



THE DESIGN WORKSHOP 1998-2005 DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, INTERIOR DESIGN AND LIGHTING

PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN

# The Design Workshop 1998-2005

Department of Architecture, Interior Design and Lighting

Department of Architecture, Interior Design and Lighting  
Parsons The New School for Design  
25 E. 13th Street  
New York, NY 10003  
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# *The Design* *Workshop* 1998-2005

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PARSONS **THE NEW SCHOOL** FOR DESIGN

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Parsons The New School for Design

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**Front and back cover:** *Entry to the Common Ground Community*, 2004 Design Workshop Project, photograph: Tara Lockitch



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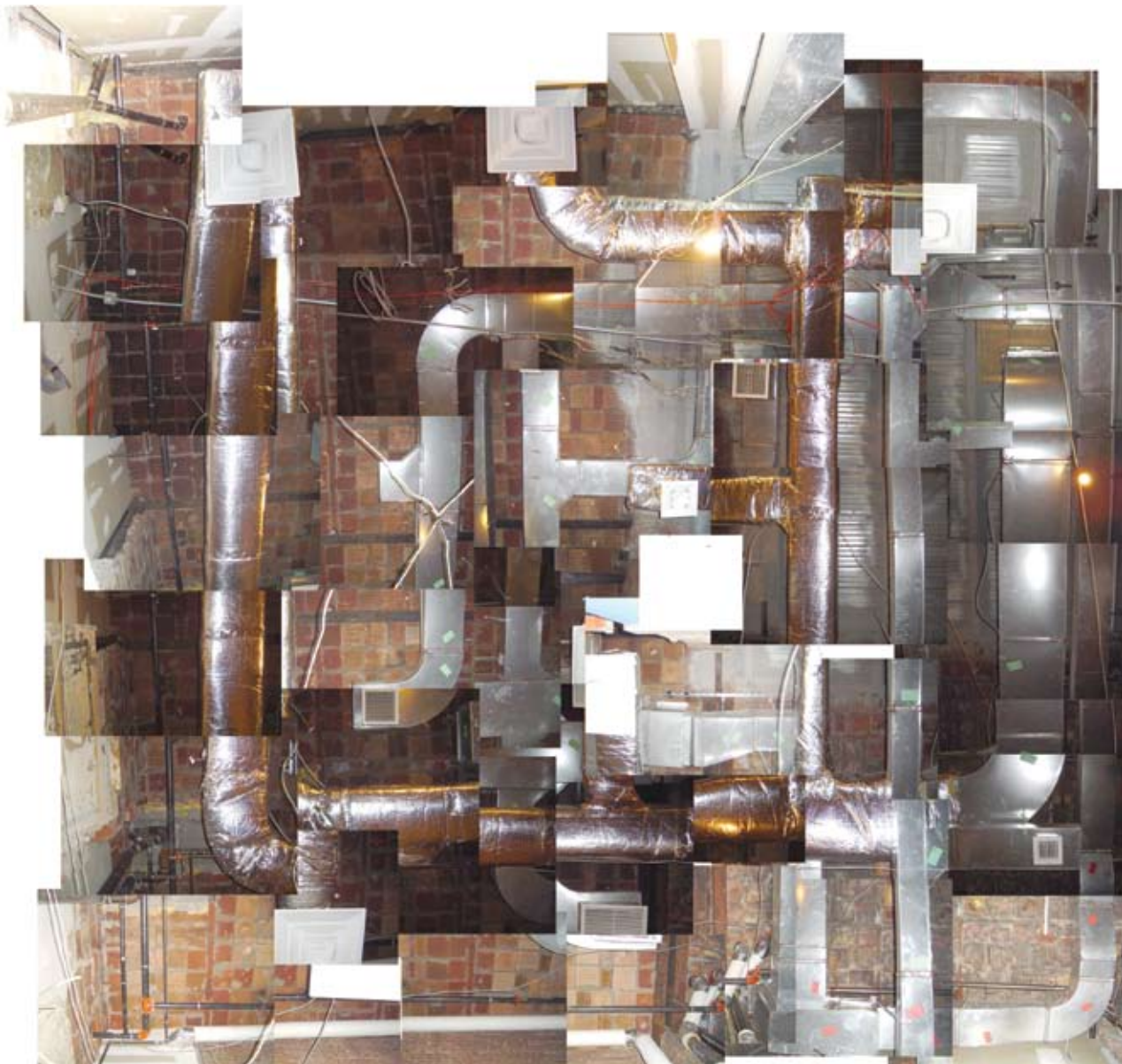
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ceiling duct collage, 2004 common ground community

