected as the mayor of a major city when he won election in Cleveland in 1967. He hired Robert's firm to build a school.

**KB** I can imagine that Robert and Carl Stokes had experiences in common, and we know Stokes participated in Cleveland's anti-segregation demonstrations in the years leading up to his run for mayor.

**JM** Yes. Robert went to protest against school segregation, including when Reverend Bruce Klunder was killed by a bulldozer. That was the beginning of his activism.

**KB** Robert, you designed a U.S. embassy for Dakar, Senegal. What was your network like when you received the commission? How were you able to submit a proposal for that project?

**RM** I was the first Black person to be registered as an architect in the state of Ohio. I told people, "I'm somebody, I went to Harvard University." That's when I began to get work from people who thought I was qualified. [All] of my classmates from Harvard were white. Robert A. Little, a direct descendant of Paul Revere, invited me to join the AIA here in Ohio.

**JM** To answer the question, when Robert was at Harvard, he applied for and received a Fulbright Fellowship, so he attended L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He spoke French, and as you know, they speak French in Senegal. He received the inquiry when Lyndon Johnson was president, and they needed a Black firm to go to Africa because the white folks didn't want to go over there. They found Dad through a series of twists and turns.

When I was a girl, I worked in the office, and we had to get a French typewriter to translate the specifications into French, which we did. I remember we used to get a call from France like every night for three minutes on a transatlantic undersea cable. This was during the time when people were threatening to bomb our house, because we had just moved into an area that was all white.

**KB** Few architects work in companies where several generations of owners are present. What's that like? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

**KM** Robert is my uncle, and he was the first one to encourage me to attend Howard University and study architecture. I would work in his office and learn the trade, so I had an advantage. But at Howard, everyone said, "Oh, you're Robert Madison's nephew, so we're going to expect much more than the average student from you," which put the pressure on me to excel. I won a few awards at Howard during my time just to meet the standard that Robert set forth in my blood.

**SM** I didn't go to Howard, but I met Kevin, my husband, when we were both working at Sulton Campbell Architects in Baltimore (now Sulton Campbell Britt & Associates).

**KM** When we were living in Baltimore, Robert would subtly hint that they could use some more architects in Cleveland. But eventually, he said, "Kevin, get your ass down here to Cleveland." That was 1989.

**SM** Robert had some great projects then. At that time, we had a son who was 3, so we made the choice to move before he started school.

When we joined, Robert had 150 people, including engineers, in multiple office locations. Today, we have 20 people: architects, designers, marketing, and administrative personnel.

In terms of our reception in the firm, I remember getting some cold shoulders. Some of it was verbal. I remember greeting one person to say I looked forward to working together, and he said, "You're on your own," and left. But later, we became good friends. I didn't let it bother me. I'm a woman, I've dealt with all kinds of things, and this was just one more.

**JM** They were looking for us to either behave like spoiled brats or to get in there and be excellent. At the time, Sandra was working on job sites where she was dealing face-to-face with contractors; that is one of the last bastions of masculinity.

**SM** People tried to bully me when I knew we were right, especially when they challenged our construction documents. A lot of times, I had to stand up for our work. Then I would go back and write letters to let them know that I'm not going to back down just because I'm a woman.

**JM** My father, Robert, tested us every step of the way. I would give him a detailed report, maybe seven or eight pages, and he found the one sentence in that report where I had two spaces between words instead of one space. That taught us how to check and double-check our information. Because he was a Black architect, Robert felt he had to be right all the time. He used to say, "Architecture is a field where if you're wrong, people die." Of course, there are contracts, addendums, and change orders, but the point was if you are someone that people don't expect anything of, you must be right, you must be excellent, you must have your credentials, and you must practice at the highest level at all times.

**KB** I wanted to ask about HBCUs and their turn away from hiring Black-owned firms when they need buildings. What does that mean for the future of African Americans in architecture if those schools are not seeking out firms that share the legacy?

**MM** I don't know the reasoning behind why architecture firms aren't getting these contracts, but I also don't necessarily think that just because they aren't African American-owned firms that African American architects aren't working on these projects.

It is critical that people are on the project who can speak to the clients they're designing for. HBCUs, like any other institution, are looking for firms that have experience. So with the pool of African American firms already being small, then maybe their experience varies? But I don't necessarily think that that means that there are no Black architects involved in the projects.

The important thing is that these colleges get what they need from the designers and that the designers are listening to the Black faculty and students.

**KM** In our office, we've noticed that commissions from colleges and universities are becoming more competitive. Even in today's society, it seems that these major universities always want the "starchitect." Even Case Western University has a building designed by Frank Gehry. Robert is an alumnus of the school and would have done a better job! I believe a lot of these universities look for architects to make a statement, and unfortunately, there are not enough architecture firms owned by African Americans who have risen to that starchitect level.

**SM** It is also based on portfolio, and larger firms are often the ones who can showcase exactly the kinds of projects they're looking for, which makes it harder for smaller firms like ours. There's also the time it takes to put together a proposal, and if the project is across the country, it will take time to go back and forth, which places us in competition with firms that have more resources to land the work.

**MM** Some of the big firms do team up with smaller offices led by Black architects, so they may not get the headline, but they are involved in the project, maybe as the architect of record or even a consultant.

**KB** Is diversity important when you hire subcontractors?

**SM** It's important, especially with our engineers. I know there are some larger companies that work with other minority companies as well. If it's a smaller project, I always call Tom Roberts's company, R Engineering Team, because I know we work together well.

Right now we are working on a development project with a Black developer, architect, engineer, and lawyer. We're trying to keep it all Black. We want to say, "This is a Black-led project." We try to do this, especially with a Black owner, but it doesn't always happen that way.

**KM** Locally, there aren't many African American-owned engineering firms that I know about. We work with Roberts for smaller projects, but choices are limited for larger commissions that can handle all the MEP and technology needs we require.

**KB** Maya, I wanted to ask about your experience working in the company. What has that been like for you?

**MM** Growing up, it didn't occur to me how rare it was to have architects in your family or to have both parents, especially as a minority. I went into the world assuming that this is a profession that everyone is aware of. It didn't really hit me until a lot of peers commented on the legacy of architects in my family. I also didn't realize until I went to school that there aren't that many Black architects. I was surprised by that realization. In terms of working for my family, one of my mentors told me that the biggest benefit is having some of the toughest feedback come from people who care about your growth and success. There's trust, and I know that every challenge is meant to push me forward.

**KB** Why are architects important?

**RM** Well, the value of architecture depends on the quality of the architect. Education and experience matter in trying to arrive at the highest level of professional performance. How many architects are really reaching for that by demonstrating what they could do? That's my challenge.

When I was coming along after graduate school, our concern was to create buildings and spaces that would benefit mankind. No matter how large or small.

**MM** I feel like the core value for architects is that human experience is most important when designing the built environment. Architects have to know a little bit about everything to design buildings. We have to be well rounded, not just about how a roof goes together but also the nuance of how humans interact with space. That broad breadth of knowledge means we can make the world a better place and ensures that people benefit from the buildings and streets they inhabit. I think that's why architects are always going to be relevant, because we're constantly thinking about humans and our experience as we navigate the world.

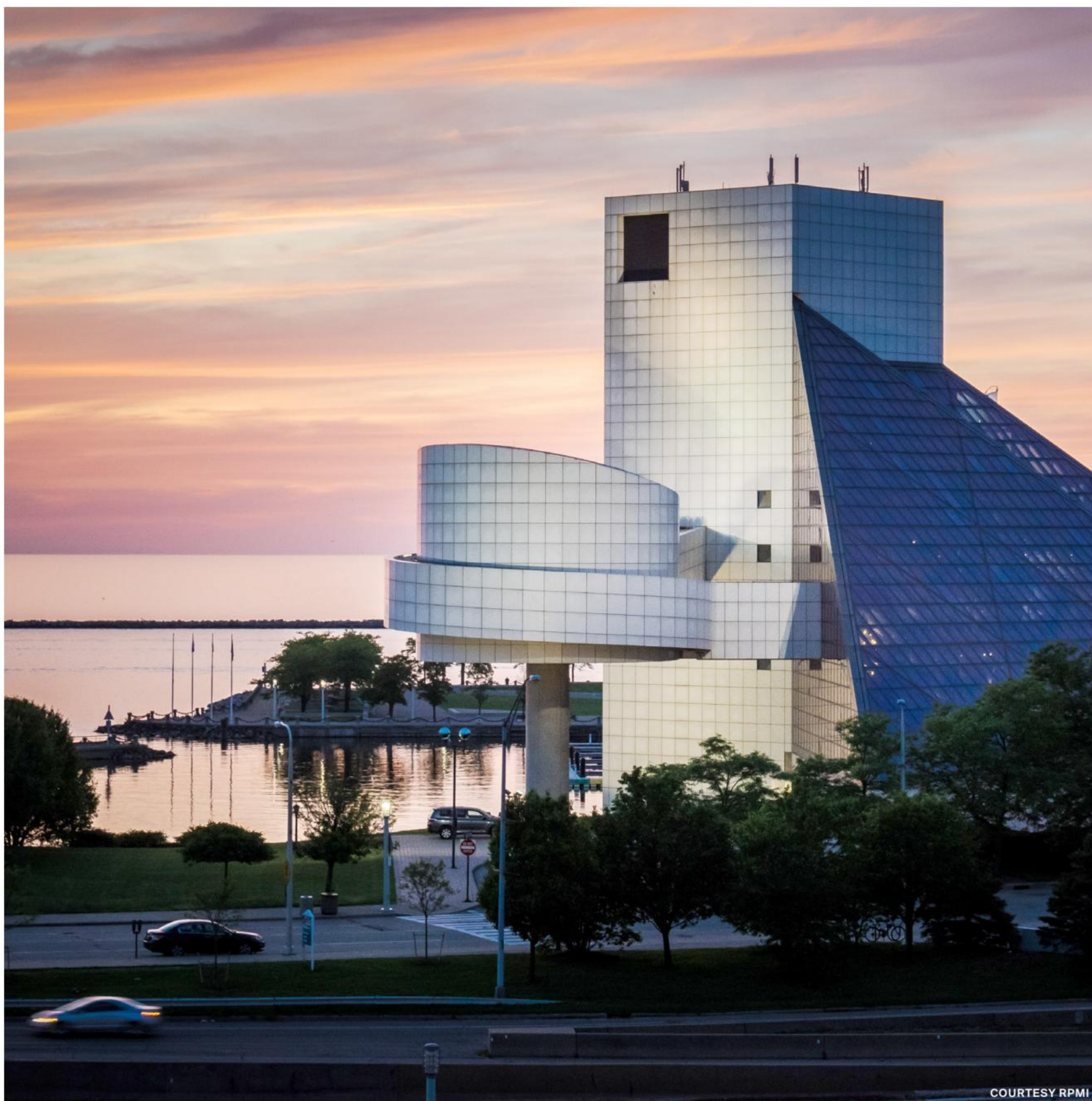
**SM** We always need to remind people of what we do. We draw pretty pictures, but there's a lot more thought that goes into it. There's psychology, sociology, spatial planning, and speaking with users. There's so much that goes into the reasoning for why a building is designed in a certain way. AI can't do this.

**KM** I talk with kids in elementary schools sometimes about the profession. They ask me, "What is architecture?" And I tell them, "From the day you're born, when you open your eyes, you are visualizing architecture." I try to tell them that the whole world is architecture; all you have to do is open your eyes. That's why we need good architects, to make sure that the built environment is always improving and providing plenty of space for society at large. Just open your eyes. Your bedroom is architecture.

**SM** This is relevant even if you can't see. We had a client, Gordon Gund, who was blind. We were working on the Gund Arena, where the Cleveland Cavaliers play. He was able to feel the space through the model to see how to get from point A to point B. He is a remarkable man. We'd explain the drawings and models, and he would also read using braille and understand the project through feeling the model. It was enlightening to learn how we could work with a client who couldn't see the drawings.

**JM** Those blueprints are still in the stadium, which is now Rocket Arena. I recently went to a game, and my rep gave us floor seats behind the Celtics. Walking down there, we were in a narrow hall. Everybody else was excited, but I was looking to the left and saying, "Those are our drawings!" The other people were like, "What's wrong with you?" And I was like, "You just don't know."

**Kelly Beamon is a freelance journalist specializing in architecture and design and sustainable building materials. She has held senior editorial roles at *Metropolis*, *Architectural Record*, and *This Old House*, but has slipped the bonds of the corporate office. She now writes from her home in central New Jersey.**



Opposite: From left: Sandra Madison, Robert Madison, and R. Kevin Madison at the signing of the contract to transfer ownership in 2016.

Left: The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; RPMI was the associate architect working with I. M. Pei of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners.

**Architecture and Videogames: Intersecting Worlds** is a new book edited by Vincent Hui, Ryan Scavnicky, and Tatiana Estrina and published by Routledge. The book features contributions from architects and educators including Viola Ago, Galo Canizares, Graham Harman, Damjan Jovanovic, Kristen Mimms Scavnicky, Jose Sanchez, and Leah Wulfman, and its title unites architecture's reliance on digital technology with the discipline of game design. The book "begins a study of virtual space produced and nurtured by videogames through an architectural lens," its editors write in a preface. Individual subjects are pulled from both academic research and architectural practice. In the text below, excerpted from a chapter in the book, AN contributor Ryan Scavnicky connects virtual architecture to paper architecture and articulates why shared digital spaces are relevant for architects today.

The space of a videogame is the space of architectural thinking. After all, so many buildings are first conceptualized and designed as a 3D digital model, so it makes sense that examining videogames as architectural works requires only minor shifts in the application of core architectural ideas. This creates a new extended boundary of architecture and the public imagination and offers a glimpse into a future of spatial design where virtual and physical spaces merge, opening doors to new domesticities and other potential worlds at the intersection of these two dynamic fields.

Understanding the role that architecture plays within game environments must include consideration of societal desires of play in order to understand the potential spatial and cultural effects of that game. In any particular narrative, the buildings inside of an environment can be understood as characters just like any other. This character is sometimes helpful like *Howl's Moving Castle*, mysterious like the Inverted Castle in *Castlevania*, or straightforwardly evil like *Bowser's Castle*. As an example, my studio Learning from Los Santos looked at the Gerudo Ice House from *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* and diagrammed it through Jay Appleton's prospect and refuge theory, as well as points of spatial conflict between player and monster or NPC (nonplayer character). We then reimagined the building from virtual space to "real" space as a gas station, which revealed extreme similarities between game and real architecture, and the space of player versus monster with player versus worker.

As videogames become more immersive and culturally mainstream, they begin to shift from mere 3D environments to entire ecosystems. Meaning the space of a game is not limited to the virtual model in which the players interact and the buildings they interact with, but the physical and social containers surrounding the leisure time and space of play. These containers are as diverse as a living room couch in a single apartment for a gamer playing with friends spread across the world, a busy traveler playing a solo handheld game while half listening for the call to board their next flight, and a chat room with thousands

of viewers on a Twitch stream. Each of these scenarios are spatial containers that provide two layers of oscillating information. The creation of virtual architecture rests upon understanding these mixed mechanics layered with social interactions that are structured, staged, and organized into an intentional spatial experience.

Any simulated world exists in relation to the known world. In architecture, models of possible worlds are used as a way to make a statement about the world today and how it should change. Historically referred to as "paper architecture," buildings can be more influential as unbuilt plans than they are as a finished product, hence the design stays "on paper." Canonical figures like Daniel Burnham and Frank Lloyd Wright often pointed out the crucial way architecture can simulate a new reality for people and convince them that it was indeed possible. Still today there is a strong interest to pursue this kind of thinking in architecture, what Aaron Betsky calls "anarchitecture" in his latest tome, *The Monster Leviathan* (2024). Ultimately, to be effective, paper architecture must stir the public imagination in such a way as to spark real change.

## PAPER VISIONS

"Only through the structure of the image, and in no other way, can the reign of necessity merge with the reign of freedom." —Manfredo Tafuri, *Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology*

Visionary architecture is an intentional type of paper architecture that concedes its impossibility in order to interrogate various conditions of the world. Perhaps none have worked so closely with this as a type than Lebbeus Woods. He famously kept a blog where he playfully and directly interacted with virtual commenters. In a post titled simply "Visionary Architecture" from December 11, 2008, Woods identified three essential attributes. First: The projects propose new principles by which to design for the urban conditions they address. Second: The designs are total in scope. Third: The designs invent new types of buildings. Woods gives two examples: Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin and Steven Holl's Spatial Retaining Bars. Examining these canonical examples alongside outsider architectures through this lens will allow us to speculate a new set of Woods's conditions to satisfy.

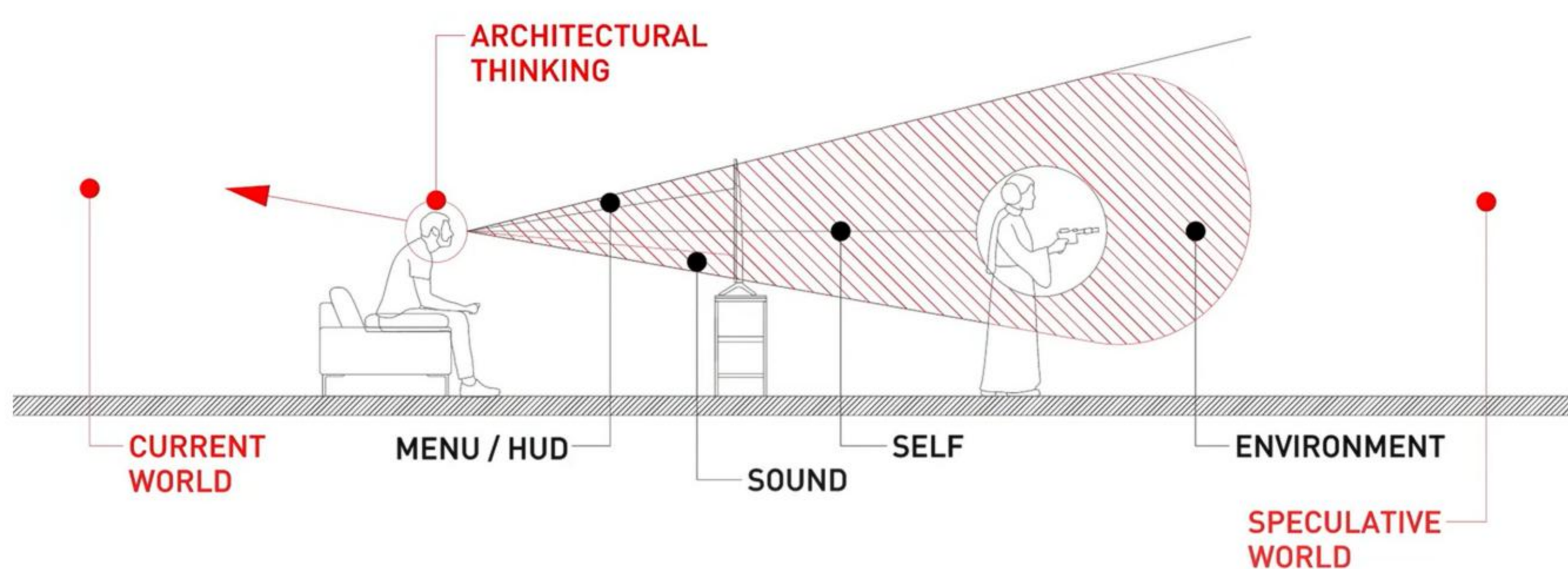
In 1925, Paris was suffering from overcrowding and poor housing conditions while steel construction was allowing most major cities to build vertically. In response, Le Corbusier designed a series of buildings that would house one million people right in the city center. He proposed demolishing a large section of buildings extending along the Rive Droite directly at Île-de-la-Cité, enough room to clear space for an airport runway. The proposal was ultimately rejected, but the ideas it instigated changed the profession forever. Some have turned out to be good ideas, like housing many people in spacious and equitable living conditions, like Co-Op City by architect Herman Jessor, which recently turned 50 years old. Some have turned out rotten, like the clearing of large quantities of a historic core. One particularly devastating example is the west end of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood in Cincinnati that was cleared to create the Interstate 75 freeway, displacing a majority Black population.

In 1989, the City of Phoenix, Arizona, searched for answers in planning the growing metropolis and its seemingly endless encroachment into the desert. Single-family home zoning was putting incredible stress on the highway system, causing the city to spread out of control. Steven Holl proposed Spatial Retaining Bars, a giant development of horizontal towers to form an implied edge between the city and desert. This idea was not only to mark the edge, but to contain the developments and potentially organize the chaos. What would've been a massive undertaking at the time, we may consider today to have been well worth the effort. The city has now spread for hours in every direction, causing extreme reliance on automobile infrastructure that stresses the city to the limit. While these two examples from Woods exist squarely within the discipline of architecture, we next consider an outsider example, while staying in the architecture field.

In late 2021, Dennis McFadden of the architecture review board of UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) tendered a resignation letter just as a new building proposal for the school was made public. The proposal, designed by then 99-year-old billionaire Charlie Munger of Berkshire Hathaway, made headlines because a majority of the building's 4,536 beds were without a window to the outside. This controversial decision was described as one made out of necessity: UCSB is in desperate need of housing. Yet, this housing need could be filled [by those of] other universities around the world whose dorms have

# PAPER VISIONS: THEORIZING VIRTUAL ARCHITECTURE

An excerpt from *Architecture and Videogames: Intersecting Worlds* makes the case why architects should take the design of shared digital spaces seriously.



windows, so the windowless rooms understandably drew a lot of public scrutiny. The media outcry earned the project the nickname “Dormzilla,” prompting the university to back off, demonstrating the societal values that effective paper architecture can tease out. The vision, it seems, was out of sync with the limits of the living conditions expected by the masses and therefore pressured society to organize around its defeat. Lastly, we look for an example entirely outside of the field of architecture that created a massive change to civic space.

In the summer of 2016, Americans couldn’t get enough of the mixed-reality mobile game Pokémon Go, which revitalized the brand in the hearts of millions who grew up with the franchise but found themselves decades removed from their old GameBoy. The game works by building a digital twin of your mobile device map, and by walking around you encounter Pokémon, which you try to capture using mixed-reality pass-through via your camera. Success in the game involves hatching and leveling up your Pokémon by actively walking around with them, which uses the phone’s step tracker. So, one must do a lot of traipsing about and exploring your neighborhood, looking for landmarks called “PokéStops” for you to get items, trade, and replenish.

These PokéStops became overnight sensations, attracting throngs of people to municipal buildings, libraries, and parks in large numbers. The number of Pokémon Go players newly introduced to public life stimulated civic spaces in a way that was so extraordinary that in July of 2016, Pokémon Go players stumbled upon two dead bodies a week while venturing into off-the-beaten-path locations. The game is highly interactive between players who are physically proximate, with items like a “lure,” which would attract rarer and more frequent Pokémon to all players in the vicinity. It takes hours of work to earn just a single 20-minute lure, or one can buy them for a fee. But in one important instance, my local dive bar in downtown Los Angeles was advertising the placing of a “lure” on the three different PokéStops within range of [its] patio during a happy hour complete with drink specials. Meanwhile, empty bars without PokéStops were desperately trying to figure out how to add them.

Pokémon Go is a spectacular example of gaming’s ability to transform the built environment at a large scale by creating a mirror virtual architectural world. This leads into a future of visionary architecture existing in the deep societies, new economies, and interactive mechanics of future games. Just as we can’t imagine a videogame made by only a single person, we can no longer theorize architecture by a single author. Both architecture and videogames should be theorized as coming from multitudes of authors across experiences, backgrounds, and specialties. Thus, we can speculate an update to the three points suggested by Woods for a new form of virtual visionary architecture. First, the projects propose new principles by which people interact and behave. Second, the designs are total in scope. Third, the designs invent new types of spaces.

## PIXELS AND POETRY

[Academic architecture] is “a dismal science, which in every instance demands of our ideas that they finalize themselves as solutions... close themselves in, prove themselves, eradicating the mystical, the unspeakable, eradicating every last trace of poetic ambiguity...”

— John May, “Under Present Conditions Our Dullness Will Intensify”

To make space for these kinds of activities, virtual space must be imbued with meaningful cultural value. Game designers already know how to make a space meaningful to players. The tactics and strategies employed (the passing of time, player and community participation, etc.) mirror historical architecture theories attempting to create the same type of effect. When a player has agency to play a game in a way that is enjoyable for them, the play creates meaning because the game space itself has an embedded history. The game holds within it the marks and changes made by the player. And even greater is the meaning created by participatory and community cultures inside of games. The sandbox style game, for example, is the ultimate game type to foster meaning and engagement with an environment.

In the *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, John Ruskin theorized architecture and its relationship to craft (1849). Lamp Five, the lamp of life, argues that buildings should be evidently made by human hands so that the joy and history

of the craftsperson or laborer is seen and enjoyed. At first glance, this seems easily related to the environment of a game changing as the player interacts with it. However, there is an important difference to bear in mind with the lamp of life in relation to labor. The craftsperson referred to by Ruskin is a builder, not the homeowner. We can better relate this theory with the signature world-building details and easter eggs of contemporary production. In an era so marred by reports of the poor working conditions of videogame studios, these touches bring a player in important close relation to a new type of craft. Thus, we could speculate a future architecture wherein the labor of the multiple workers or craftspeople is given agency enough to leave a signature on the world built for a player to inhabit.

## Both architecture and videogames should be theorized as coming from multitudes of authors.

When it comes to domestic space in particular, Ruskin believed that “restoration, so called, is the worst manner of Destruction.” Meaning that the history of a building and its age is preservation itself. The markings and scars of inhabitation are the very soul of the work of architecture. To see one’s own effect on the environment is to truly live inside of it. In the same way that games mark the passage of time and progress of the player by changing the environment, so does a house grow with a family. What’s important here is that there is little difference between the marks you’ve made on the wall of your childhood home and the weapons you’ve hung to display in the house you can purchase in *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*—both are a particular shared cultural experience made through meaningful insertions on space.

Game mechanics like the total loss of an item when it wears out or the glass shattering permanently on the car I shoot up in *Grand Theft Auto* properly reflect this desirable architectural agency. Other successful examples include when franchises like *Halo* remastered the infamous Blood Gulch multiplayer map, or the smashing success that *Fortnite* had when rereleasing its original maps.

These sentiments are felt through contemporary meme culture. My personal favorite: “You’ve just ordered Pizza Hut and a 2L Mountain Dew. You’ve loaded up *Diablo* on your PC. No school tomorrow. Your parents don’t care if you stay up all night long. A perfect Summer night. You are 39 years old. The year is 2023.” This popular meme and others like it showcase a contemporary longing that equates a particular virtual space with the comfort of domestic leisure.

According to the website *Fortnite.gg*, the game typically has around 400,000 active players at any given time, but during the release of classic original maps on Thursday, November 2, 2023, it peaked around 3.1 million active players. Imagine Cleveland, Ohio, swelling from 390,000 people to hosting Rod Stewart’s free 1994 show at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, which had an audience of approximately 3.5 million. This type of swelling is among the largest gatherings of people in human history and will only grow in scale and proportion next to the obvious limitations of the purely physical world.

## IT’S ARCHITECTURE WITH OR WITHOUT ARCHITECTS

The discipline of architecture has always grappled with the extraordinary expanse of buildings and spaces in the world and the difficulty surrounding the choice of which few to denote as canonical examples. In 1964, Bernard Rudofsky organized an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City called *Architecture Without Architects*, in which the canon of architecture history itself was challenged. Presenting what is now broadly known as vernacular architecture, Rudofsky interrogates the notion of the master builder and its history by presenting works built not by individuals but by cultures responding to specific local material conditions and environments. In the book written for the exhibition, Rudofsky writes “part of our troubles results from the tendency to ascribe to architects—or, for that matter, to all specialists—exceptional insight into problems of living when, in truth, most of them are concerned with problems of business and prestige.”

Photographs of the MoMA exhibition, however, reveal images of Indigenous and vernacular structures without context positioned across a simple stud wall system. The show was designed for people to take inspiration from this architecture and make new buildings from it, which

perpetuates the cycles of prestige Rudofsky so despises. It additionally created a clear border between the “insiders” and “outsiders” of the discipline by presenting this work to a particular audience of museumgoers, which resulted in the fetishization of the work itself rather than learning with interest, empathy, and respect. Rudofsky again, “the present exhibition is a... vehicle of the idea that the philosophy and know-how of the anonymous builders presents the largest untapped source of architectural inspiration for industrial man” (1964). This smells more like colonialism than honest representation.

In opposition to this, a YouTube video by Andres Souto of mUcHo estudio/taller called *El Grand Tour* gives a guided tour of the fantastic and wild speculative architecture available on the Sketchup Warehouse. This type of representation opposes the fetishizing quality because it speculates a radical repositioning of authorship. Instead of a survey of amateurs by masters prepared to pounce on the discovered unnamed talent, the video supposed the amateurs have the mark of true genius and it is us who should marvel at the work. This comparison and reversal showcases a new

possibility for architecture to work through challenges of authorship and vernacular as it navigates the need to take things apart in our constructed wasteland and emerge from power structures to liberate from below.

Yet we still must rely on the idea of vernacular architecture not for fetishization of form over materials, mechanics, and shared authorship but the way vernacular creates and nurtures a shared domestic image. A recent commercial for Nintendo Switch showed two brothers playing *Goldeneye 007*—a game released on the Nintendo 64 in 1997—online with one another in February of 2023. While playing together in their current lives, they are transported to their childhood bedroom, where they have stored memories of domestic leisure and play. This meaningful physical-digital interaction, and the clear reflection on virtual space as an extension of the domestic, has resounding implications for the future of all spatial design.

This manifests through my work and research as a gamer and an architecture teacher. Building on sentiments expressed poetically by a famous (and now-deleted) post from Viviane Schwarz on X (formerly Twitter) which stated, “Zoom sucks, we started having editorial meetings in *Red Dead Redemption* instead. It’s nice to sit at the campfire and discuss projects, with the wolves howling out in the night.” So during 2020, to experience immersive space as a class, I held desk crits remotely, but rather than Zoom, we met inside of a virtual space called Sansar, which comes with a variety of community-built avatar skins. We also held our final critiques online and instead of a typical jury, we invited a Twitch chat to do a “chat plays” stream where the chat is the jury. This generated feedback not just by architecture faculty but by outside characters, truly opening the architecture jury to the broader public while experiencing a new type of shared domestic space.

Through slightly shifting core ideas and foundational concepts, domesticity in architecture is changing from one that is contained to one that changes in world culture and then remixes it. A better framework for this type of creation is Jill Stoner’s *Toward a Minor Architecture*, which highlights the leaks into shared virtual containers. The merging of videogames and architecture reveals a dense stew of spatial design, societal influence, and cultural significance. Videogames, evolving into immersive ecosystems, transcend digital environments to become cultural artifacts akin to physical buildings. They shape behavior, reflect societal norms, and transform physical spaces, destroying the assumed boundary between virtual and real-world architecture.

The concept of virtual visionary architecture has emerged, and it promises collaborative design and participatory experiences that reflect the multiplicity of voices in our society. Whether huddled around a living room console or engaging with a global community through online platforms, players inhabit diverse spatial contexts that enrich their experiences. Understanding the intricacies of these mixed domestic mechanics and social interactions is essential for reimagining the discipline of architecture through the design of virtual worlds as a new project of our shared cultural imagination.

**Ryan “Scav” Scavnicky uses memes, TikToks, Twitch broadcasts, Discord servers, and the Extra Office YouTube channel to create insightful commentary by challenging the status quo of disciplinary boundaries. Scav is an assistant professor at Marywood University School of Architecture, where he launched and now coordinates the groundbreaking Bachelor of Virtual Architecture program.**



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# Windows, Walls & Doors

The play of solid and void is one of architecture's time-honored challenges. But these articulations are not buildable without an array of specialized apertures and finishes that bring the light in and keep the rain out. On the following pages, learn from an impressive set of case studies—from Seattle to Doha, with stops in Bentonville, Baltimore, and New Haven—that use openings and finishes to great success. Movement is key: From mobile partitions to operable skylights, there are ample selections to consider for future use.

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© CHRISTIAN MARCLAY

# Open Doors

Christian Marclay explores a universe of thresholds in his latest single-channel montage of film clips.

ICA Boston  
Through September 1

On the screen, a movie clip plays of a character entering through a door to leave out another. It cuts to another clip of someone else doing the same thing over and over, all sourced from a panoply of Western cinema. The audience, sitting for an unknown amount of time, watches this shape-shifting protagonist from different cultural periods come and go, as the film endlessly loops.

So goes Christian Marclay's latest single-channel film, *Doors* (2022), currently exhibited for the first time in the United States at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston. (It also premieres June 13 at the Brooklyn Museum and will run through April 12, 2026). Assembled over ten years, the film is a dizzying feat, a carefully crafted montage of film clips revolving around the simple premise of someone entering through a door and then leaving out a door. In the exhibition, Marclay writes, "Doors are fascinating objects, rich with symbolism." Here, he shows hundreds of them, examining through film how the simple act of moving through a threshold multiplied endlessly creates a profoundly new reading of what said threshold signifies.

On paper, this may sound like an extremely jarring experience. But Marclay—a visual artist, composer, and DJ whose previous works such as *The Clock* (2010) involved similar mega-montages of disparate film clips—has a sensitive touch. The sequences feel incredibly smooth, the montage carefully constructed to mimic continuity as closely as possible. This is even more impressive when one imagines the constraints that a door's movement offers; it must open and close a certain direction, with particular types of hinges or means of swinging. It makes the seamless of the film all the more fascinating to dissect. When a tiny wooden doorframe cuts to a large double steel door, my brain had no issue at all registering a sense of continued motion through the frame—a form of cinematic magic.

Watching the clips, there seemed to be no discernible meta narrative—simply movement through doors. Nevertheless, Marclay is a master of controlling tone. Though the relentlessness of watching the loops does create an overall feeling of tension that the film is clearly playing on, there are often moments of levity that interrupt, giving visitors a chance to breathe.

The pacing too, swings from a person rushing in and out, to a slow stroll between doors in a corridor. It leaves one musing on just how ubiquitous this simple action is, and how mutable these simple acts of pulling a door and stepping inside can be. Sometimes mundane, sometimes thrilling, sometimes in anticipation, sometimes in search—*Doors* invites us to reflect on our own interaction with these objects, and with the very act of stepping through a doorway.

Much of the experience rests on the soundscape and music, which is equally—if not more heavily—important in creating the transition across clips. Marclay's previous work leaned heavily on his interest in aural media; this added dimension only enriches *Doors* and elevates it beyond a formal visual study of clips that match each other. The film bleeds music from one scene to another, sometimes prematurely, to make believable the movement of one character across multiple movies. This overlap of sounds is essentially an echo of the space we left behind and are entering into. We as the audience almost believe—even if just for a second—that the transition is real.

The effect is powerful and calls to mind several references. No doubt *Doors* owes some degree of inspiration to the lineage of surrealist art, perhaps in the work of Magritte or Duchamp. For those steeped in architecture, one may think of Bernard Tschumi's *Manhattan Transcripts*, where his transcriptions of events, spaces, and movements similarly both shatter and call to attention simple spatial sequences. One may also be reminded of the work of Situationist International, particularly the psychogeography of Guy Debord. I confess that my first thought was the (in my view) equally famous door-chase scene in *Monsters, Inc.* But regardless of what corollaries one may conjure, *Doors* has a wholly unique feel. It is simplistic and singular in constructing its webbed world.

But what exactly are we to take away from this world? In an interview with *Artforum*,

Marclay declares, "I'm building in people's minds an architecture in which to get lost." The clip evokes a certain act of labyrinthian mapping—or perhaps a mode of perpetual resetting. I began to imagine this almost as a non-Euclidean enfilade of sorts where each room invites you to quickly grasp a new environment and then very quickly anticipate what may be in the next. With the understanding that you can't backtrack, and the unpredictability of the next door taking you anywhere, the film holds you in total suspense. The production of new spaces and new architecture is activated all at once in the moment someone steps into a new doorway.

All of this is without even mentioning the chosen films themselves. There is a degree to which the pop-culture element of Marclay's work makes certain moments click—I can't help but laugh as I watch Adam Sandler in *Punch Drunk Love* exit a door and emerge as Bette Davis in *All About Eve*. But to a degree, I also see the references being secondary, and certainly unneeded to understand the visceral experience Marclay crafts. It helps that, aside from a couple of jarring character movements or one-off spoken jokes, the movement is repetitive and universal.

*Doors* runs on a continuous loop, and there is no running time given. I sat watching for just under an hour before convincing myself that I would never find any appropriate or correct time to leave. Instead, I could sit endlessly and reflect on each character movement, each new reveal of a room. Is the door the most important architectural element in creating space? Marclay makes a strong case for it with this piece.

**Harish Krishnamoorthy is an architectural and urban designer based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Bangalore, India. He is an editor at PAIRS.**

Above: Christian Marclay, *Doors* (still), 2022. Single-channel video projection (color and black-and-white; continuous loop).

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# Healing Arts

**Marlon Blackwell Architects adds the multifunctional Heartland Whole Health Institute and a creative parking complex to the campus of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.**

Marlon Blackwell Architects (MBA) won the commission for the Heartland Whole Health Institute project on the campus of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas—and then came the notes. Philanthropist Alice Walton told MBA founding partner Marlon Blackwell early on, “I really love your concepts, but I really don’t like boxes,” the architect recalled.

“The scheme we had won with was mass timber boxes stacked on top of each other, because the brief was that it had to be mounted

mass timber,” Blackwell added with a laugh.

So much for enjoying the win. Undaunted, Blackwell, along with his partner and wife, Meryati Johari Blackwell—better known as Ati—who handles interiors for the firm, and their Arkansas-based office set out to “reconceive” the plans that won them the competition, he told *AN* on a recent video call.

According to Scott Eccleston, president of campus management for Crystal Bridges, the pressure was on: “It’s a big project because it was the first outside of the Moshe



Safdie-designed building [the Crystal Bridges Museum] on this campus, and that is a big responsibility for any architect.”

Blackwell isn't just any architect, however. In fact, the May 1 Heartland Whole Health Institute ribbon cutting started an impressive run that illustrates how in-demand he and his firm have become. He and Ati left Bentonville shortly after the opening for Chicago, where their firm was awarded with the prestigious Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize as one of three contributors to Bentonville's Thaden School. (The collective

design effort included EskewDumezRipple and Andropogon Associates; the project also earned an *AN* Best of Design award in 2024 and was a finalist for Project of the Year.) From there, the Blackwells were off to Venice, where MBA's work on the U.S. Pavilion—along with that of Stephen Burks Man Made, D.I.R.T. Studio, and TEN x TEN—resulted in a mass timber and rammed earth porch that garnered buzz during the May launch of the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. (*AN* is the pavilion's education/outreach partner.) May

marked a stretch of recognition for Blackwell's philosophy of an “economy of means” that has propelled his work since he founded his practice in 1990.

### A Linear Tree House

Founded in 2019 by Walton, daughter of Walmart founder Sam Walton and the world's richest woman, Heartland Whole Health Institute is an effort to forge connections between wellness, art, nature, education, and architecture.

The institute's new home is a 3-story, 85,000-square-foot curvilinear structure that artfully blends into the Ozarks landscape around it while standing out on the 134-acre campus that already included Safdie's Crystal Bridges museum, the (relocated and reassembled) Bachman-Wilson House by Frank Lloyd Wright, and a new parking garage, also by MBA, that is a statement piece in its own right. Heartland Whole Health Institute has a ground floor with public galleries, event spaces, and a cafe, with offices on the second and third floors for the



TIMOTHY HURSLEY/COURTESY HEARTLAND WHOLE HEALTH INSTITUTE



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**Previous page:** A view of the dog trot entrance and facade of the Heartland Whole Health Institute from the lawn.

**Above:** A closer view of the dog trot entrance and the vernacular building materials, such as giraffe stone and weathered brass.

**Far left:** Marlon Blackwell Architects drew inspiration from the Ozarks for the new building, connecting it to the landscape and to the Crystal Bridges campus.

**Left:** Pre-weathered brass fins help mitigate exposure to sunlight.

## Healing Arts continued

institute and Walton's other nonprofits, including the Art Bridges Foundation and the Alice L. Walton Foundation.

Eccleston likened the resulting structure to "an extended, linear tree house"; he and the Blackwells spotlighted the use of the locally favored giraffe stone, which connects the facade both to place and history.

"We are very inspired by the karst topography of our place, the limestone as well as the hardwood forests," Marlon Blackwell said. "I learned from Fay Jones that almost every project he ever worked on was inspired by the cave and the forest, which are very dear to a lot of folks in the Ozarks."

This approach extended to the interiors, Ati Blackwell said. "It was the same kind of feeling, where we wanted to [evoke] the idea of a walk in the woods," she explained, adding that this helped the team achieve the client's wish to connect the architecture to health and wellness.

### Positive First Impressions

Indeed, the Heartland Whole Health Institute building seems destined to fulfill its role as a calming space to experience art (for the public) and to work (for staff). Marlon Blackwell said that employees approached him and Ati to thank them in the first few weeks of the building's lifespan; Eccleston suggested that merely entering the "welcoming" spaces can lead to a lowering of one's blood pressure.

Visitors and employees can approach the institute building on foot, via bike trail, or by shuttle or other motor vehicle. Their first impressions will likely result from the giraffe stone facade and, above, the pre-weathered brass fins and cladding.

Before entering the lobby, visitors traverse a dog trot with a large glass window teasing what's inside: Venetian plaster walls, travertine floors, and an undulating pecan veneer plywood ceiling that

Eccleston likened to the "underbelly of a mushroom." There are also felt wall panels, selected for proper acoustics and an injection of color.

The lobby showcases art from Crystal Bridges and includes a cafe and a grand central staircase that is one of the building's signature moments. Structurally, the building works like a long-span bridge and requires a few columns, so major pieces like the stair are suspended from above. Outside, the one-story rock foundational pieces read as being set underneath this sloped, curving form.