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## PREFACE

In 1998, the year before I became chair of the department, I was asked to teach *The Design Workshop*. The new design-build program was in its second year and because it lacked both funding and clients willing to entrust their architectural fate to second year graduate students, I proposed to then department chair, Karen Van Lengen, that the architecture students design and build their own department facilities. As it turned out, this became the first *Design Workshop* project to actually be built, and although it was a small-scale undertaking it provided a large foundation for what would follow. This small book provides a brief critical history of the six projects that came after as well as some thoughts about what still lies ahead.

I wish to thank Paul Goldberger, the dean of Parsons, for his introduction and I gratefully acknowledge that his long-standing support of *The Design Workshop* well precedes his deanship. Thanks as well to Kenneth Frampton for his essay and his example of unwavering commitment to material practice. Unbeknownst to him, Kenneth has been the de facto conscience of *The Design Workshop*. I also want to recognize David J. Lewis who, as Director of the M.Arch program since 2002, has provided it with extraordinary leadership. *The Design Workshop* will have a bright future in his hands.

Of course, most important to thank are the students. Their enthusiasm for and commitment to *The Design Workshop* have been instrumental in its flourishing and their pride in its accomplishments has set its compass.

***Peter Wheelwright, Chair***

***Department of Architecture, Interior Design and Lighting  
Parsons The New School for Design***







## INTRODUCTION

It is not news to observe that the education of architects in the United States for the last generation has often been defined by a struggle between the theoretical and the practical, not to say also between the conceptual and the tectonic, and even between the beautiful and the useful. And it will come as no surprise to point out that generally in schools with high academic ambitions, the theoretical, the conceptual and the beautiful tend to win out over the practical, the tectonic, and the useful. But not, I am happy to say, at Parsons. Here, thanks to the extraordinary program called *The Design Workshop*, the center of gravity in architectural education is shifted, not away from intellectual pursuits but toward a balanced and knowing integration of the academic side of architecture with the other realities that inevitably come into play in real architectural practice.

It is no exaggeration to say that *The Design Workshop* gives architectural education at Parsons a kind of equilibrium that exists in few other schools. Students not only deal with the concrete realities of physical construction; perhaps even more important, they deal with the complex process of working with clients to develop and refine a real and workable program, an element of architectural practice which is treated in most architectural education as fixed and absolute, and yet at the same time may well be a piece of make-believe. Real clients have real needs, and they do not always fit neatly into architects' concepts. But it is at the core of an architect's mission to bring his or her concepts to the table, and to use them to elevate a client's aspirations. The task is how to serve a client's real needs, while not compromising all higher aims in the name of that service. *The Design Workshop* teaches students how to begin to navigate between these conflicting priorities.

It also reminds architectural students that their profession has an honorable tradition of *pro bono* work, a tradition that today is far too often ignored. Architecture is social service, as much as it is form-making. The New School, of which Parsons is a division, is an institution founded on the premise that social responsibility and civic engagement are a fundamental part of intellectual inquiry. Parsons, for its part, emphasizes the connections between design and the real world, not to allow practical concerns to overshadow aesthetic ambitions but to do the opposite – to underscore the importance of design by placing it within the context of real life. *The Design Workshop* does the same thing, and connects the practice of architecture with the highest ideals of citizenship.