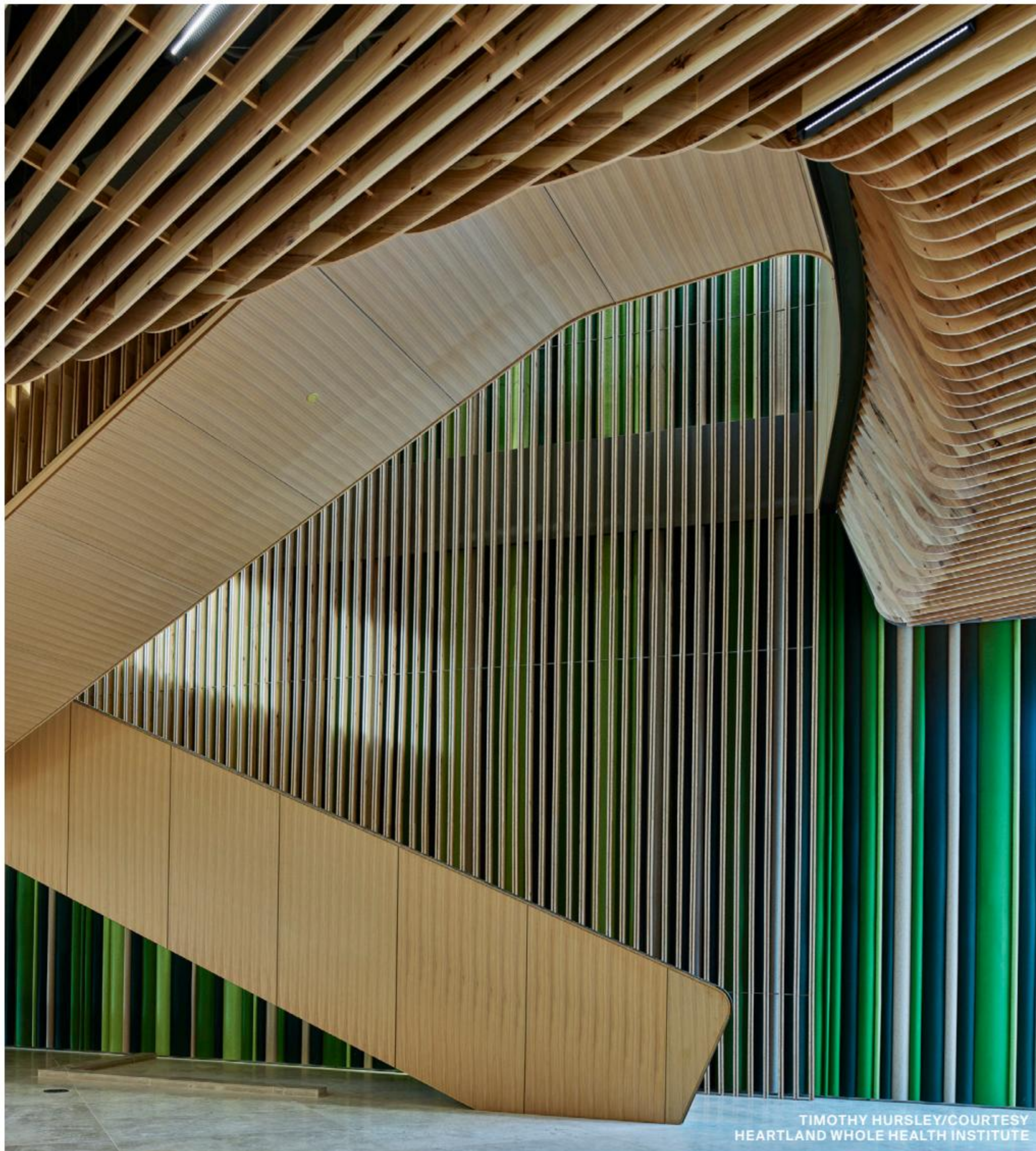
"The grand stair is designed to be slow, anticipatory," Marlon Blackwell shared, adding that it leads to the only public space on the second floor: a meditation room with daylight provided by an unseen window at the end of an approximately 30-foot cone that bends to the north. "When you're in the space, you don't see the sky; you only see the illumination coming through the cone."

Ati Blackwell delivered office space on the

second and third floors for Walton's foundations. The philanthropist directed the architects to "give the best view and the best location to the folks that are working in the open office," Ati Blackwell said. The architect sourced a glass system from Maars Living Walls to create the few private offices and for conference areas, allowing increased daylight while providing sonic privacy.

### The Art of Parking

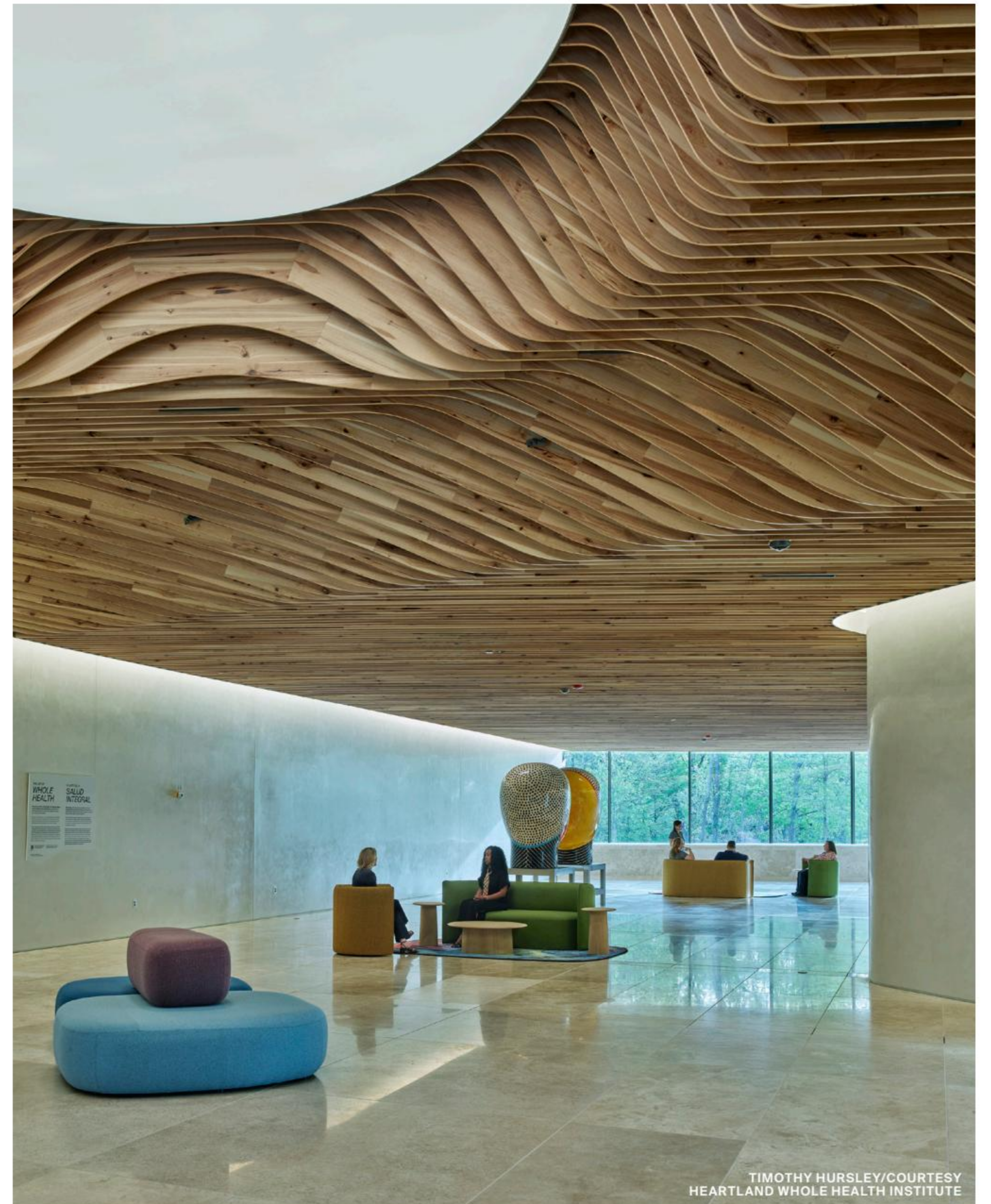
Though it wasn't part of the Heartland Whole Health Institute commission, the Crystal Bridges campus parking garage became sort of an exclamation point on the MBA contribution to this growing architectural and artistic showcase. The next major project, the Alice L. Walton School of Medicine, is slated to open this summer, with design by Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects and rooftop park and landscape design by Office of Strategy + Design; the same architects are also at



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HEARTLAND WHOLE HEALTH INSTITUTE

**Top left:** The lobby staircase ascends to the second floor, which houses offices and a meditation room; green felt is folded to create an acoustical wall.

**Top right:** The institute's gallery, with exposed plywood ceiling, includes Jun Kaneko's glazed ceramics *Untitled, Heads*.

**Left:** Ati Blackwell of MBA installed Maars Living Walls to create office spaces that offer privacy while letting in natural light.

**Opposite Top:** MBA also created a new garage for the campus, with 800 parking spaces and amenities such as an event space, a plaza with a cafe, and a proscenium to showcase more art from the Crystal Bridges Museum.

**Opposite bottom left:** Visitors rest near *Congruence*, a sculpture by HYBYCOZO.

**Opposite bottom middle:** The garage follows Marlon Blackwell's philosophy of providing clients with added value, where "one plus one equals more than two," he said.

**Opposite bottom right:** The parking garage at night.

work on a campus housing complex for the medical school on an adjacent 11-acre site.

Marlon Blackwell stressed that the 800-vehicle lot was no afterthought. Intended to keep car traffic to a minimum on campus, the parking area needed to also connect to the landscape in a meaningful way. Though MBA didn't stop there.

"When we make design proposals, either as a whole design or pieces of it, we always try to make one plus one equal more than two," he explained. "It's got to do more than one thing. If we can do three or four, it creates a great value proposition for our clients."

The resulting 6-floor parking structure, faced in blue metal panels and fins, includes a public plaza with a 150-foot-wide, 5-story proscenium for art, a cafe, and a retail space on the ground level, plus a terrace with a performance space on the second level.

The public plaza is fittingly named "Convergence," and the new institute building had a theme of "Flow." In Bentonville, it seems simple ideas creatively executed make for monumental architecture. Now, Walton's vision for creating a thoughtful approach to wellness and healing is set up to succeed. **RM**

**DESIGN ARCHITECT:** Marlon Blackwell Architects

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Michael Boucher  
Landscape Architecture

**INTERIOR DESIGN:** Marlon Blackwell Architects  
Interiors

**ACOUSTICS:** Threshold Acoustics

**CIVIL ENGINEERING:** CESO, EDG

**CODE:** Coding Solutions Group

**LIGHTING:** TM Light

**MEP:** HSA Engineering

**STRUCTURAL AND ENVELOPE:** Studio NYL

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Baldwin & Shell  
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**FACADE SYSTEM:** Kawneer Clearwall

**CLADDING:** MG McGrath, Rainbow Stone  
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**GLASS:** Agnora, Tristar, Scheuten, Pilkington  
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**WINDOWS:** Raico

**DOORS:** Ellison, Kawneer

**INTERIOR FINISHES:** Sherwin Williams,  
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Walls, C.R. Laurence, DesignTex,  
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Up & Down Industries, Daltile, Mohawk,  
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# Windows & Skylights



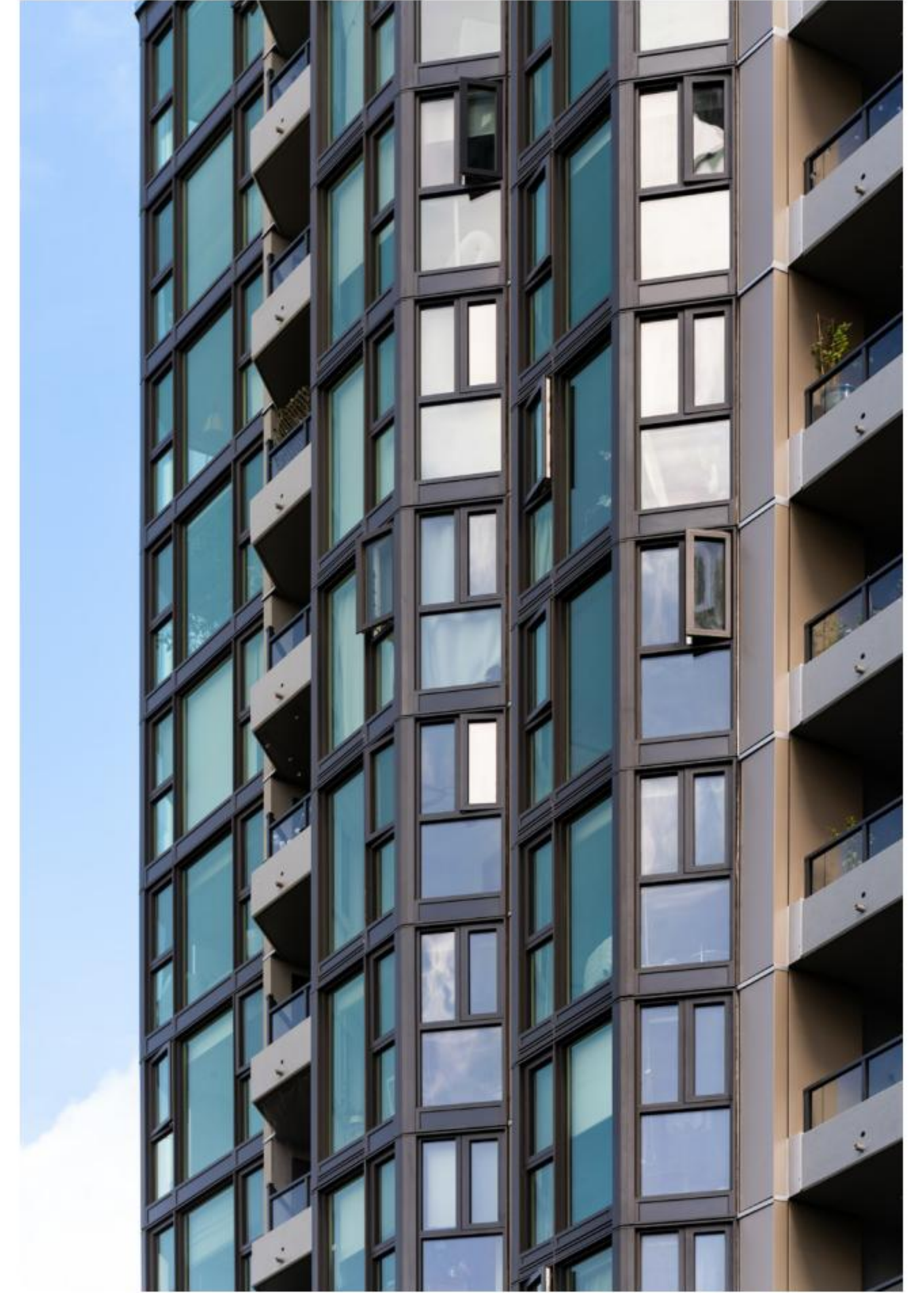
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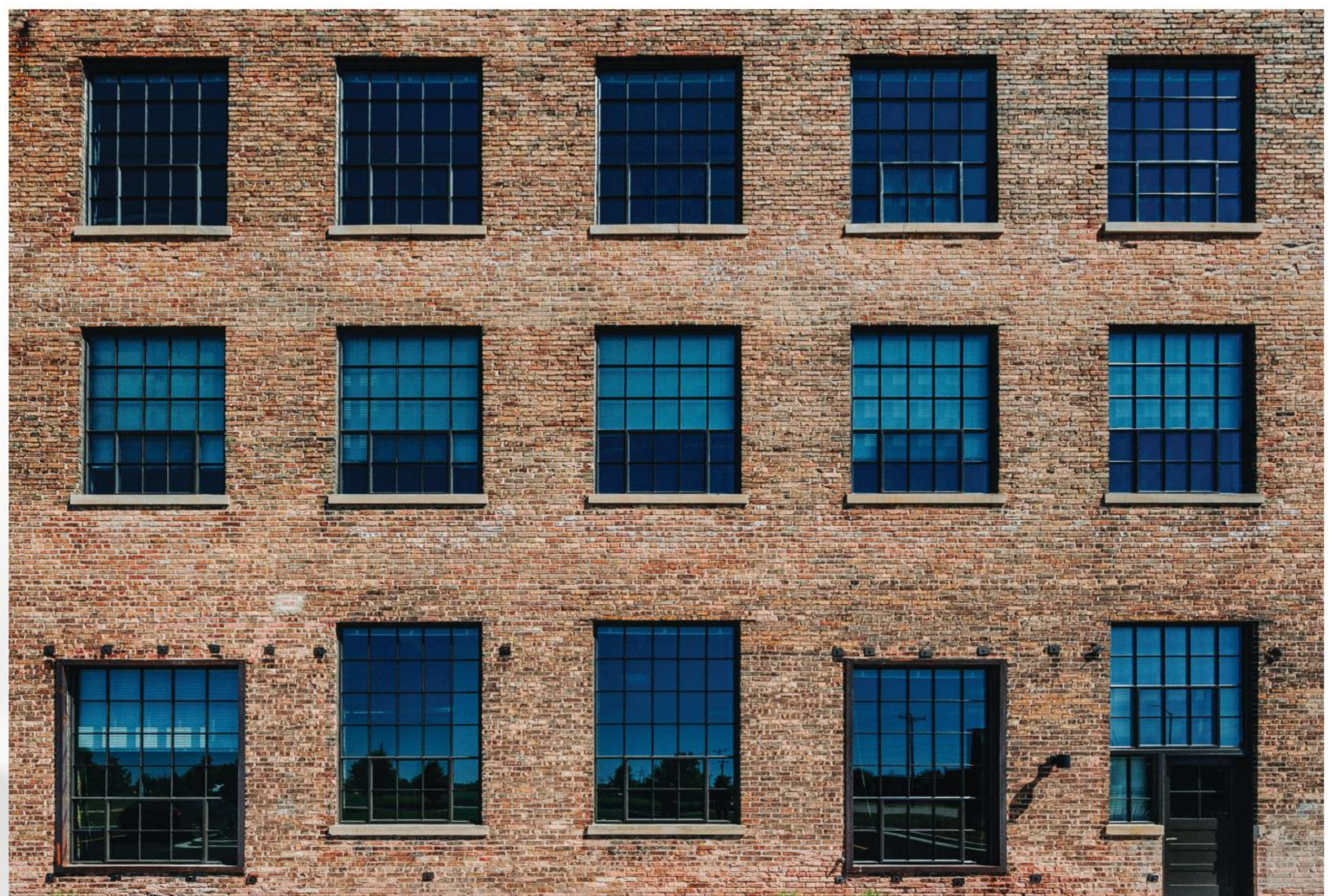
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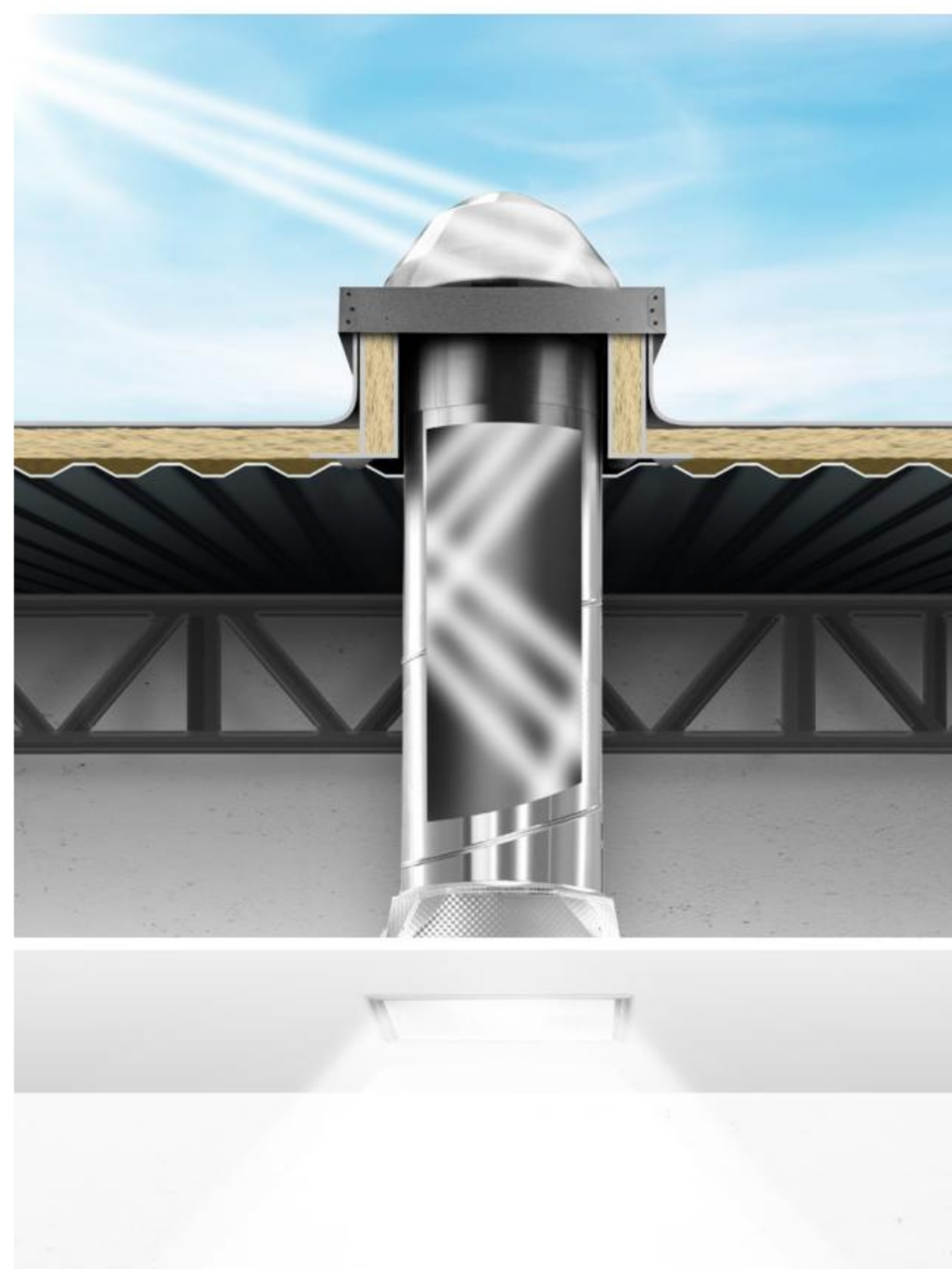
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# Faithful Updates

**Diller Scofidio + Renfro tops Al-Mujadilah Center and Mosque for Women in Doha with “field” of skylights, blending tradition and innovation.**

Diller Scofidio + Renfro designed Al-Mujadilah, a mosque and education center for women, on one of the last developable sites in Education City, a campus west of Doha, Qatar’s central business district. The religious structure is defined by its undulating roof, sturdy travertine walls, and modern minaret, which each offer a contemporary take on traditional Islamic architecture and rituals.