**Paul Goldberger, Dean**

**Parsons The New School for Design**



## FORWARD

Despite the time-honored pedagogical precepts of John Dewey I would hazard a guess that there are very few schools of architecture in which the common consensus as to the value of “learning through doing” translates into a course in which students go through the experience of realizing a full-size operable structure with their own hands. This aspect of the Parsons graduate program in architecture seems by now to have become a tradition, if not exactly a permanent feature since each year a new subject has to be found for *The Design Workshop* to put its hand to, and beyond this funds have to be raised to subsidize the enterprise. If that weren't sufficiently daunting there is evidence of a tendency for each successive workshop to become more ambitious in scope and scale than its predecessor. This is perhaps a laudable impulse, but one that has to have its limit if the pedagogical is to remain effective. After six successive more or less appropriately scaled realizations one has the sense that this limit was surely breached in 2004 when *The Design Workshop* took on the task of creating a new 2,400 square foot public entry and exhibition gallery within the previously derelict Prince George Hotel now under restoration for the Common Ground Community. In this instance, to a greater degree than before, students had to acquire rather demanding skills such as cement rendering and high quality plasterwork, not to mention all the difficulties encountered in connection with the renewal and rerouting of various services.

One of the most rhetorically impressive works realized under the auspices of *The Design Workshop* is surely the Glass Corner, a glass enclosed but modifiable 14-foot high volume comprising a lecture room and exhibition space, located in the very heart of the loft floor that accommodates the architecture department. As the departmental chair, Peter Wheelwright puts it this space has become the symbolic node of the school's formal and public identity.



One has the feeling in retrospect that some of the most successful workshops have turned on the ingenious transformation of loft space, as in the so-called Swing Room, once again within the main body of the school of architecture, where a series of rotating/sliding polycarbonate panels swing out from a long wall to provide temporary enclosures for either studio critiques or seminars. Something similar was achieved in the very next year when *The Design Workshop* took on the task of furnishing an open loft for the New York Studio Program of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design. This eventually led to the design and construction of large pivoting cabinets that could either be arranged so as to provide 20 separate artists' studios or, alternatively, these same units could be organized in a more open, linear formation so as to provide a single, articulated space for the end-of-year exhibition. As it happens the latest exercise has taken on a similar task of providing demountable space-dividing units for yet another loft/studio space, this time for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Artist-in-Residence program.

Perhaps the most visibly ambitious project to be achieved by this rather unique program was a commission in 2003 to design and build a small, free-standing, single story field house on the sports field of the Grand Street Campus High School in Brooklyn. This steel structure was an exemplary *tour de force* in rationalized modular construction; one which for obvious reasons has probably brought the program more public attention than anything else it has achieved to date.

Clearly students learn a lot of multiple "hands-on" lessons from taking a studio of this nature. These range from the actual fabrication and assembly of the component parts of a structure to confronting all the intractable bureaucracies that are inevitably involved in building in a city of this size, complexity and age, not to mention all the other vested