In its brief, Qatar Foundation asked for a contemporary building cognizant of the traditional and cultural constraints of mosque

architecture. The program is simple and reflects the notion that a mosque can be both a civic and a spiritual space. At 50,000 square feet, the mosque comprises one large prayer hall and an education space with smaller dedicated worship areas, as well as room for ablution, shoe storage, and offices.

The building’s orientation was the starting point for the entire design, as it maintained an indisputable tradition and ritual of Islam: positioning prayer spaces to precisely face Mecca. Evan Tribus, associate principal at DS+R, told





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## Faithful Updates continued

AN that in the case of Al-Mujadilah that was 17 degrees off latitudinal lines. Inside a mosque that point is marked by the qibla wall. Within this wall are the minbar, where the iman delivers the sermon, and the mihrab, the niche in which worshippers pray. DS+R used the concepts of the qibla wall as an opportunity to modernize a traditional element.

"We took a flat wall and pushed out one part of it at the top and pushed out one part of it at the bottom," Tribus said. The part of the travertine wall inverted at the bottom creates space for the minbar, while the portion pushed out at the top riffs on the ubiquitous mihrab form. The spirit and tradition of the mihrab is often replicated as a design on prayer rugs. Inside Al-Mujadilah, DS+R blew up the proportions of a small Turkish prayer rug to the size of the prayer hall. When viewing the pattern in a digital form, designers played around, shifting the pixels to ultimately deliver an abstracted version of the symbolic wall element replicated on the original rug.

Travertine walls line much of the prayer and education spaces. The vein-cut stone was sourced from Turkey and Italy. It subtly contrasts with the crosscut flooring. Another prominent wall element inside Al-Mujadilah is its courtyard. Courtyards are a traditional component

of mosque architecture, often as an entry point. With a more inward location, the courtyard DS+R realized divides the prayer hall and education room via a glass-enclosed, circular structure, opened at its top by an oculus cut into the larger roof. Two olive trees were planted in the sliver of green space, another nod to Islamic practices.

While the traditional image of a mosque brings to mind a domed roof, Al-Mujadilah contemporizes that too. Its swelled form is flatter yet still marked by two primary curvatures: the highest above the prayer hall and its counter situated atop the education space. The roof is clad in marble sourced from Qatar's neighbor Oman; the stone is native to the region. Augmenting the stone treatment on the roof is a robust lighting scheme that Tribus described as "a field."

This "field" of light cones perforates the roof surface, acting as individual skylights that "harvest" and diffuse sunlight. Given Qatar's desert climate, minimizing direct sunlight was paramount to the project. There are 5,488 light cones dotting the roof, most identical in size, with variation only occurring at the edges. Within the cylinder, an interlayer of polyvinyl butyral, a type of laminated glass, permits visible light to pass through.

"The light comes in. It scatters through that

interlayer. It further scatters through this cone, so that by the time it hits the bottom, perceptually there's no direct sunlight," Tribus explained. "All the solar radiation has been taken out, and there's just a diffused glow in the space."

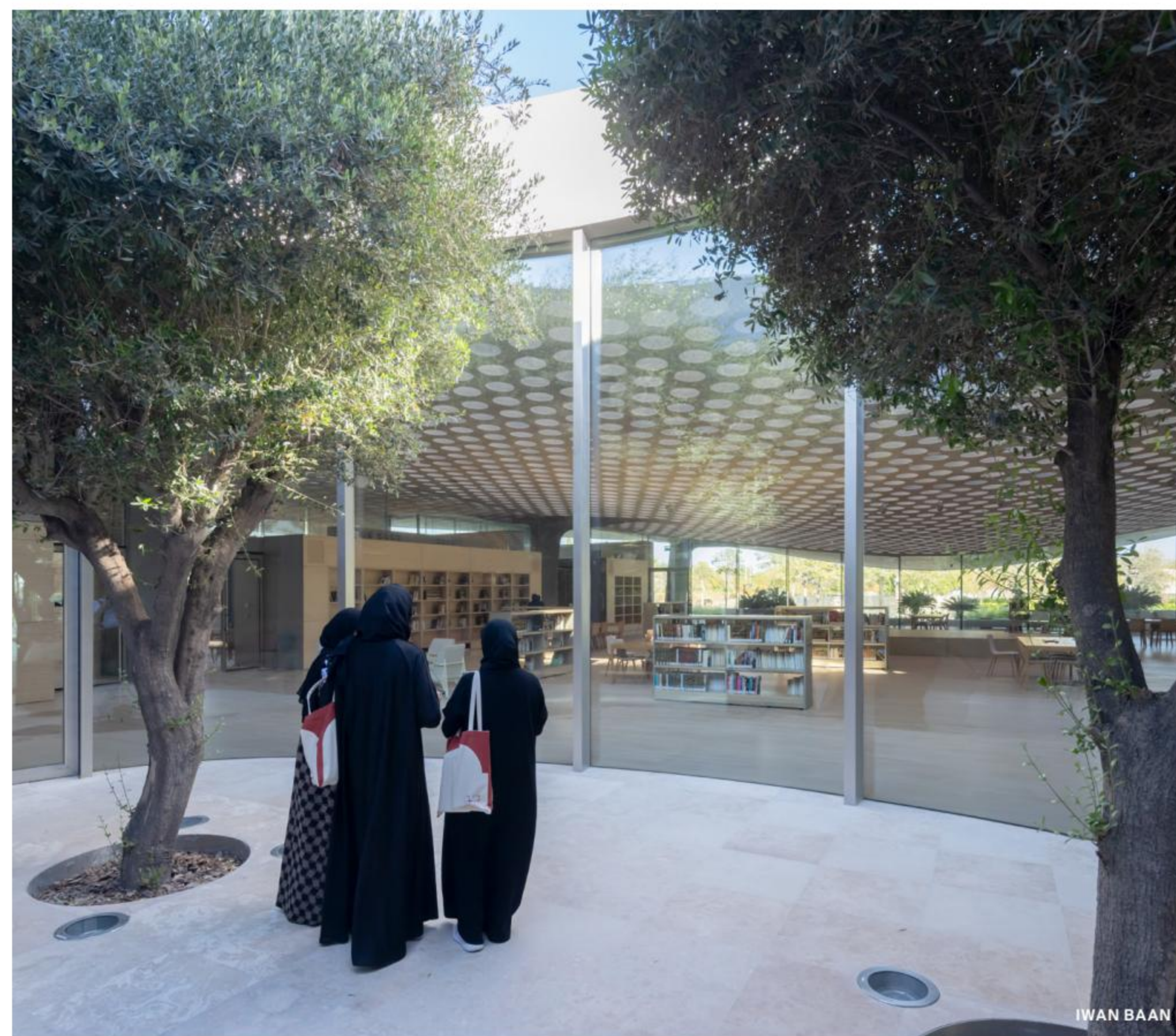
Inside on the ceiling, the dotted effect is equally as artful and functional as it is on the roof. At night, with sunlight no longer present, an electric ring attached to each of the fixtures illuminates the interiors. An installed lighting control system can dim the lights row by row.

The minaret, located away from the primary building, at the south end of the site, was another opportunity for DS+R to creatively innovate traditional mosque architecture. While many mosques have fixed loudspeakers on the top of their minarets to broadcast the calls to prayer, historically a muezzin would ascend the tower to deliver the announcement. At Al-Mujadilah, five times a day the electronic loudspeakers ascend, and then descend, the mesh tower. The pattern on the mesh mimics that of mashrabiya, traditional latticework common in Islamic architecture for passive cooling, illumination, and privacy. At night the minaret glows, underscoring its role as a beacon of tradition and modernity existing harmoniously.

KK

DESIGN ARCHITECT: Diller Scofidio + Renfro  
 MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE ADVISER: Ziad Jamaledine  
 LEAD CONSULTANT: Halcrow  
 LANDSCAPE: Atelier Miething  
 STRUCTURAL AND FACADE ENGINEER, CONCEPT & SCHEMATIC DESIGN: Werner Sobek  
 TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST, AV, ACOUSTICS: Charcoal Blue  
 LIGHTING: Buro Happold  
 SIGNAGE: IN-FO.CO  
 SUSTAINABILITY/LEED: Qatar Green Leaders  
 PROJECT MANAGEMENT: ASTAD  
 MINARET, MINBAR, AND LIGHT CONE FABRICATOR: Metalex

FACADE SYSTEM AND GLAZING: Schuco, Saint Gobain  
 ROOF STONE PAVERS: Nassar Stone  
 INTERIOR GLAZED DOORS: Gemino  
 ROOF SHEATHING: Kingspan  
 ROOF WATERPROOFING: Sika  
 INTERIOR FINISHES: Haz Marble (fabricator, stone walls and flooring), Filzfelt (felt walls)  
 LIGHTING: apure, Ecosense, Erco, Bega  
 APPLIANCES: Teka  
 FURNITURE: Vitra, Nikari, Alter Ego, Arper, Unifor  
 LANDSCAPE FURNITURE: Urbastyle, Fermob, Escofet  
 SHADES & DRAPERY: Mechoshade, Goelst, Carnegie Fabrics  
 HARDWARE: Allgood



COURTESY DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO

**Previous page:** Al-Mujadilah mosque is topped with thousands of light cones that harvest sunlight to illuminate the interiors.

**Left:** The qibla wall was inverted at the bottom to create space for the minbar, while the portion pushed out at the top draws from the traditional mihrab form.

**Top:** A glass-enclosed courtyard in the center of the building separates the prayer room from the education spaces.

**Above:** A section of Al-Mujadilah mosque shows the undulating roofline and the glass-enclosed courtyard.



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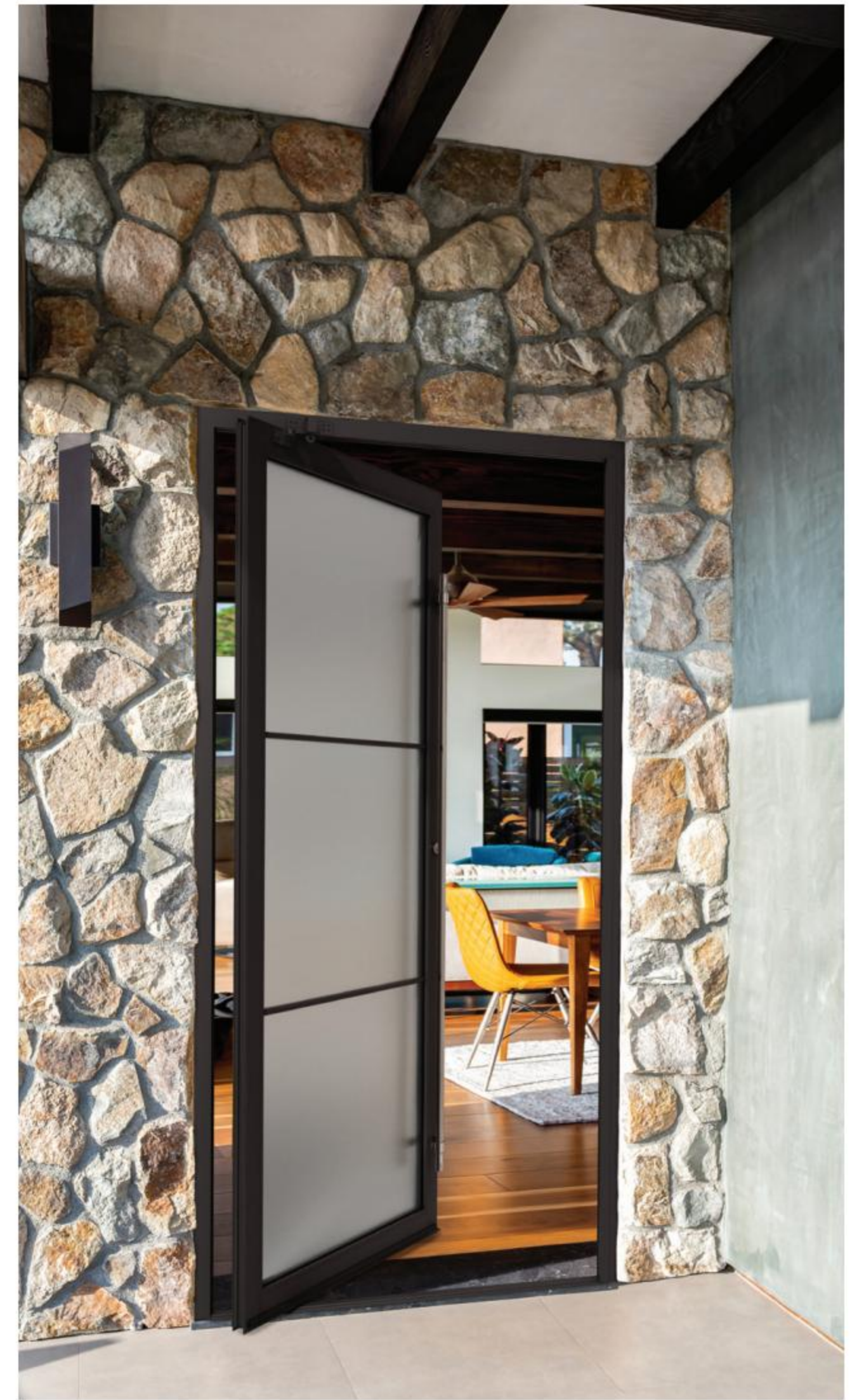
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**Modern Steel Ultra-Grain Plank** | Clopay  
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**Kodama and Komorebi** | Kengo Kuma for Albed  
albed.it

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ykkap.com

Updated to meet the guidelines of the International Energy Conservation Code for commercial entrances, the system maintains a clean aesthetic and narrow sightline.



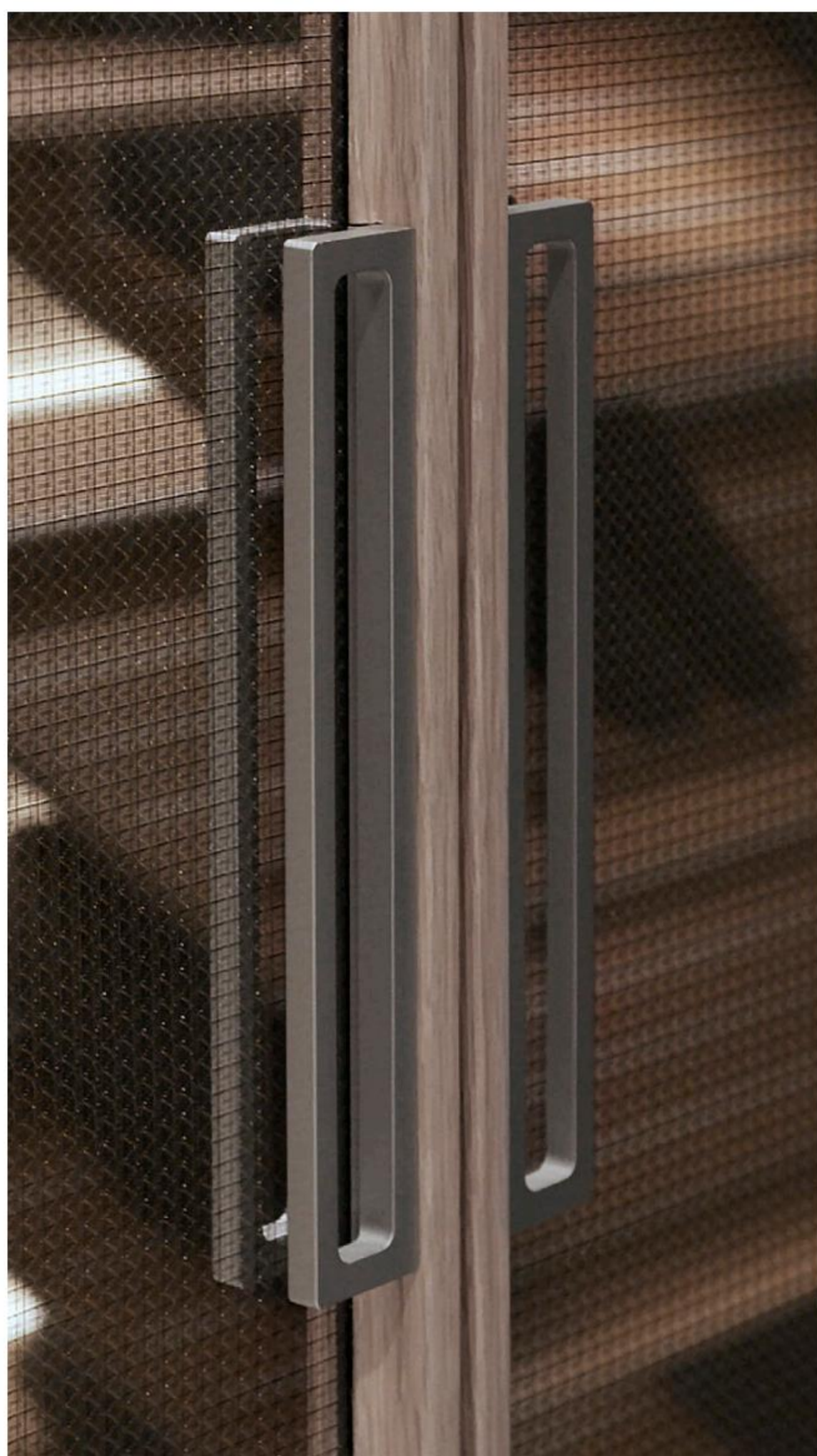
**VistaLuxe WD LINE Stretta** | Kolbe Windows & Doors  
kolbewindows.com

Available with soft functions for controlled, smooth movements and perimeter locking for air and noise filtration, this series offers a stylish slider without sacrificing performance.



**NOVA.LS** | Panda Windows & Doors  
panda-windows.com

The NOVA.LS is a slim-framed, all-aluminum, thermally broken lift-and-slide door that uses a new mechanism to maintain a slim frame and to maximize daylight.



**Velaria** | Rimadesio  
rimadesio.it/en

Now offered in a wood frame, these sliders utilize a built-in and wall-fixed rail system for maximum design simplicity and total architectural integration.



**NW MultiSlide 630** | NanaWall  
nanawall.com

The Generation 4 MultiSlide provides uniform glass lines, matching frames across its product family, and smooth opening with Gothic arch rollers.

# Bright Minds

## Knight Architecture updates Louis Kahn's Yale Center for British Art with new skylights and light-diffusing cassettes.

New Haven, Connecticut—and Yale University, more specifically—possesses two of only three Louis Kahn-designed museums. (The other is the Kimbell, in Fort Worth, Texas.) The architect's extension to the Yale Art Gallery (1953) and the posthumously completed Yale Center for British Art (1974) straddle either side of Chapel Street, bookending the prolific period of his career; the former was Kahn's first major commission, and the latter is among his final works. Despite the nearly 20 years between them, the projects are set in undeniable dialogue, beginning with their modest rectangular massing, which may come as a surprise to those familiar with Kahn's more formally expressive designs.

For the past two years, a major renovation at the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) severed this architectural pairing. The project focused on repairing what is arguably the building's premier architectural feature: a grid of 224 skylights that bring natural light into the exhibition space.

YCBA's structural organization follows from this grid. Kahn arranged the museum's galleries within a network of repeating 20-by-20-foot cast-in-place concrete bays that each align beneath four rooftop apertures. This rigid compositional pattern continues down through the building's four floors and is only interrupted twice: by multistory chasms that occur in the lobby and again in the center of the building to create an indoor "courtyard" and event space. A cylindrical concrete stairwell punctuates the event space; an earlier version of this drum-shaped design exists in the Yale Art Gallery across the street.

Except for 16 fully transparent iterations above the lobby, YCBA's roof lights each feature a complex filtration and diffusion apparatus devised by Kahn alongside his lighting designer, Richard Kelly. From above, north-facing aluminum louvers channel and reflect strong southern light through the thermoplastic domes, reaching a series of prismatic acrylic sheets that dilute the strength of the beam. This laylight system, also referred to as a "cassette," is essentially the opposite of a telescope, where instead of focusing the light, the compound lenses scatter and reduce its brilliance. This protects the center's collection, which is the largest assembly of British art outside the United Kingdom.

To lead the roof renovation, Yale hired Knight Architecture, a local firm specializing in historic preservation and residential work.

"We weren't unhappy with the 50-year lifespan of the original skylights, but they had yellowed and started to craze noticeably. That gave us the clue that it was time to replace them," George Knight, the firm's founding principal, told *AN* on a tour of the building. "They weren't allowing water in, but that was a concern down the road, obviously, with everything being so precious on the walls."

Knight Architecture replaced the original acrylic domes with a more durable polycarbonate system and coated the rooftop with a liquid membrane application that strengthens the concrete. While the firm accomplished these tasks with off-the-shelf products, the building's one-of-a-kind acrylic laylight cassettes required custom fabrication.

"We carefully studied the existing laylights and went through several mockups to produce these," said Knight. "They're essentially indistinguishable from the originals in their material and composition. The one marginal difference is that we added a layer of reflective film that slightly reduces the amount of daylight that

enters the gallery for conservation purposes."

Light streams into the building with fresh clarity via the pristine new apertures. This is felt most powerfully at the peak of the concrete drum, where sunlight, after passing through the louver system, double-paned dome, and multilayer cassette is refracted through one final layer: a lattice of glass blocks set into the cast-in-place roof of the stairwell. Bending as they travel through the blocks, the beams cast rippled streaks across the space's radial walls, mimicking the appearance of light through water.