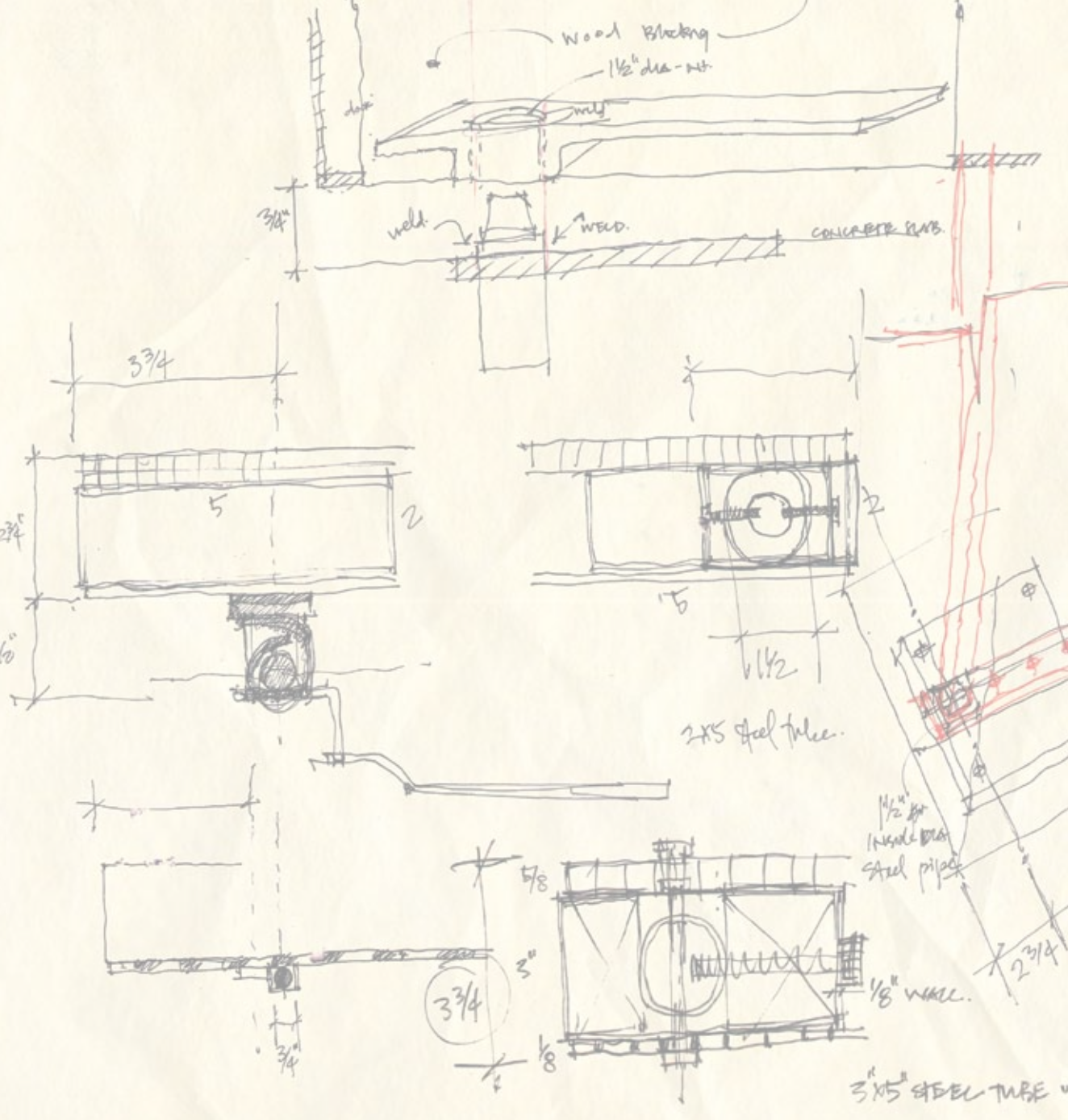
interests that are invariably involved and the all but arbitrary restrictions that are bound to crop up in the construction of any object larger than a piece of free-standing furniture. The students also learn a great deal about what used to be euphemistically called the Critical Path Method and hence about the virtues of correct sequential organization as opposed to the downside of learning the hard way, as they used to say.

In sum the Parsons *Design Workshop* has proven itself as a remarkably successful pedagogical initiative, one which, in many ways, stands as a kind of discreet challenge to all the other architectural schools in the New York area. In this digitally dominated, dematerializing age it is situated in the field of architectural education as a paradoxically anachronistic pedagogical stratagem in as much as it harks back, however inadvertently, to what used to be a mandatory requirement in the architectural department of the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen, namely, that every entrant to the five-year course had to serve a one-year apprenticeship as a carpenter in the school's workshop before being let anywhere near a drawing board. Then as now this is an institutional recognition of the fact that architecture is definitively neither an art nor a science, but ultimately a craft, notwithstanding all the inevitable changes that transpire over time in terms of tools, methods and materials. This is possibly the ultimate ethical significance of *The Design Workshop*, one which even in this benighted time may still have a chance of saving the profession from the overwhelming blandishments of the spectacular.