YCBA is now open to the public Tuesday through Sunday. Make sure to visit on a sunny day. **Trevor Schillaci**

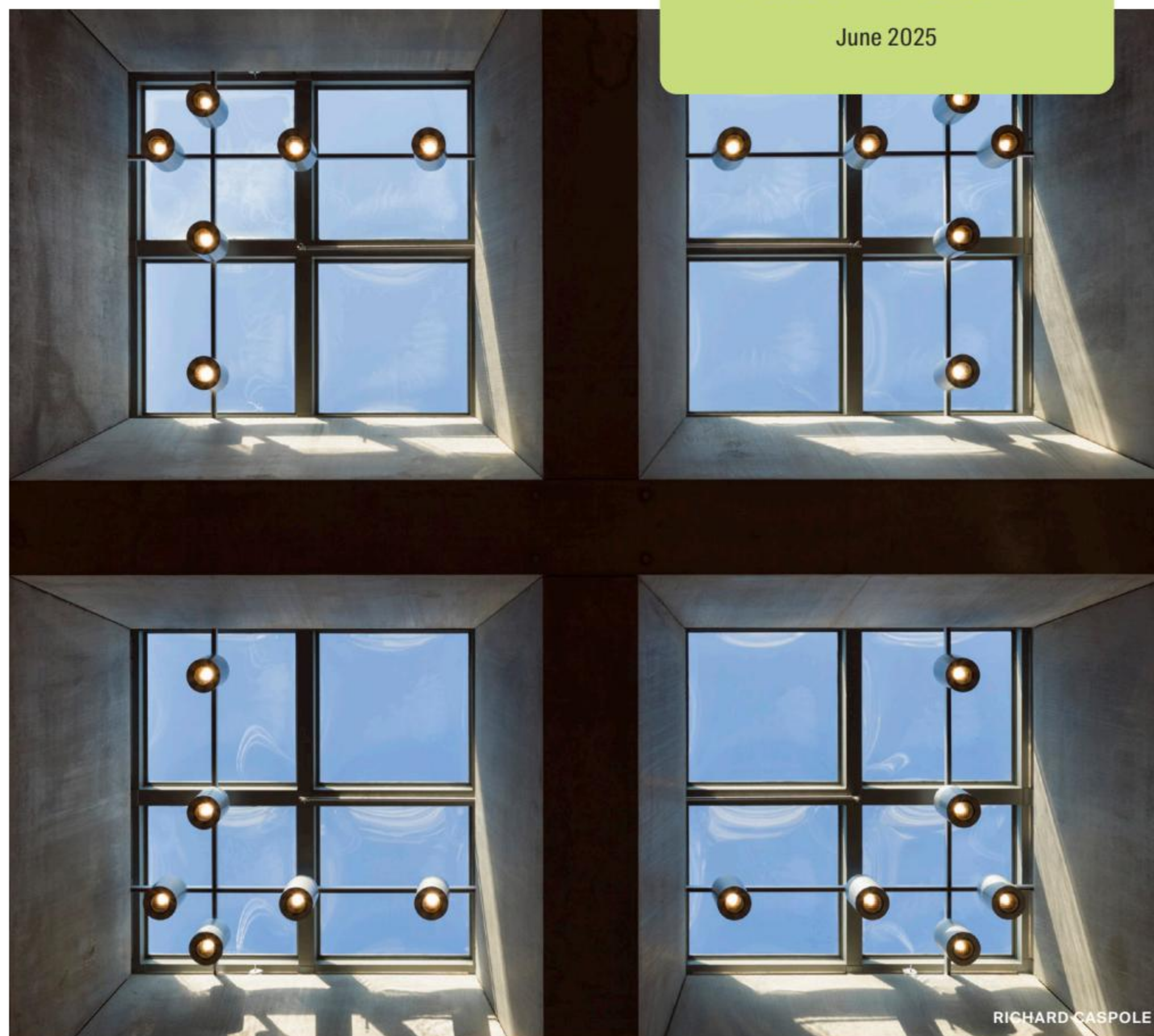
**DESIGN ARCHITECT:** Knight Architecture  
**PROJECT MANAGER:** Yale University Office of Facilities  
**BUILDING ENVELOPE AND LIGHTING CONSULTANT:** Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates  
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER:** Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates  
**ELECTRICAL ENGINEER:** Southport Engineering Associates  
**ELECTRICAL AND LIGHTING CONSULTANT:** EwingCole  
**LIGHTING ANALYSIS:** Yale University Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage  
**LIGHTING CONSULTANT:** Deborah Berke  
**LIGHTING DESIGN, ENGINEER, AND MANUFACTURING:** Lighting Services  
**LIGHTING RESTORATION:** New Grand Light  
**ROOF AND SKYLIGHT CONSTRUCTION MANAGER:** Turner Construction Company  
**ROOF AND SKYLIGHT REPLACEMENT:** Eagle River Roofing  
**ARCHITECTURAL MILLWORK RESTORATION:** OFS Corporation  
**CUSTOM MILLWORK FABRICATOR:** Whitehawk Construction Services  
**COMMERCIAL FLOORING SPECIALIST:** M. Frank Higgins & Co.

**SKYLIGHT MANUFACTURER:** Kingspan  
**CASSETTE FABRICATOR:** Modern Plastics  
**CARPET MANUFACTURER:** Bentley Mills

**Top:** The museum's halogen tracking lighting was replaced with new LED bulbs.

**Middle:** The skylights are arranged in groups of four, defining a grid of 20-by-20-foot structural modules that organizes the interior of the building.

**Bottom:** The roof is upheld by hollow cast-in-place concrete v-beams that contain ductwork and vents for air distribution.



RICHARD CASPOLE



RICHARD CASPOLE



JOHN HASSETT

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# Hardware

A sextet of new offerings ensures sleek, contemporary designs without compromising on privacy or performance. KP



**Milan | Kwikset**  
kwikset.com

Kwikset's smooth collection expands to meet added protection requirements of workspaces, integrating a keyed storeroom function for enhanced security.



**Schlage XE360 Series | Allegion**  
commercial.schlage.com

Designed to meet the needs of contemporary multifamily housing, this wireless lock features wi-fi and smartphone connectivity and offline capabilities for flexible protection.



**Rainstop Exterior Door Seal | athmer**  
athmer.com

This small but mighty detail seals the deal on insulation, energy savings, and sound isolation with self-leveling features to adjust to uneven floors.



**HES2S-150-A110 | Sugatsune**  
sugatsune.com

Sugatsune's three-way adjustable hinge is surface-mounted to the doorframe for easy installation while offering a concealed look for sleek designs.



**Hawa Concepta III | Häfele**  
hawa.com

This hardware system enables doors to turn 90 degrees and slide into wall niches or between cabinets for a clean, contemporary look.



**Witherby Collection | T Concepts**  
t-concepts.com

A collection of nonlocking ladder door pull handles from T Concepts exudes sophistication as it is finished by hand using leather and high-quality brass.

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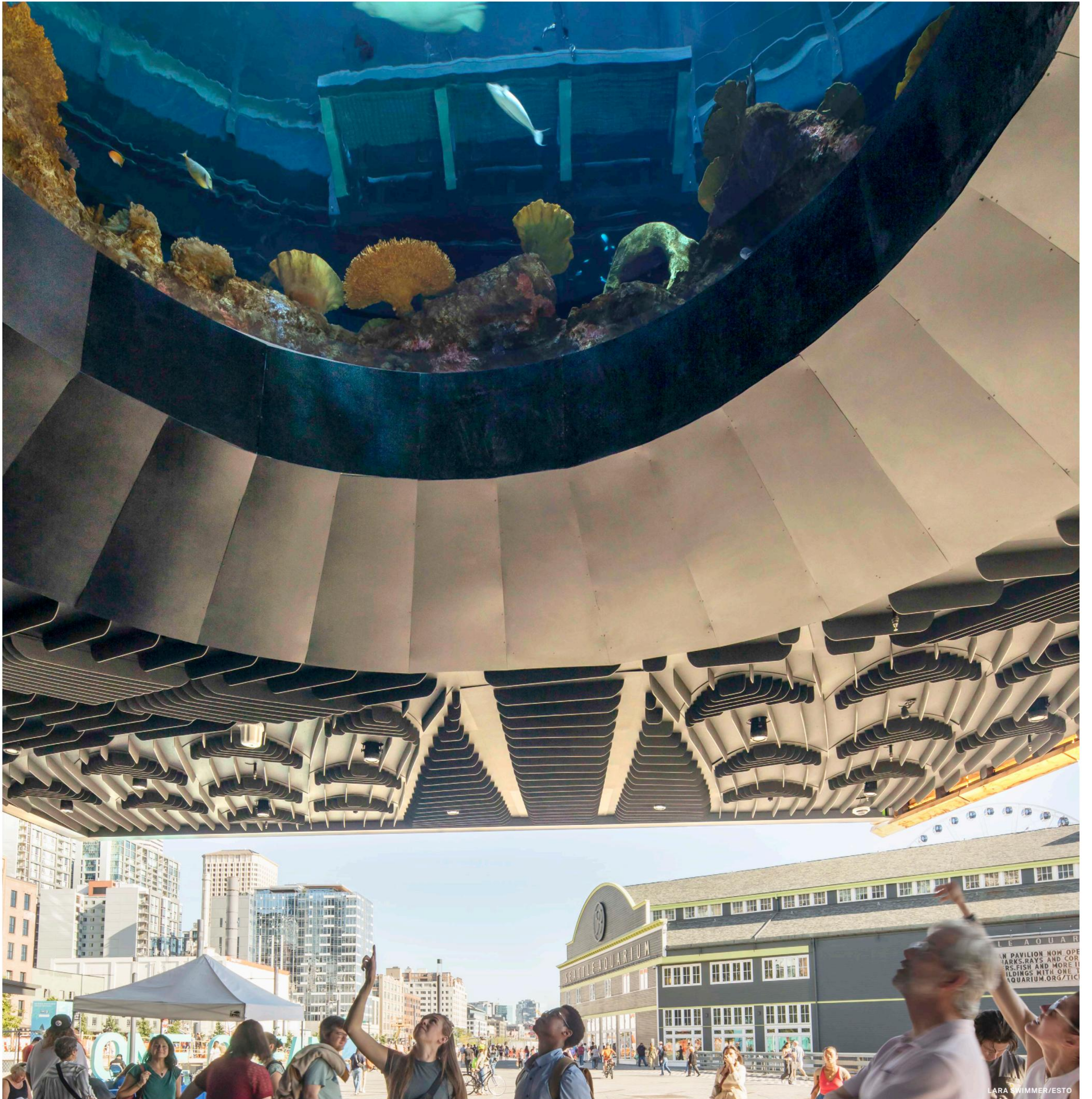
# Aquatic Openings

**LMN and Thinc Design use apertures to break the traditional mold for the new Ocean Pavilion at the Seattle Aquarium.**

Approaching the Ocean Pavilion, the newest addition to the Seattle Aquarium on the city's developing waterfront, one is immediately compelled to look up. Here, in the covered plaza at the pavilion's front door, visitors are granted a view inside the building's largest marine habitat, the Reef, without having to walk inside and without paying the price of admission. Through the round, curved acrylic oculus overhead, passersby are granted views of spotted eagle rays, leopard sharks, and brightly colored fish as they swim by.

This notion of breaking the typical "black box" aquarium mold, where illuminated marine habitats punctuate pitch-black interior exhibit

spaces, was paramount to the Ocean Pavilion design, which was led by Seattle architecture firm LMN and New York-based exhibition designers Thinc Design. Creating glazed openings in unexpected places, both on the building itself and the tanks inside, was a central design move. "Connecting habitat apertures and building openings was a way of linking the Indo-Pacific exhibits inside with the Salish Sea just outside," Hanna Kato, the LMN associate who served as project architect on the building, told *AN*. "We're trying to make the visitor aware that their actions here at home, in this part of the world, affect the other side of the ocean, too."





LARA SWIMMER/ESTO



LARA SWIMMER/ESTO

Because the 50,000-square-foot Ocean Pavilion contains so many glazed openings with views of the city and waterfront on its south and west facades, conducting extensive daylight studies was essential to ensuring the habitats would not be compromised by light penetration. Overabundant sunlight entering aquarium habitats can cause excess algae growth, as well as visual glare. Besides using geometry to ensure the habitat windows were far enough away from the building windows, the designers incorporated partial wing walls around the main viewing oculus of the Reef to shield it from daylight. The walls have the added benefit of creating a protected, vestibule-like feel for the viewing space.

"This main view into the Reef is even more majestic than we dared hope," said Tom Hennes, Thinc's principal and founder, who designed a large aquarium window for the California Academy of Sciences (CAS) in 2008. "The Reef' window is only three feet higher [than the CAS window], but we were stunned by how much of a difference that made to the immersive feel."

Using 3D visualizations, Thinc was able to incorporate refraction indexes from both the acrylic and the water itself to determine the precise curve of the acrylic on each of the habitat apertures. Curving the panel prevents distortions that would occur with a flat piece of acrylic and helps extend views into the tank. "When more of your peripheral vision is included, you feel more immersed in the view," added Hennes.

Throughout the Ocean Pavilion, the 28 acrylic habitat apertures vary in thickness, depending on the hydrostatic pressure weighing on each opening. "We design the shape of the inner surface of the acrylic, and the manufacturer does the engineering to determine the thickness and the distance the acrylic needs to extend past the opening to ensure the edges are not visible," explained James Pase, senior exhibition designer at Thinc.

For Ocean Pavilion's largest habitat window, the main view into the Reef, which measures 25 feet by 33 feet, acrylic manufacturer Reynolds Polymer created four individual 8-inch-thick acrylic panels, which were chemically bonded together in its Colorado factory. "We didn't want any joints put together in the field, partially because it would require a large, silicone joint, meaning the seam would break up that big, grand view," explained LMN's Kato. The massive 30,000-pound window took a week to truck to Seattle from Grand Junction, Colorado,

**Opposite:** LMN and Thinc Design placed glazed openings inside the building and out, attracting visitors on Seattle's waterfront.

and was craned into place.

The building also features large windows in back-of-house spaces where caretaking of the animals and habitats occurs, another atypical view for aquariums. Together, the apertures at the Ocean Pavilion help the Seattle Aquarium connect visitors to marine ecosystems, both inside and outside its walls. "We envisioned this as an aquarium of the future," said LMN partner Mark Reddington. "It's a place where we can engage people in a deeper understanding of the ocean and our connection to it."

**Lauren Gallow is a design writer and educator living in Seattle.**

**DESIGN ARCHITECT:** LMN

**EXHIBIT DESIGN:** Thinc Design

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Field Operations

**STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING:** Magnusson Klemencic Associates

**ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING:** PAE Consulting Engineers

**LIGHTING DESIGN:** Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Design

**AV/ACOUSTICS:** Stantec

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Turner Construction Company

**FACADE SYSTEM:** Morin

**CLADDING:** TAAN Forest

**CURTAINWALL:** Oldcastle Building Envelope

**AQUARIUM WINDOWS:** Reynolds Polymer Technology

**DOORS:** Unified Doors and Hardware

**ROOFING:** Hydrotech

**WATERPROOFING:** Aquafin

**WALL AND CEILING PANELS:** Richlite

**CARPETING:** EGE Carpets

**RESINOUS FLOOR:** Neogard

**RESILIENT FLOOR:** EcoSurfaces

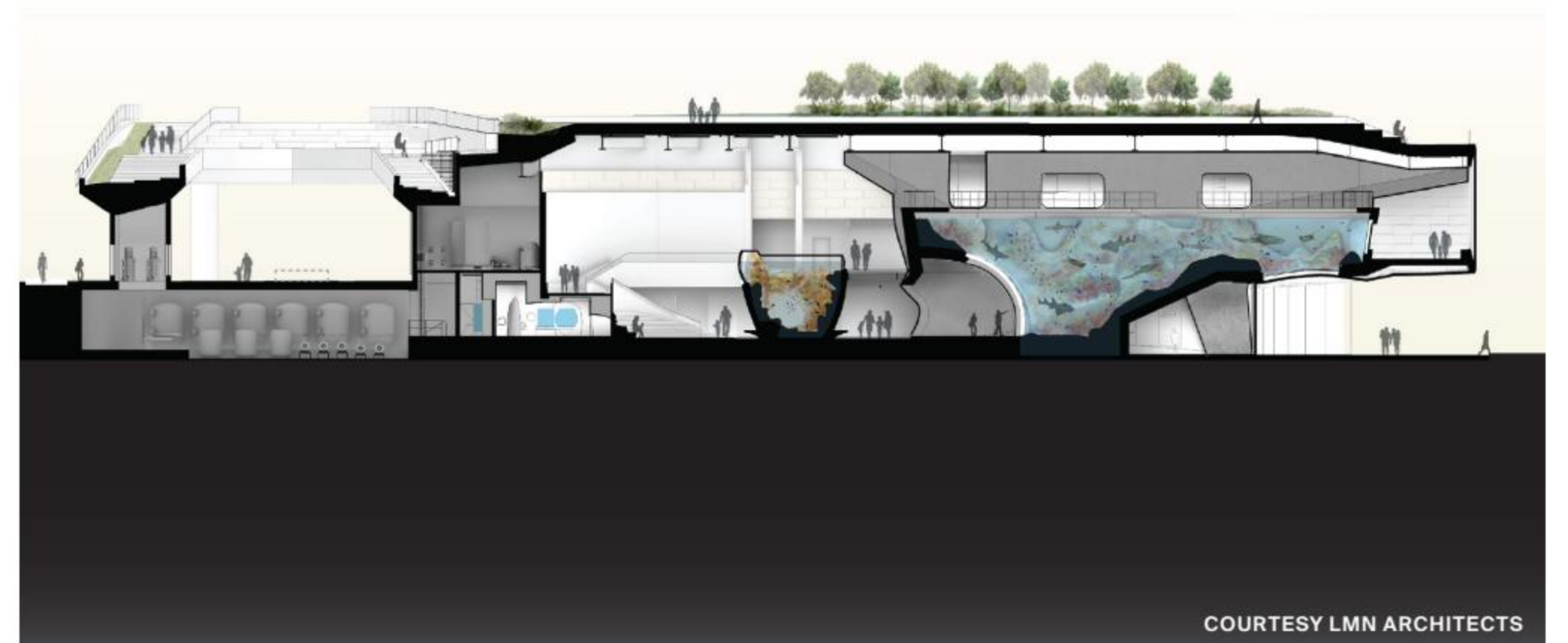
**CEILING:** Armstrong

**LIGHTING:** Insight Lighting

**Top:** The aquarium's west facade features inset windows to reduce the effects of natural light from the building's western exposure.

**Left:** Ocean Pavilion's view into the Reef features 8-inch-thick acrylic panels, which were bonded in a factory and trucked to Seattle.

**Below:** The cantilevered main entrance, at right, leads to the Reef, a 500,000-gallon immersive experience, and One Ocean Hall; above is a rooftop garden.



COURTESY LMN ARCHITECTS

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**Flo Acoustic Panels** | modularArts  
modulararts.com

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**SOUNDSCAPES SHAPES** | Armstrong World Industries  
armstrongworldindustries.com

Now available in seven standard wood-look designs, these acoustic panels are offered in various geometric shapes to build warm, sculptural acoustic environments.

**Drop | Turf**  
turf.design

Turf refreshes its Drop acoustic ceiling baffle with its Gridlock patented connection, which allows for height adjustability.



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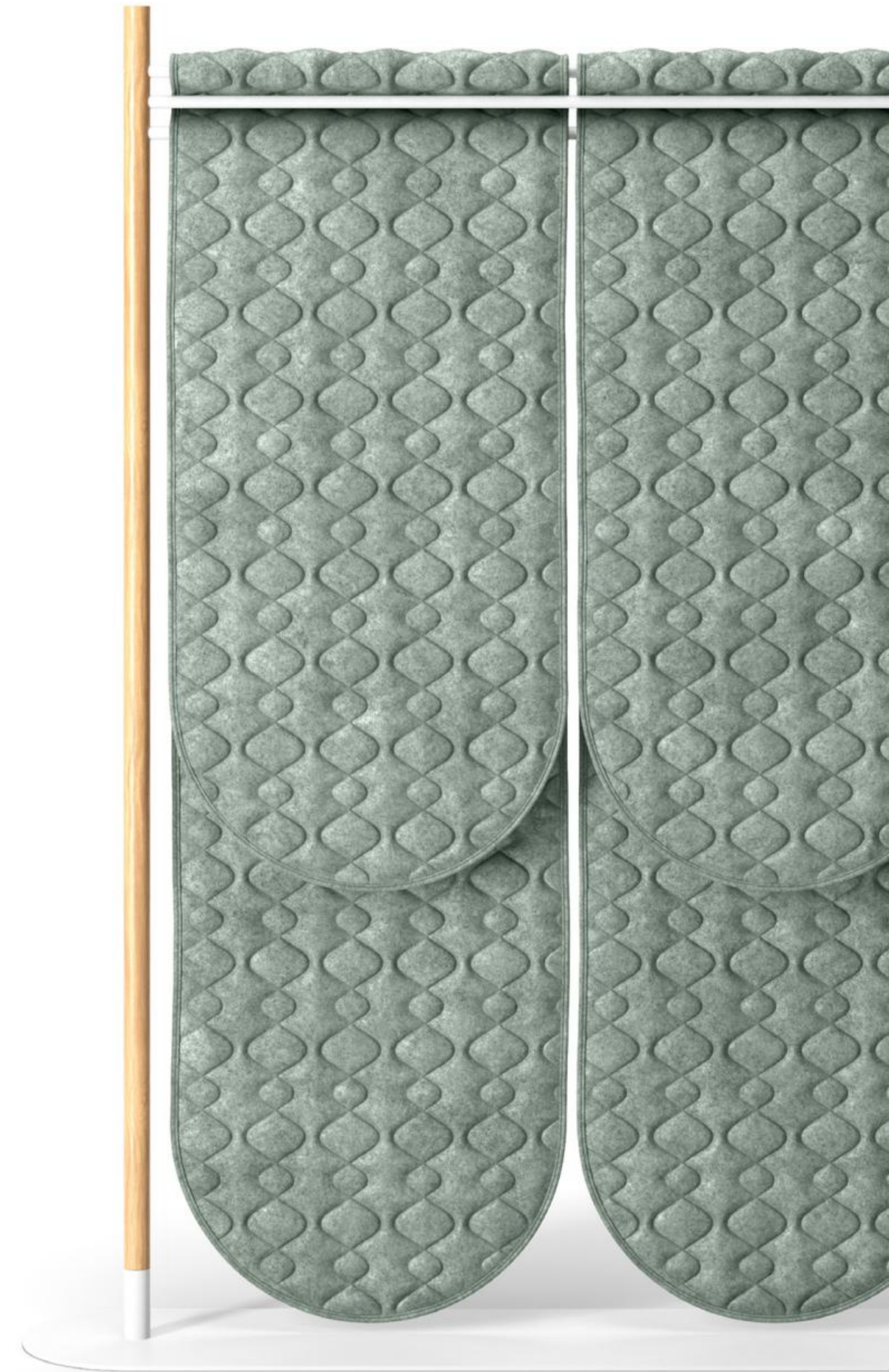
**Visarlo** | Hush Acoustics  
hushacoustics.ca

Capable of integrating bespoke patterns, Visarlo is printed fabric panels that can be wall-mounted, ceiling-mounted, and even backlit.