***Kenneth Frampton, New York, May 2005***







construction detail sketches, 2003 take the field

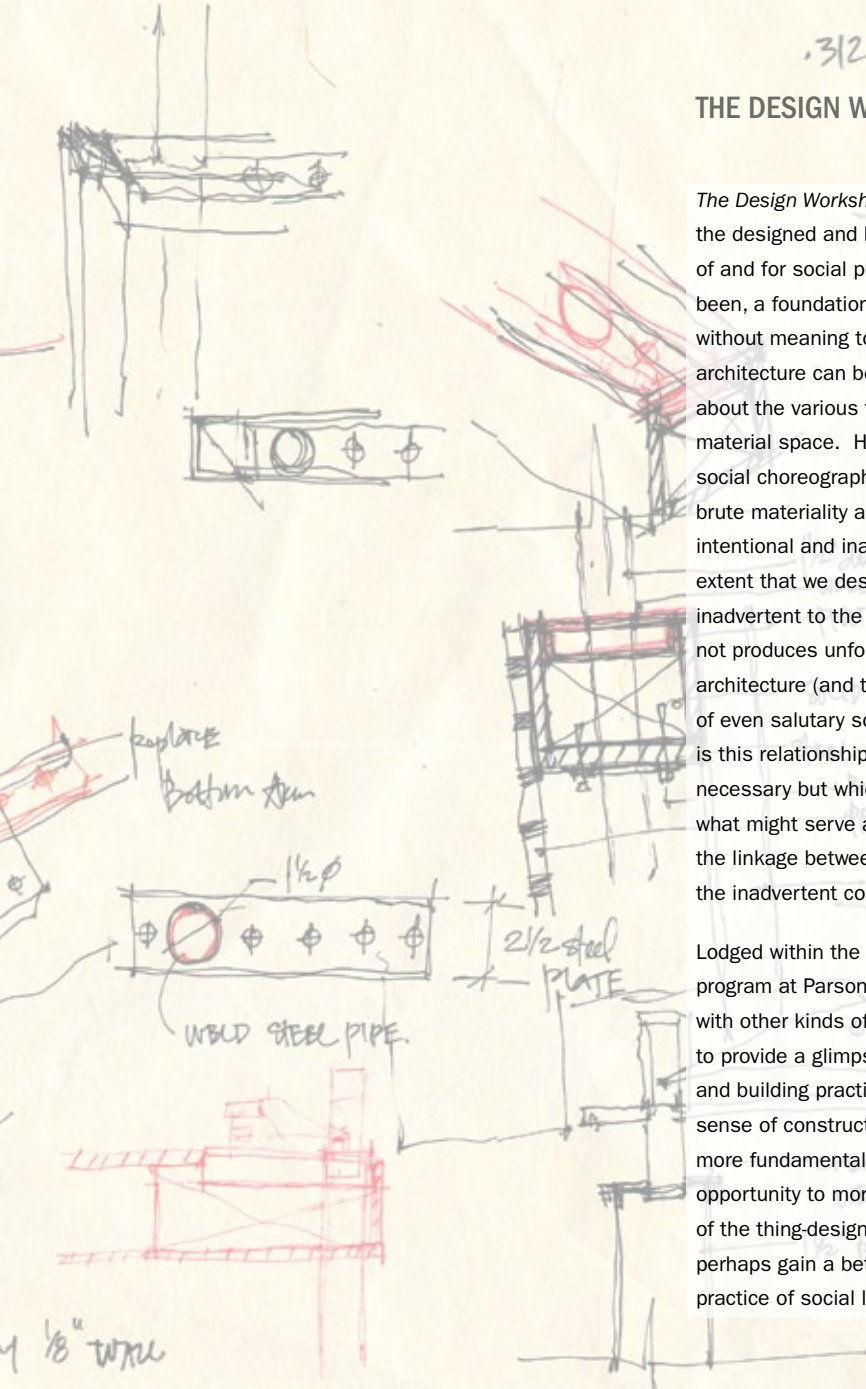
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## THE DESIGN WORKSHOP PROJECTS

*The Design Workshop* is commitment to the belief that the designed and built environment acts as the ground of and for social practice. This idea is, and has always been, a foundational tenet of architecture. Indeed, without meaning to diminish its plenitude, the history of architecture can be thought of as simply a way of talking about the various forms this idea has taken in time and material space. However, the production of this complex social choreography performed by the interaction of brute materiality and human subjects in space has both intentional and inadvertent aspects. It is intentional to the extent that we design with a social purpose in mind but is inadvertent to the extent that built form more often than not produces unforeseen social configurations that humble architecture (and the architect) and remind us of the limits of even salutary social engineering by design. What, then, is this relationship of the designed to the built that is so necessary but which seems so unstable? And, further, what might serve as a useful mode of research for probing the linkage between the intentions of an immaterial idea to the inadvertent consequences of its material form?

Lodged within the curriculum of the graduate architecture program at Parsons, *The Design Workshop* shares with other kinds of design-build programs an intention to provide a glimpse of post-academic architectural and building practice along with a more sophisticated sense of construction, materiality and craft. However, a more fundamental motive was to initiate an academic opportunity to more closely scrutinize the transformation of the thing-designed to the thing-built and, in so doing, to perhaps gain a better understanding of the perception and practice of social life.





# 1998

25 E. 13th Street, New York, NY  
**THE EVENT CORRIDOR**

## STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Douglas Dohan  
 Daniela De Sola  
 Terry Erickson  
 Suzanne Elizabeth Hussey  
 Sandra Klaus  
 Teresa Rampolla  
 Timothy Rasic  
 Carlos Salazar  
 Nicolas Wiener  
 Lisa Lynn Wright

## STUDENTS: SUMMER FABRICATION

Herbin Ng  
 Anthony Panza  
 Ken Koomalsingh  
 Constantine Kalesis

## FACULTY

Peter Wheelwright (Design Studio IV)  
 Charles Wolf (Construction Technology II)

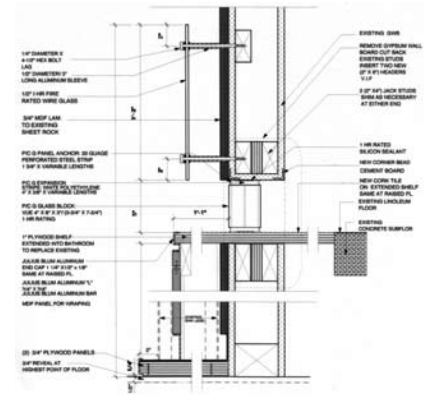
## CLIENT

Department of Architecture, Interior Design and Lighting,  
 Parsons The New School for Design



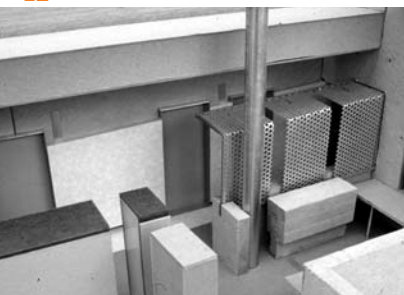
event corridor looking north

The Design Workshop began as a formal graduate studio in 1998 when it undertook what would become a three-year project to renovate the architecture department's facilities. Challenging the existing 12,000 s.f. loft space and the acquired habits of the student and faculty that this spatial condition had produced, this renovation project was undertaken to both improve daily academic life while re-constructing future possibilities for the school as a whole. The first phase produced *The Event Corridor*. A laminated medium density fiber board (MDF) surface along the corridor wall "folds" to mark True North on the floor as one moves along its 175 ft. length. Cross cutting this fold are folded metal flats which redistribute the student lockers and register within the studio the transverse rhythm of the ancillary rooms along the corridor. The wall is further punctuated by five "constructed events" in glass, wood, and aluminum which playfully articulate and comment on specific aspects that support the life of the studio (lounge display, fabrication shop, library/archive, bathrooms, and computer lab).