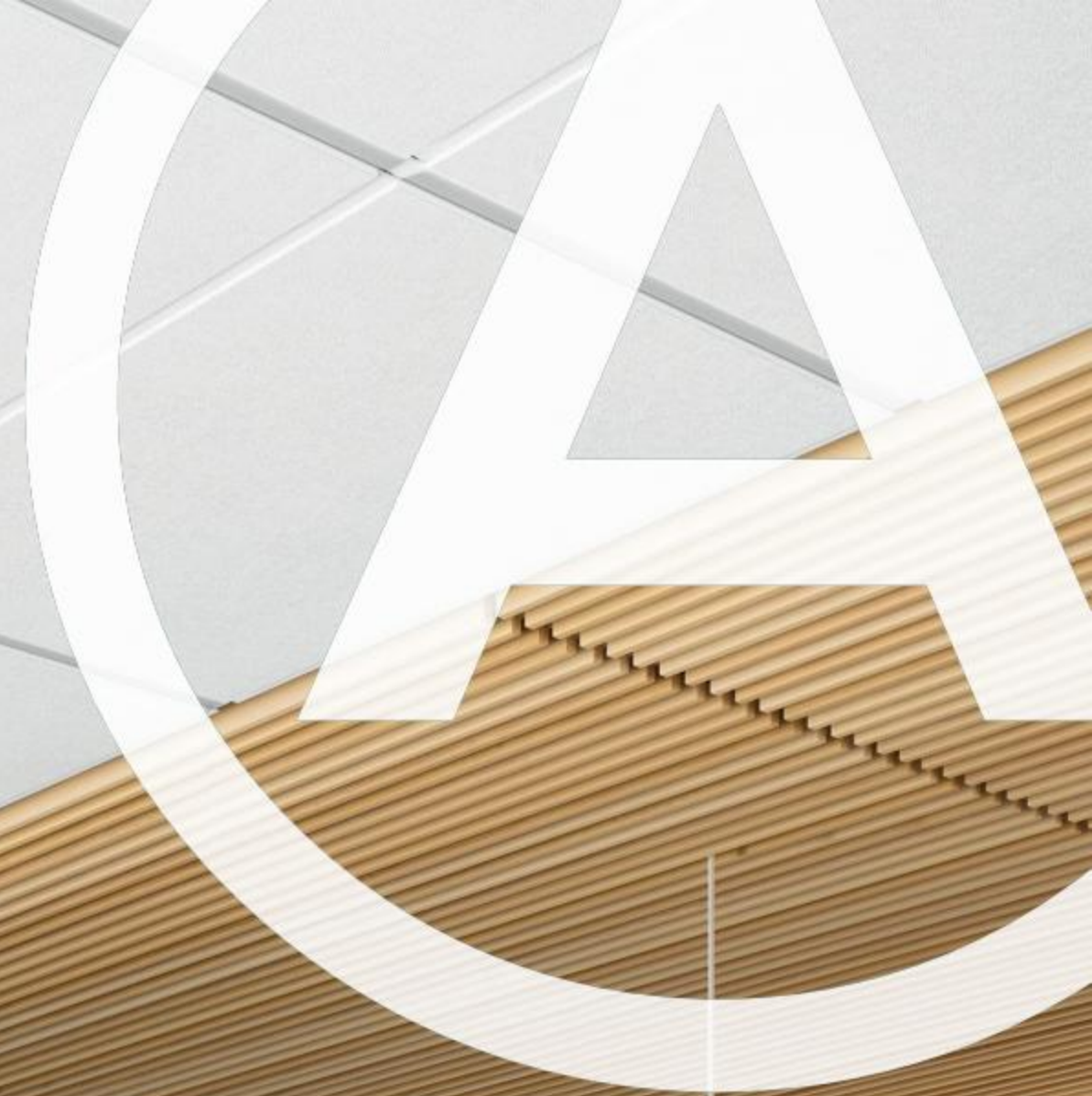
**X-FELT** | BAUX  
baux.com

Designed in collaboration with Form Us With Love, these panels and tiles draw inspiration from Japanese Zen gardens using PET that can be recycled at the end of its life.



**Hangout Acoustic Room Divider** | MIO  
mioculture.com

Placing Quiltforms—acoustic quilts with various color and stitch patterns—on an H-frame stand, this product is a two-in-one acoustic solution and partition.



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# On the Waterfront

**KPF's T. Rowe Price Headquarters embraces Baltimore's industrial vernacular with double-height windows and dark gray aluminum mullions.**

Like many postindustrial port cities, Baltimore has long struggled to reclaim its waterfront, which is interrupted and obscured by a series of derelict sites once devoted to shipping and manufacturing. One of the largest redevelopment projects addressing this underutilized space is an effort to remake Harbor Point, a 27-acre promontory that juts out into the Patapsco River. Led by Baltimore's Beatty Development, the plan is adding office, retail, residential, and hotel programs, as well as a pedestrian-accessible public park, to the former brownfield site.

For more than a century—roughly from 1845 to 1985—Harbor Point was occupied by Baltimore Chrome Works, for a time one of the world's

largest facilities for the refinement of chromium, a heavy metal that is commonly added to car paint for its anticorrosion properties. This extended period of chemical activity severely polluted the site, necessitating a massive remediation effort before construction could begin.

While in many cases owners can excavate brownfield sites to remove contaminated soil and waste, Harbor Point's toxicity was so extreme that the entire site was capped with a synthetic film and layers of clean soil that seal away the plant's noxious debris.

Built upon this new foundation is Harbor Point's most recent addition: the new corporate headquarters of T. Rowe Price, an investment firm with deep Baltimore roots.

Designed by KPF Architects, the structure eschews the typical office tower paradigm, instead assuming a horizontal orientation formed by two side-by-side volumes that furnish 180-degree views of the harbor. These bar-like office blocks are slightly askew from each other, angling outward to increase field of vision within the floor plate and create extra space at the center of the project for a public plaza and lawn. The plaza draws visitors inward to the office's transparent lobby from Harbor Point's new network of waterside parks.

KPF used studies of the city's 19th- and early-20th-century architecture to inspire the design of the building's facade. The firm adapted the material palette and proportions of these



heritage structures to the contemporary standards of class A office space.

To reduce the perceived scale of the 9-story office blocks, oversized window openings span two floors, with the slab edge concealed via a shadow box positioned near the middle of the frame. If you look carefully, you'll notice that the window's mullion and transom are slightly off center, shifted to the top corner of the frame.

"That detail was actually really deliberate," Jeffrey Kenoff, design principal at KPF, told *AN*. "We offset the mullions so that they wouldn't split the view right down the middle. It's a small move, but it makes a notable difference—it frames the harbor instead of blocking it. Much like the historic bay windows that inspired the design, the larger pane becomes a focused, almost cinematic view, while the smaller panel works more like a sidelight."

In lieu of a conventional all-glass envelope, KPF framed the headquarters' large window openings with dark gray aluminum mullions, a decoration that evokes the site's industrial past. The base of the building is wrapped by a board-formed, cast-in-place concrete podium; its materiality negotiates the transition from dark aluminum to the verdant landscaping that surrounds the office.

"We even worked with the fabricator to develop a custom color, Harbor Point Gray, invented specifically for the project, drawn from the tones of the bays and the city itself," Kenoff

added. "The goal was to create something bold but never ostentatious—something that reflects T. Rowe Price's values of stewardship and longevity and that feels grounded in the identity of Baltimore."

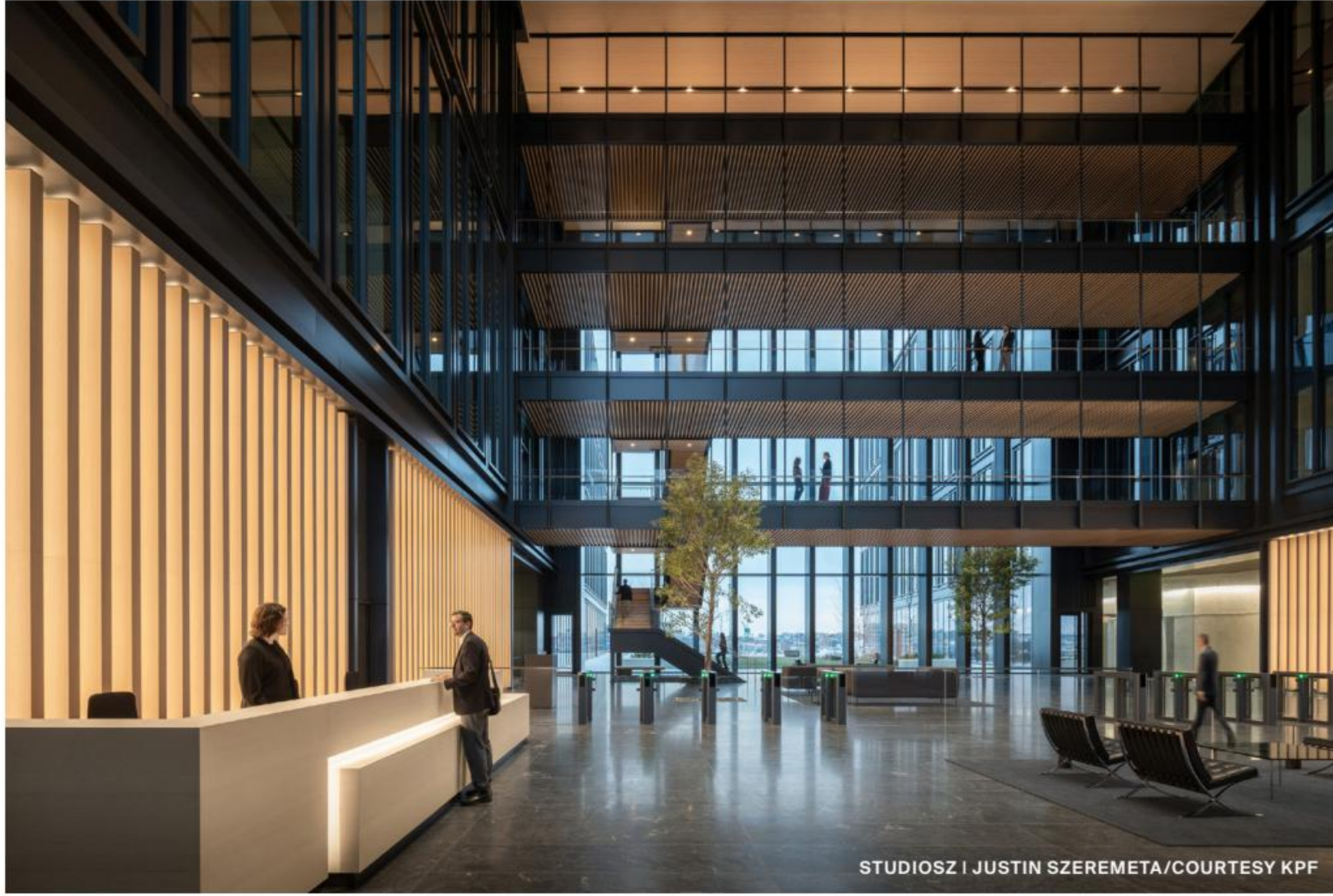
As the development takes shape, Harbor Point is in one sense restored; it will once again be a hub of commercial activity. However, this time that activity will occur in a manner that invites pedestrians to the water. **TS**

**DESIGN ARCHITECT:** KPF  
**ARCHITECT OF RECORD:** Beatty Harvey Coco Architects  
**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** iO Studio  
**INTERIOR DESIGN:** KPF (atrium); Gensler (tenant interiors)  
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER:** Morris & Ritchie Associates  
**ELECTRICAL ENGINEER:** JBD Engineering  
**CIVIL ENGINEER:** RK&K  
**LIGHTING DESIGN:** OneLux  
**ACOUSTICS:** Longman Lindsay  
**SIGNAGE/WAYFINDING:** Younts Design  
**FACADE CONSULTANT:** Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates  
**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Ventana  
**FACADE INSTALLATION:** CGI  
**GLASS:** Viracon  
**ROOF:** Carlisle  
**VERTICAL CIRCULATION:** TKE

**Opposite:** The new T. Rowe Price headquarters is made up of two nearly parallel office blocks connected by a transparent glass atrium.

**Below:** A sequence of suspended platforms cross the spacious lobby, allowing workers to traverse between the two office volumes while taking in sweeping views of the harbor.

**Bottom:** Mature trees are planted inside the lobby, bringing the greenery of the harbor's new park landscapes to the building's interior.



STUDIOSZ | JUSTIN SZEREMETA/COURTESY KPF



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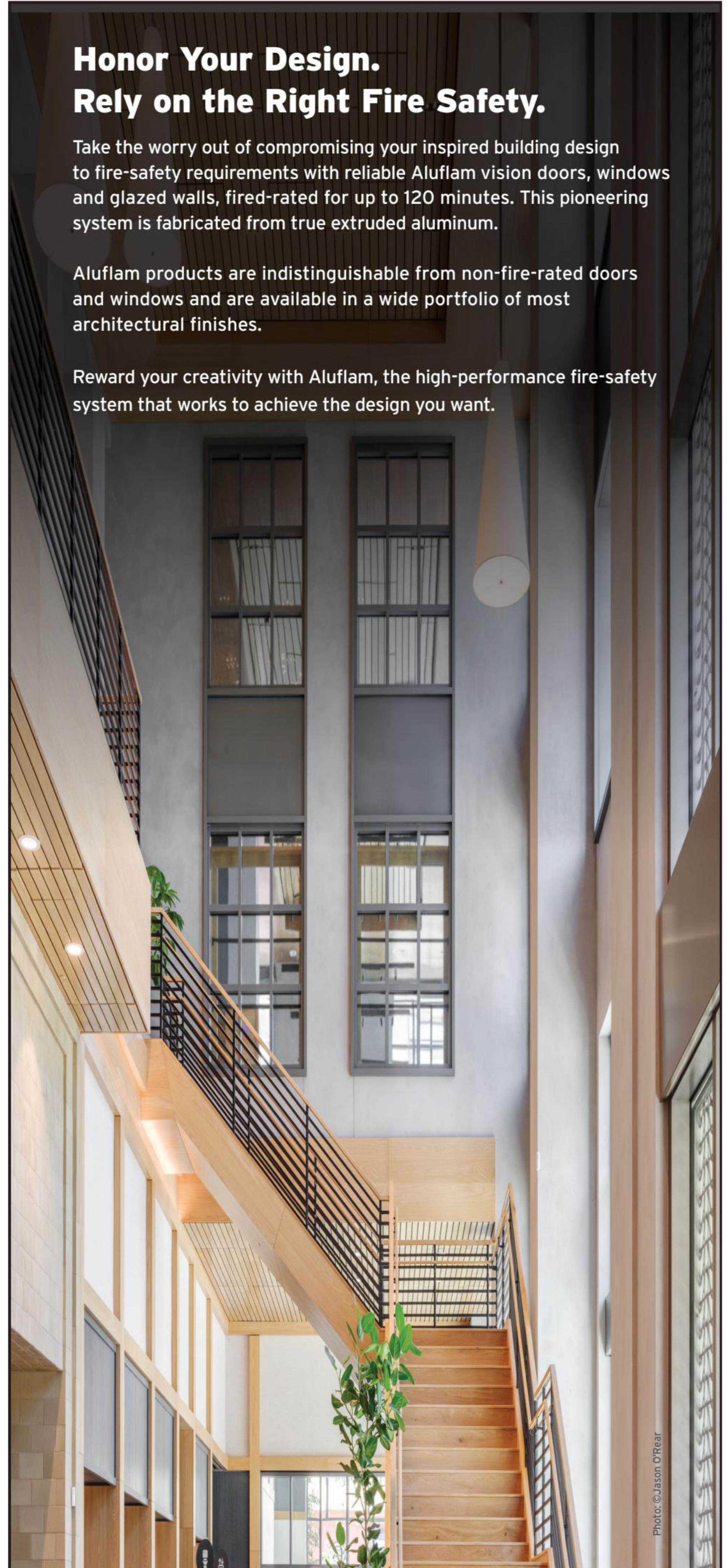


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**Fallbrook Series** | CRL  
crlaurence.com

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**Wall&Door** | Lualdi  
lualdiporte.com/en

Wall&Door is a boiserie and partition system composed of modular panels to define and harmonize different surfaces of the same setting.



**Carola** | Door  
door.it/en

This innovative freestanding and circular sliding system creates sculptural spatial division with Italian textiles along an easy-to-install aluminum upper track.



**Tek Vue** | Teknion  
teknion.com

A glass office-front system, Tek Vue focuses on single-center glazing and thin-profile frames with the addition of curved glass corners for modern, unique partitions.

**Dimensional Dividers** | Móz Designs  
mozdesigns.com

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# Resources

This listing combines companies specified in case studies, product highlights from Design Editor Kelly Pau, and additional recommendations, all in one place.

## DOORS & SLIDERS

**Albed**  
albed.it

**Brombal**  
discoverbrombal.com

**Clopay**  
clopaydoor.com

**Crown Doors**  
crowndoors.com

**dormakaba**  
dormakaba.com

**Ellison Bronze**  
ellisonbronze.com

**Goldbrecht**  
goldbrecht.com

**JELD-WEN**  
jeld-wen.com

**Kalwall**  
kalwall.com

**Kolbe Windows & Doors**  
kolbewindows.com

**LaCantina Doors**  
lacantindoors.com

**MI Windows and Doors**  
miwindows.com

**Milgard Windows and Doors**  
milgard.com

**NanaWall**  
nanawall.com

**Panda Windows & Doors**  
panda-windows.com

**panoramah!**  
panoramah.com

**Pella**  
pella.com

**Pirnar Doors**  
pirnardoors.com

**Raydoor**  
raydoor.com

**Reveal Windows & Doors**  
revealwd.com

**Reynaers Aluminum**  
reynaers.com

**Rimadesio**  
rimadesio.it

**Schweiss Doors**  
bifold.com

**Solarlux**  
solarlux.com

**Superior Windows & Doors**  
swdimports.com

**Therma-Tru**  
veriscollection.com

**Unified Door & Hardware**  
udhgroup.com

**VELUX**  
veluxusa.com

**Weather Shield**  
weathershield.com

**WinDoor**  
windoorinc.com

**YKK AP America**  
ykkap.com

**FritsJurgens**  
fritsjurgens.com

**Häfele**  
hafele.com

**Halliday + Baillie**  
hallidaybaillie.com

**INOX**  
inoxproducts.com

**Kwikset**  
kwikset.com

**Lowe Hardware**  
lowe-hardware.com

**Norton Rixson**  
nortonrixson.com

**Rocky Mountain Hardware**  
rockymountainhardware.com

**SARGENT**  
sargentlock.com

**Schwinn**  
schwinn-group.com

**Sugatsune**  
sugatsune.com

**Sun Valley Bronze**  
sunvalleybronze.com

**T Concepts**  
t-concepts.com

## INTERIOR & OPERABLE PARTITIONS

**3A Composites**  
3acompositesusa.com

**Arden Home**  
ardenhome.com

**Chemetal**  
chemetal.com

**CRL**  
crlaurence.com

**Door**  
door.it/en

**Euro-Wall**  
euro-wall.com

**func.**  
funcconnect.com

**Gemino System**  
geminosystem.com

**Lasvit**  
lasvit.com

**Lualdi**  
lualdiporte.com/en

**Maars Living Walls**  
maarslivingwalls.com

**Modernfold**  
modernfold.com

**Móz Designs**  
mozdesigns.com

**Naava**  
naava.io

**PK-30 System**  
pk30system.com

**PurOptima**  
puroptima.com

**Teknion**  
teknion.com

## SOUND & PRIVACY

**3form**  
3-form.com

**Allsteel**  
allsteeloffice.com

**ALPOLIC**  
alpolic-americas.com

**Arktura**  
arktura.com

**Armstrong World Industries**  
armstrongworldindustries.com

**BAUX**  
baux.com

**Framery**  
frameryacoustics.com

**Haworth**  
haworth.com

**Hush Acoustics**  
hushacoustics.ca

**Kirei**  
kireiusa.com

**Kvernstoen, Rönholm & Associates**  
kracoustics.com

**Loftwall**  
loftwall.com

**MIO**  
mioculture.com

**modularArts**  
modulararts.com

**Momentum Textiles & Wallcovering**  
momentumtextilesandwalls.com

**Nienkämper**  
nienkamper.com

**Poppin**  
poppin.com

**Turf**  
turf.design

**Unika Vaev**  
unikavaev.com

## WINDOWS & SKYLIGHTS

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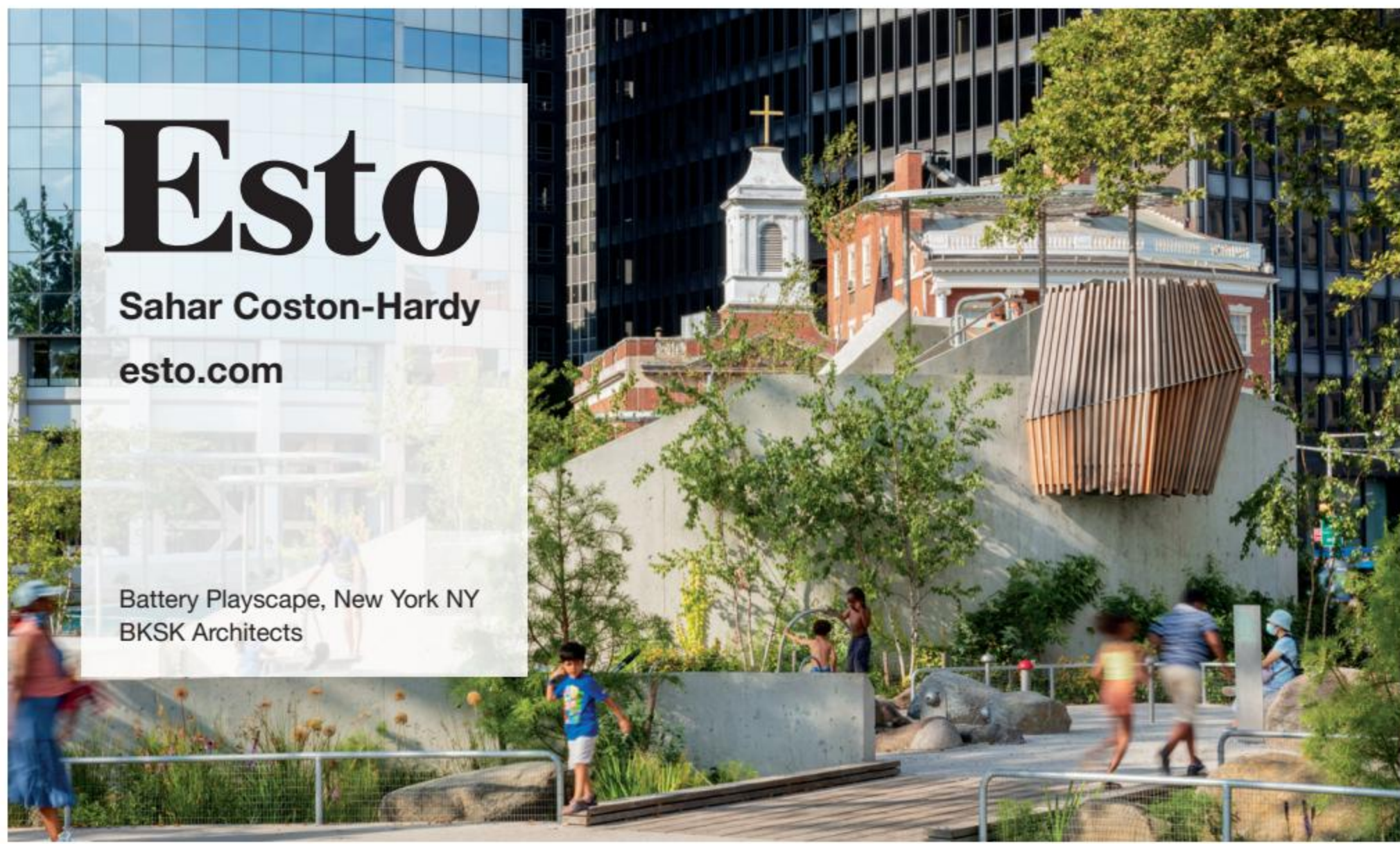
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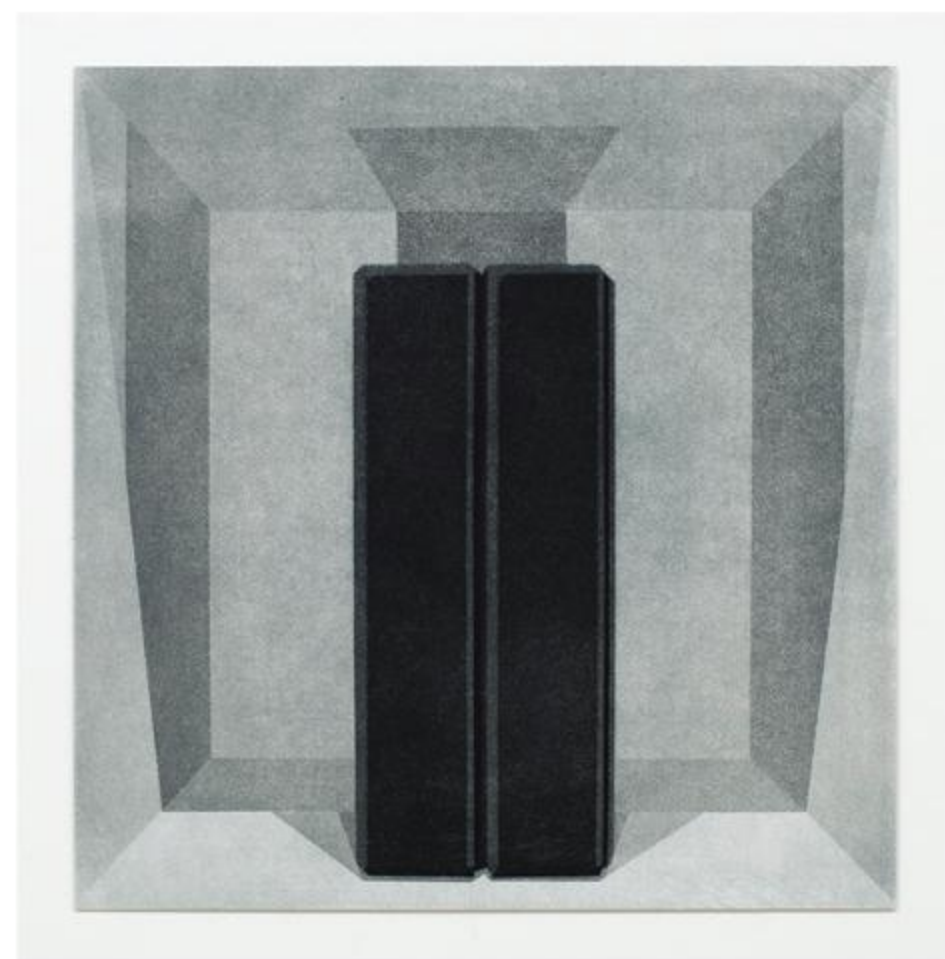
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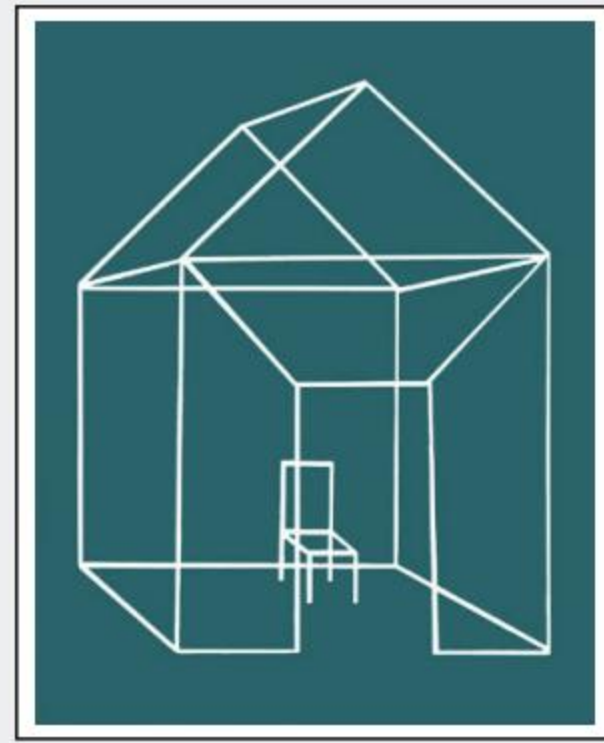


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# 63 Happenings

## Exhibitions



ORIOI TARRIDAS

Installation view: José Parlá: *Homecoming*, Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2024–25.

### Cardboard Genius: The Architectural Marvels of Kambel Smith at the Germantown Historical Society

Self-taught artist Kambel Smith displays 11 of his intricately constructed cardboard models in this hometown show. Known for his use of found materials, Smith creates versions of architectural landmarks completely from memory, often focusing on the built environment in Philadelphia.

5501 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144  
[historicgermantownpa.org/exhibits/](http://historicgermantownpa.org/exhibits/)

Through June 29

### Capital Brutalism at the National Building Museum

Exploring the history, current state, and future of seven controversial buildings and the Metro system in the nation's capital, this timely show ends its run this month. Leading architecture firms Studio Gang, Brooks + Scarpa, Gensler, and others contributed reimagined versions of several structures.

401 F Street, Washington, D.C. 20001  
[nbm.org](http://nbm.org)

Through June 30

### Framed Views at Chicago Architecture Center

CAC's first-ever photo competition, during Open House Chicago, yielded 1,300 entries. The curatorial team selected 12 finalists apiece in interior, exterior, architectural detail, and black-and-white categories, and a panel of photographers and architectural experts selected winners. The top photos are now on display, showcasing fresh views of Chicago's beloved architectural landscape.

Orientation Space, 111 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60601  
[architecture.org](http://architecture.org)

Through July 6

### José Parlá: Homecoming at Pérez Art Museum Miami

The Cuban American painter, a favorite collaborator of architectural firms, including Snøhetta, gets his first solo museum exhibition in his hometown. The show is set around a mock-up of Parlá's Brooklyn studio and features a new series of works and a site-specific mural.

1103 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, Florida 33132  
[pamm.org](http://pamm.org)

Through July 6

### Maayan Elyakim: Game of Goose at Neutra VDL Studio and Residences

The multidisciplinary artist presents a site-specific exhibition that draws its name from the famed board game, exploring movement, chance, and shifting mental landscapes. The show aims to transform the modernist residence into a reflective and dynamic experience, weaving a narrative shaped by the building's history as a home, social hub, and workspace.

2300 Silver Lake Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90039  
[neutra-vdl.org](http://neutra-vdl.org)

Through July 20

### Jackie Castillo: Through the Descent, Like the Return at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

The Los Angeles multimedia artist creates works that explore the relationship between city infrastructure, collective memory, and the isolation and anxiety felt by the working class. Castillo's first institutional solo exhibition features a sculptural installation and photographs that cast the built environment in a different light.

1717 East 7th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021  
[theicala.org](http://theicala.org)

Through August 31

### Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei at Seattle Art Museum

The celebrated conceptual artist gets a new retrospective featuring over 130 works crossing four decades at SAM's downtown hub, part of a Seattle takeover of sorts that includes a Lego version of Monet's *Water Lilies* (at Seattle Asian Art Museum) and a forthcoming showing of bronze sculptures at the Olympic Sculpture Park.

1300 1st Avenue, Seattle, Washington 98101  
[seattleartmuseum.org](http://seattleartmuseum.org)

Through September 7

### Reading Room at The MAK Center for Art and Architecture

R. M. Schindler's Kings Road House gets re-inhabited with practices of reading and showcasing publications, including artists' books and printed matter from Los Angeles-based practitioners exploring the intersections of art and design, with commissioned furniture by Ryan Preciado.

Schindler House, 835 North Kings Road, West Hollywood, California 90069  
[makcenter.org](http://makcenter.org)

Through September 14

### Ragnar Kjartansson: The Visitors at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

The Icelandic artist's beloved 2012 video installation returns to SFMOMA, which presents this hourlong work projected across nine screens, transporting viewers to the serene upstate New York setting where he and his musician friends performed in rooms around a historic mansion.

151 Third Street, San Francisco, California 94103  
[sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org)

Through September 28

### Oscillating Spaces at the Canadian Center for Architecture

This exhibition, curated by Anneke Abhelakh, looks at the Rhône Glacier—undergoing fast melting and transformation processes—as a case study to reflect on environmental challenges. Juxtaposing glacier cartography plus photography, film, ecclesiastical documents, tourist souvenirs, and architectural archives, the show questions the role of architecture when confronted with a shifting climate, an unstable landscape, and a site that possesses a life of its own.

1920 Baile Street, Montreal, Quebec H3H 1R4, Canada  
[cca.qc.ca](http://cca.qc.ca)

Through October 26

### Superfine: Tailoring Black Style at The Met

With set design by Torkwase Dyson, the Costume Institute's 2025 exhibition presents a cultural and historical examination of Black style through the lens of dandyism. The show explores the importance of style to the formation of Black identities in the Atlantic diaspora, and features a presentation of garments, paintings, photographs, and decorative arts from the 18th century to the present.

1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10028  
[metmuseum.org](http://metmuseum.org)

Through October 26

### Kinetic Traces at the National Academy of Design

This group exhibition, curated by Natalia Viera Salgado, features 28 artists and architects elected as National Academicians in fall 2024. Their work ranges across painting, sculpture, video, and architectural design. Featured architects include Sara Caples, Lise Anne Couture, Florian Idenburg, Hani Rashid, Jesse Reiser, Ken Smith, Nader Tehrani, and Nanako Umemoto.

519 West 26th Street, 2nd floor, New York, New York 10001  
[nationalacademy.org](http://nationalacademy.org)

Through September 13

### The Many Lives of the Nakagin Capsule Tower at MoMA

Opening July 10, this much-anticipated exhibition is devoted to Kisho Kurokawa's influential structure consisting of 140 single-occupancy capsules, which were prefabricated and attached to two concrete-and-steel cores in Tokyo. Capsule A1305, a fully restored unit from the tower's top floor that was salvaged when the building was sadly demolished in 2022, will be on display, along with original drawings, photographs, and more.

11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019  
[moma.org](http://moma.org)

July 10, 2025–July 12, 2026

Check [archpaper.com/calendar](http://archpaper.com/calendar) for updated listings and other exhibitions and events.

## Events

### 3 Days of Design

Copenhagen's signature design fair's 12th edition is earning buzz as perhaps the second most important gathering of designers, architects, and aesthetes after Salone del Mobile in Milan. The program includes events spread across eight districts in the Danish capital, with exhibitions, installations, talks, and tours centered around the theme "Keep It Real."

Copenhagen, Denmark (various locations)  
[3daysofdesign.dk](http://3daysofdesign.dk)

June 18–20

### A&D Market Day

Focusing on the design world—from architecture and interiors to retail and residential—this one-day event for the trade will feature in-person events in A&D Building showrooms. Learn about new products, discover up-and-coming talent, study trends and innovations, and more at this special event.

Architects & Designers Building, 150 East 58th Street, New York, New York 10155  
[adbuilding.com/trade-only-events](http://adbuilding.com/trade-only-events)

June 24

### Los Angeles Design Festival

Billed as a global platform for creative exploration, cultural exchange, and design as a tool for transformation, this festival will explore "Design Futurism," with four major content tracks: L.A. Forever (curated by Frances Anderton), Revenge of Analog, The Ancestors Have Answers, and We Can See the Future (cocurated by Radha Mistry and Ronni Kimm). The programming includes talks, exhibitions, and block parties in design districts.

Los Angeles (various locations)  
[ladesignfestival.org](http://ladesignfestival.org)

June 26–29

### Strange & Familiar: Architecture on Fogo Island

This film, directed by Marcia Connolly and Katherine Knight, considers the future of Fogo Island, a remote enclave off the coast of Newfoundland. After the collapse of the cod fishing industry, local entrepreneur Zita Cobb partnered with architect Todd Saunders to create an inn for contemporary artists on the island's coastline. The documentary explores the architectural project that emerged from the collaboration between founders and guests. The film screens as part of a community-building day in Vermont.

BigTown Gallery, 99 North Main Street, Rochester, Vermont 05767  
[adfilmfest.com/sp\\_films/strange-familiar-june-28/](http://adfilmfest.com/sp_films/strange-familiar-june-28/)

June 28

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# 64 Review

Washington, D.C., holds a place in the collective imaginations of many, and that imagined place takes many forms: capital, seat of power, collection of monuments, eighth-grade field trip destination, home. The city's ambitions have long been aspirational, with imposing Beaux Arts structures and Neoclassical buildings, heavy in their white marble both in actual mass and perceived importance; in the last century rendered in concrete as a means of economical expressions of grand ambition and large-scale bureaucracy.

The city is also the setting for Dr. Amber N. Wiley's new book, *Model Schools in the Model City: Race, Planning, and Education in the Nation's Capital*, which illuminates complicated histories of Washington's school system and its buildings, specifically emphasizing the rise of Black educational facilities designed to inspire despite longstanding segregationist attitudes and planning policies. Wiley, whose credentials include a doctorate in American Studies, a master's in Architectural History, and a BArch, deftly weaves together documentation of the district's tumultuous history to recall, as she writes in her introduction, how:

"Black Washingtonians used public education as a means of racial uplift, in the face of entrenched white resistance and repeated assertions of white supremacy. For Black Washingtonians, it was the school building—a permanent structure, made of sturdy material—that was the physical realization of Black liberation, agency, and the right to exist as citizens of the United States."

Loosely spanning the period immediately after the Civil War up through the late 1970s, with a present-day epilogue, the book dives deep into records to unearth pieces of history, which, as Wiley stitches them together, reveal the struggles and successes of Black Washingtonians in achieving built monuments to academic greatness as well as a damning pattern of deliberate erasure of that same history by white preservationists. Three schools—the Sumner School, Howard University's School of Architecture, and Dunbar High School—play significant roles, illustrating the importance of physical structures in holding literal and figurative space for Black Washingtonians to grow and thrive, but only through decades of hard-fought antisegregation battles.

The Sumner School, named after abolitionist Charles Sumner, was designed by Adolf Cluss and completed in 1872, the year after Washington gained its first municipal government. With newfound autonomy and budgets, D.C. opened three post-Civil War schools for Black residents of Washington, among which the Sumner School building is standing today. "The design and erection of the Stevens and Sumner schools, as well as the establishment of Howard University," Wiley writes, "were all landmarks to Black educational gains during the Reconstruction era."

The Sumner School's contemporaneous counterpart for white students, the Franklin School, was also designed by Cluss. Today, both the Sumner School and the Franklin School live on as museums: The latter became Planet Word following a renovation by Beyer Blinder Belle; the former was rehabilitated in 1986 and combined with the neighboring Magruder School into an award-winning, block-wide project that now houses the D.C. public schools archive, designed by Hartman-Cox Architects; Navy, Marshall & Gordon; and the Ehrenkrantz Group (today known as Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn). The continued existence of these two buildings is notable in that, as Wiley attests, buildings of importance to Black Washingtonians were not included by

white preservationists in their surveys of "sites of interest," thereby rendering them vulnerable to demolition and redevelopment under the guise of urban renewal.

Black communities suffered from wholesale displacement in the city's Southwest quadrant; Black Washingtonians fought to exert more control over the urban

profession; graduates of Howard University School of Law had already proved instrumental in efforts to desegregate D.C. from the 1940s through the 1960s. "The roots of public school desegregation in the United States were sown at Howard University, and in the segregated Washington public school system," Wiley writes. Howard's architecture school

arose in the aftermath of the 1968 assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the subsequent uprising, but yielded a cohort of professionals eager to shape the city around them.

The work happening in and around Howard University was the foundation upon which Black activist architects built. Within this cultural milieu of urban renewal, desegregation, and later, urban unrest, Black activist architects fought against and worked to leverage federal legislation to gain design commissions for projects ranging from housing to school buildings.

One such building arising from these commissions was for a new location of Dunbar High School, which arrived in 1977, just over a century after the Sumner School. Designed by Bryant & Bryant, two brothers who graduated from Howard University, Dunbar featured split levels connected by a central set of ramps rising 10 stories tall, perhaps drawing reference to Paul Rudolph's Art & Architecture Building at Yale (where the author studied). Bryant & Bryant's Dunbar replaced an existing 1916 building after a fraught preservation battle; Old Dunbar had been "the epitome of Black excellence in the first half of the twentieth century," whereas New Dunbar, as the Bryant & Bryant building was occasionally called, would be a symbol of hope enshrined in a modern design befitting its community. "Black architects at Howard and those practicing in Washington," Wiley explains, "mirrored the modernism of the early to mid-1960s historical milieu: forward-looking, concrete, Brutalist structures that were monumental, announcing their grandeur and durability." Dunbar was that monument, situating a tower within a low-slung residential neighborhood whose outward views, framed by windows to inspire the students within, included both Howard and the Capitol.

Wiley cleverly creates ties across a century through inclusion of praise for Dunbar from *The Washington Post's* architecture critic Wolf Von Eckardt, who wrote of the school's innovative open plan that it was "something that Washington's public school builders have not dared since 1868 when the Franklin School...was built and won first prize as a model school building at the Vienna Exposition of 1873."

Although the three schools explored here are case studies in the pursuit of Black educational excellence, they represent just a few fragments of the compelling tapestry Wiley unfurls in *Model Schools*. Although far too many of the schools discussed in the book have been demolished—including the second Dunbar as well as the first—Wiley's writing reinforces their legacies by resurfacing them and highlighting their importance in Washington's history.

**Deane Madsen is a Washington, D.C.-based writer and photographer specializing in architecture.**

## Model Schools in the Model City: Race, Planning, and Education in the Nation's Capital

Amber N. Wiley

The University of Pittsburgh Press

\$75



renewal process, with activist architects emerging from Howard University to guide local reconstruction lest it be done to them instead of by them. Howard established its School of Architecture and Planning in 1970, and its students teamed with local practicing architects to provide more opportunity for African Americans within the design

Walter E. Fauntroy exhibiting an early Sulton-Campbell concept for Shaw Junior High School, 1969. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

# 65 Review

**M**any books pose the question: What can architecture do that's good? Not enough ask what architecture can do for evil. Historian Aaron Cayer's book *Incorporating Architects: How American Architecture Became a Practice of Empire* does exactly that. The book traces architecture's role in postwar and Cold War American imperialism through the history of Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall (DMJM), the firm later known as AECOM. Often viewed by critics and practitioners as a shadowy behemoth whose role blurs the line between an architecture and engineering firm and a defense contractor, AECOM is the biggest such firm in the world, with its thumb in seemingly every pie, including less savory ones such as inquiries into the reconstruction of a post-urbicide Gaza and water infrastructure for the now-beleaguered NEOM megaproject in Saudi Arabia. Were—one will learn in Cayer's book—it ever thus!

Did you know, for example, that DMJM was implicated in the Watergate scandal? And in the Jakarta program that saw the extrajudicial killing of civilians under the guise of rooting out communism? Did you know that its relationship with the Saudis goes back to the 1970s? Or that DMJM bought a warplane and refurbished it with surveying equipment that would later be used in the construction of U.S. air bases abroad? Or that it was, for a time, bought out by the Ashland Oil company, which sought to use its geospatial services for oil production? Did you know that it did a building for the CIA? That it stored its records in the Iron Mountain underground fortress? Did you know that the funding for such imperial projects was often underwritten by the construction of schools and public infrastructure for the City of Los Angeles?

Cayer, an assistant professor at Cal Poly Pomona and a longtime critical voice with regards to the labor of architecture (he is also a board member of The Architecture Lobby) is well suited to the task of linking architecture and empire. Here he offers insight into a murky world that's difficult to historicize simply because, for matters of national security, it's difficult to access. This makes *Incorporating Architects* not only a history of a firm but an object lesson on how to assemble a historical narrative through pieces of information—letters, interviews, news clippings, FOIA requests, etc.—obtained beyond an elusive central corporate archive. Helping Cayer along, however, is the role of famous architects, which itself does not go unnoticed. While he's always been pegged as a corporate architect, there are passages in this book where César Pelli, who got his start at DMJM in the 1960s doing office parks for defense contractors, sounds like Karl Rove.

*Incorporating Architects* does the field a great service by demonstrating the staggering extent to which firms like AECOM were embedded within the state and thereby complicit in war profiteering, espionage, and foreign policy. It also shows how changes in the nature of work and the evolution of business models to adapt to new economic realities—i.e., the expectation of economic downturn after the postwar boom—both reinforced the appeal of government contracts as a stabilizing factor and enabled firms to adapt to and exploit a post-Fordist world through changes in their very structures. These changes were even helped along by the AIA, whose 1970s reforms liberalized (in the Reagan sense) the business side of architecture, taking what was once a “gentleman's profession,” a trade bound by a shared, ostensibly apolitical culture and a set of ethics, and reshaping it in the image of management consultants and mergers and acquisitions. AECOM, here, is an object lesson in a bigger claim, namely

the overarching role of incorporation and conglomeration on architectural form, ethics, practices, and business. Cayer writes: “While adopting the terms, tools, and techniques of the state, architecture and engineering firms produced and made visible the stages of capitalist development through the design of their firms and of everyday urban infrastruc-

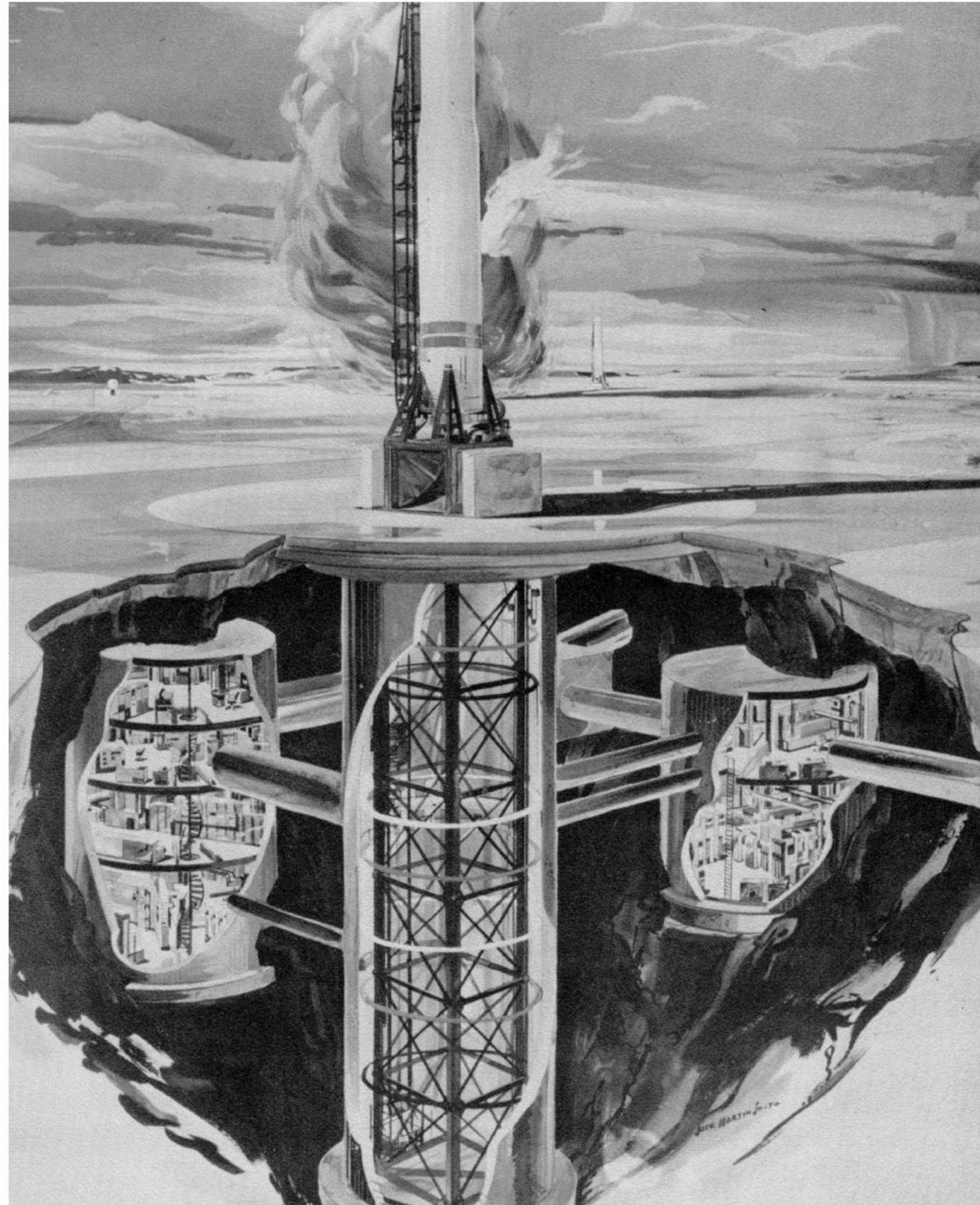
architecture firms within the military industrial complex writ large; concurrent publications about architectural practice; and the culture of secrecy that emerged around architectural work in the postwar era, with a special focus on the hidden work of women in computation and archiving.

Of these chapters, the front three are most compelling to the general reader, though the back half of the book has much to offer those more interested in critical interpretation and historiography. Compared to most academic histories of architecture, *Incorporating Architects* is very readable and at times even feels like a spy thriller. Through its studying of large architecture firms as businesses having a vested interest in their own self-perpetuation—interests that, for AECOM in particular, are intertwined with the maintenance and construction of American hegemony—architectural production is stripped down to its political and material bolts. The mechanism of stability in an unstable world was, as implied by the title, conglomerates, what Cayer defines conceptually as “firms with many firms within them—as social, physical, economic, political and technological infrastructures through which land, money, people, resources, materials, or business flow in or out and change over time.”

As for the architecture itself, while it's always tempting to attach politics to form willy-nilly, especially with regards to the emergence of postmodernism and the corporate headquarters big firms like DMJM were producing in the 1960s and '70s, Cayer avoids this trap, even in his critical analysis of the buildings themselves (in particular Cesar Pelli for DMJM's Teledyne headquarters), by pairing organizational objectives with architectural thinking. “The building,” Cayer writes of Teledyne, a sprawling, horizontal structure defined by the mirrored skin made possible by Pelli's inventive use of inverted mullions, “quite literally took on the form of an organization chart transposed onto the ground, thereby maintaining the modernist relationship between form and function while also recognizing the difficulty of designing for a future building that did not yet exist.” This is my favorite part of the book, in part because it disrupts the typical postmodern analysis—from Jameson to Jencks—of the slick-skinned buildings as ones that, to paraphrase Cayer, *represented* postmodernism in “their engagement with language and their abstracted relationship to capital” rather than *produced* it.

Overall, Cayer's book fulfills many objectives, all of which should be considered crucial for understanding the role architecture plays in the bad infinity, as Adorno put it, of the world we've made. It examines in detail structures of labor and bureaucracy; exposes relationships between what is ostensibly “an art” and military and political power; and interrogates how architecture as a practice portrays, theorizes, and reproduces itself. After all, conglomeration remains a crucial way to conceal corporate structures and funds, to plan for future contingencies, and to offset liability. It continues to shape architectural practice and culture, even in “bespoke” firms like SHoP and Gehry Partners. In other words, there's a little AECOM in a whole lot of architecture.

**Kate Wagner is the architecture critic at *The Nation*.**



## *Incorporating Architects: How American Architecture Became a Practice of Empire*

Aaron Cayer  
University of California Press  
\$29.95

ture.” This claim is substantiated throughout the book's six chapters. These respectively tackle the major structural changes in architecture firms as businesses after World War II; the history of conglomeration, especially at DMJM; how the firm's inner structures of center and periphery, core, and subsidiaries map onto the architecture it built; the history of

Rendering of a Titan I missile launcher by Jack Martin Smith. From: A Presentation of the Work of Daniel, Mann, Johnson, & Mendenhall: Company General Brochure, 1967. Stanley A. Moe papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

# 66 Comment

**S**teve Brooks is an incarcerated journalist at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center and the former editor in chief of San Quentin News. This article was cowritten by Brooks and AN news editor Daniel Jonas Roche.

“Nordic model” prisons are the latest trend in U.S. carceral architecture. California Governor Gavin Newsom’s administration is learning from Norway to transform San Quentin State Prison into San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, with help from Schmidt Hammer Lassen (SHL), headquartered in Denmark, and DLR Group.

Norway has much a stronger social welfare state than California and the U.S. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, imprisoning 1 in every 100 adults. California’s incarcerated population makes less than \$1 per hour and was even enlisted to fight the recent waves of Los Angeles wildfires, sparking criticism from human rights groups. California voters recently shot down Proposition 6, which was meant to “bar slavery in any form and repeal a current provision allowing involuntary servitude.”

Three forthcoming education and vocational training buildings by SHL and DLR Group stand to add new amenities at San Quentin as part of Newsom’s transformation plan with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The state’s goal is to reduce recidivism through education, job training, and substance treatment. Is the “Nordic model,” sometimes used interchangeably with the “California model,” transferable in a state where prison labor is a multibillion-dollar industry? When, if ever, is it ethical to design carceral spaces?

Lori Coppenrath is DLR’s Justice + Civic Planning leader. She told AN the design for San Quentin “departs from conventional prison architecture through an open, flexible campus layout, emulating a community college environment, and increased connections between the built environment and nature.”

“This close resemblance to education spaces outside the correctional institution is part of the Nordic model’s normalization principle,” added Jette Birkeskov Mogensen, a senior project manager at SHL. “This will break down the institutional feel, introduce a human scale, and signal a new openness—not only to those who are attending classes inside the buildings but also to the entire San Quentin community.”

Deandre Brumfield, who’s incarcerated at San Quentin, is critical of the plan. “We didn’t even need these new buildings,” he said. “There are so many spaces sitting empty in the prison that could be repurposed and reimaged.” Instead of new amenities, Brumfield wants to see improvements happen where he sleeps. “The windows could be redesigned in a way so that fresh air and sunlight can stream into the building. Put some plant life in the housing units, paint the walls, put up some pictures. Make our housing units more humane.”

## San Quentin Today

California has 35 state prisons. Of that number, eight will adopt Nordic model philosophies as part of Newsom’s plan. “San Quentin’s construction project will provide vital rehabilitation opportunities and drive a once-in-a-generation transformation of California’s prison system,” public information officer Todd Javernick told AN on behalf of CDCR. “Recidivism is greatly reduced when incarcerated people are able to take advantage of education, vocational, and other rehabilitative programming that will be expanded by the new center.”

Built in 1852, the “Bastille by the Bay” looks like a power plant with 20-foot-high walls, gun towers, and barbed-wire fencing. Today, there are four barrack-shaped, moldy, beige residential blocks, which can each house up to 800 incarcerated individuals: North, West, East, and South blocks. There are five tiers of cramped, double-occupancy cells, each approximately 4 feet by 10 feet.

The iron bar doors expose inhabitants to the stale air inside the building. Ventilation is poor. Windows are welded

shut. The only fan is broken; generations of pigeons live within its cobwebs and dusty blades. The roof leaks during the rainy season. Broken water mains, leaky showerheads, and poor plumbing leave rancid pools of water. Many sinks and toilets need repair. Sickness permeates the recycled air, giving hundreds of people a relentless seasonal cough.

San Quentin’s architectural design left its inhabitants helpless against COVID-19. During the pandemic, over 3,500 incarcerated individuals inhabited a space meant for 3,084 people. COVID spread like wildfire once it entered the facility, infecting more than 2,500 and killing 28 incarcerated people, plus one correctional officer. There was no room for social distancing.

Arthur Jackson has been incarcerated at San Quentin for 30 years and remembers what it was like during COVID. “I filed a grievance a month before COVID hit San Quentin,” Jackson said. “I complained that if someone didn’t open the windows in the housing unit, this virus is going to kill us.”

## San Quentin State Prison Rehabilitation Center

California is looking to Norway, with help from a Danish architecture practice, to revamp its prisons. Will it work?



AESTHETICA/COURTESY SHL

Jackson contracted COVID and watched helplessly as people he knew died. “The ventilation systems still need fixing, and the windows need to be unwelded and opened to let fresh air into where we live.”

Gary Green, who’s been incarcerated at San Quentin for the past decade, was rushed to an outside hospital for treatment during COVID. He wasn’t able to breathe on his own and suffered for a month. “I think they should have put a shield over the cell bars, like a sheet of Plexiglas to protect each cell from the dayroom elements,” Green said. It was the “worst epidemiological disaster” in prison history, according to an appeals court. San Quentin was fined over \$400,000 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

It was immediately after this crisis when Governor Newsom shared his plan, in March 2023, to convert San Quentin State Prison into a “model rehabilitation center.” The state subsequently hired DLR Group and SHL to bring a touch of Norwegian style inside the complex. The San Quentin Transformation Advisory Council was formed that May, which included SHL, DLR Group, McCarthy Building Group, Vanir, CDCR, and incarcerated people at San Quentin.

CDCR wanted to build a “progressive design-build set-up,” it said, by forming an advisory council that connected the design-build team and incarcerated population at San Quentin. Recommendations by People in Blue and

others for San Quentin were issued in January 2024. SHL and DLR Group shared renderings of the project the following November, as reported in architecture media outlets, albeit with zero mention of the human rights problems swirling around San Quentin at that time.

## San Quentin Tomorrow?

If all goes according to the plan by CDCR, SHL, DLR Group, and others, three 2-story buildings with autumn-plum exterior walls and full-height windows will make up an 80,000-square-foot campus within the prison. Rooftop balconies will provide a picturesque view of Mount Tamalpais and bay waters off the peninsula. These buildings will be for education and vocational training purposes.

The \$239 million campus will have 28 classrooms, a media center, tech space, a library, counseling center, and multipurpose rooms. It will have a store, cafe, a central plaza, courtyards, and space for social gatherings. Corrections staff will also have administrative offices and restrooms that serve both employees and the incarcerated population.

San Quentin’s South Wall will be removed, Coppenrath said, which could improve circulation. “People can choose their own pathway to the cafe, library, and media center, the latter [of] which provides training opportunities relevant to the current job market, including audiovisual production and a coding program,” she elaborated. Forty-five trees will be planted, Coppenrath noted, and plants and wildlife will provide an air of humanity and “normalcy.”

*Normalcy* is a key word here. The words *normal* and *normalize* appear 39 times in the original plan from 2023. To make things “normal,” recommendations include eliminating San Quentin’s “Death Row” and replacing it with housing; the plan also suggests converting all cells from two-person bunks into single-occupancy units. But overshadowing this place of supposed humanity and “normalcy” will be an antiquated cathedral of decaying concrete and steel, designed for punishment and death. How can that ever be normal? And should it be?

The 2025–26 CDCR budget, as interpreted by the Legislative Analyst Office, allocates funds to hire 25 new correctional officers. The 2027–28 budget would hire another 22 officers. In other words, the proposed campus at San Quentin would be inundated with uniformed correctional officers. This will contradict the purpose and intent of these supposedly “trauma-informed,” “normal,” and “humane” buildings, even if the people inside them share the same bathrooms.

Separate but related, in 2019, SHL finished the New Correctional Facility Nuuk in

Greenland, which applied the Nordic model in that country. At the heart of this thinking was rejecting punitive measures and replacing them with education and community offerings, much like the California model. “What the projects in Nuuk and San Quentin share is a fundamentally human-centric approach to architecture, rooted in our perspective on people and the unique context of each site. Our design philosophy is shaped by curiosity, openness, and respect for the individuals involved, regardless of the project’s typology, budget, or scale,” SHL’s Mogensen said.

Dr. Chester Lee, a professor at Emerson College in the Netherlands, lectured at San Quentin last April about Scandinavian penal philosophy. Lee is skeptical of the Nordic model’s application in California, as are many inside San Quentin. “We have a system focused on social inclusion,” Lee said at the April lecture. “We believe in mercy and compassion.”

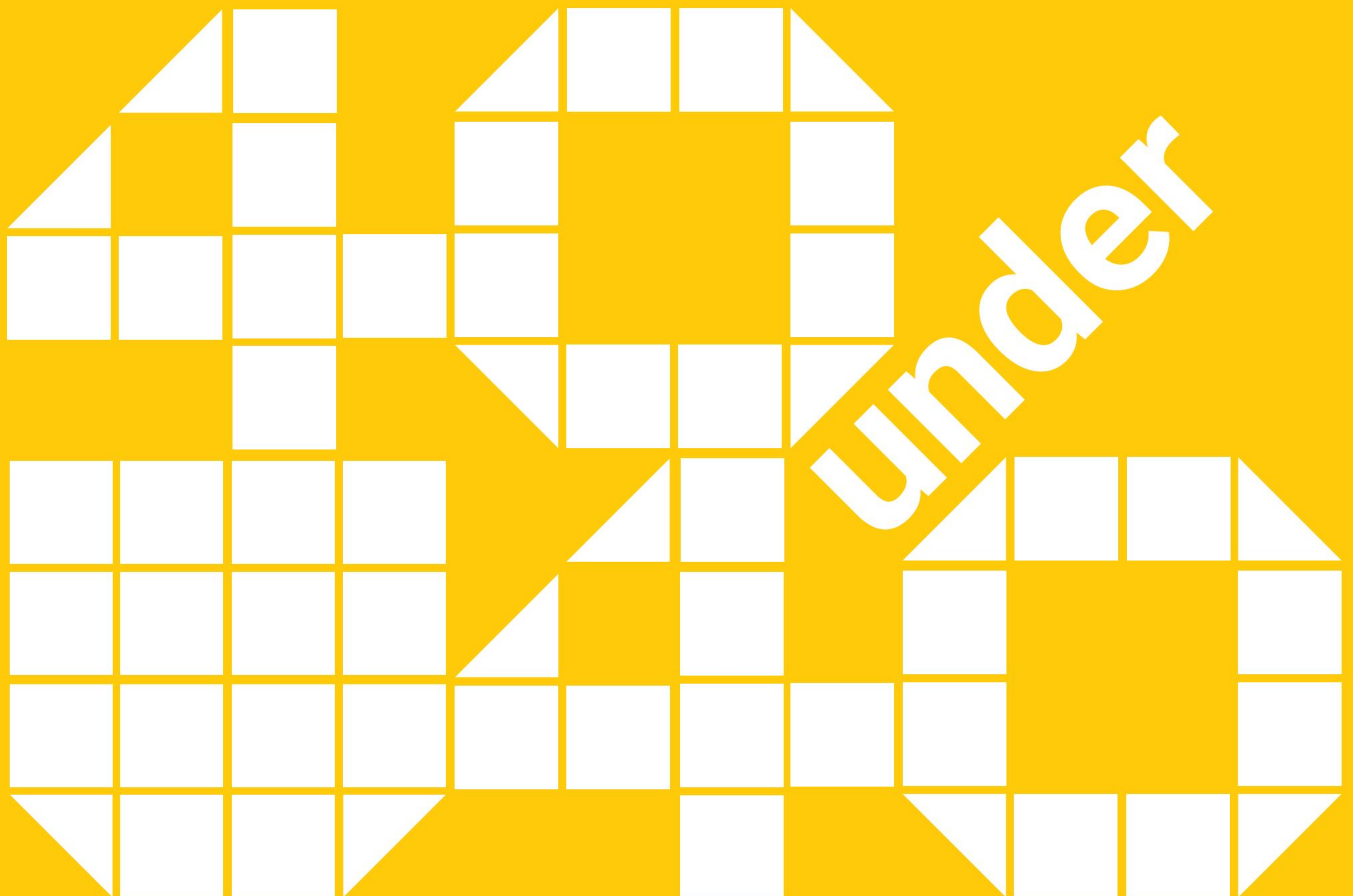
Can the culture of prison be changed with new architecture? Perhaps one day CDCR will realize that going out of business is the only true sign of success.

Three 2-story buildings with autumn-plum exterior walls and full-height windows will make up an 80,000-square-foot campus within the prison.

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