section detail through bathroom event

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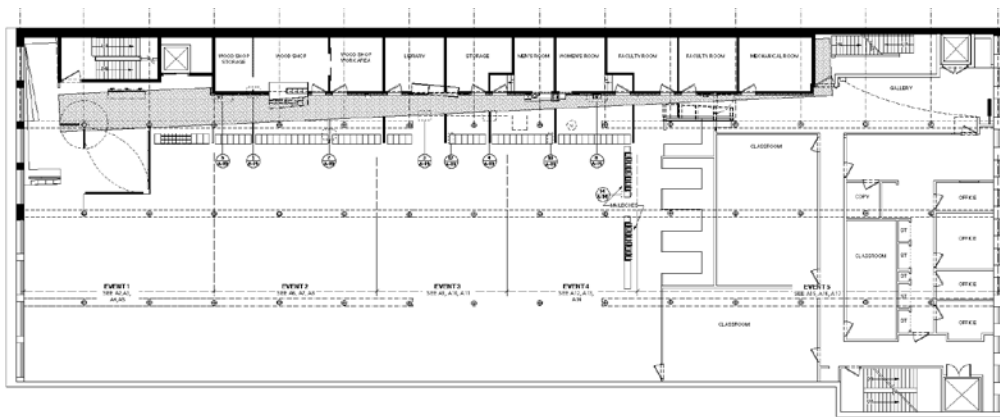




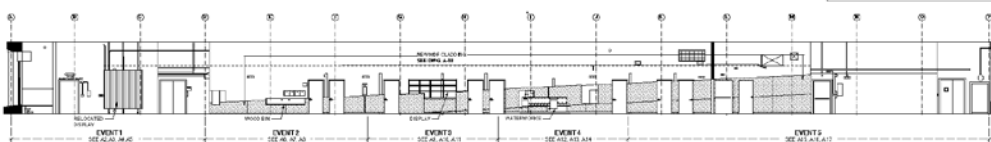
lounge display event



lounge display event



plan



elevation



# 1999

25 E. 13th Street, New York, NY

## THE GLASS CORNER

### STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Lynn Hock  
Dino Kalesis  
Ken Koomalsingh  
Kevin Lally  
Elisheva Levi  
Stacy Kronland Millman  
Tony Panza  
Sharon Small  
Vincent Yeung  
Janeen Pernigotti Zaharoni

### STUDENTS: SUMMER FABRICATION

Niva Artizi  
Rita Castro  
Herbin Ng

### FACULTY

Charles Wolf (Design Studio IV)  
David Van Handel (Construction Technology II)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

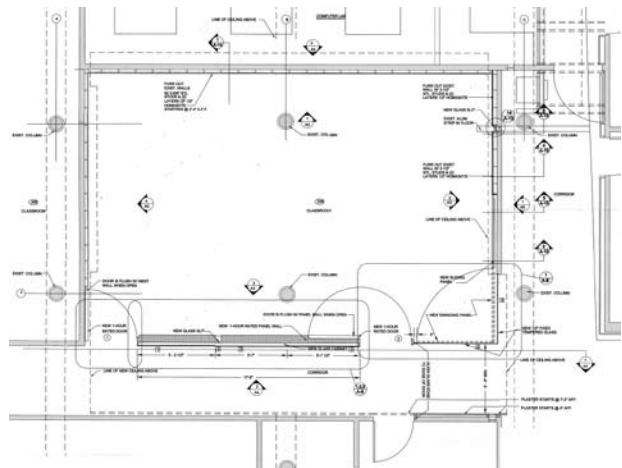
### CLIENT

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*the glass corner, outside looking in*

While the first phase established the material and detail vocabulary that would characterize the architecture department in the years that followed, both the two subsequent phases, *The Glass Corner* and *The Swing Room*, expanded on the students' interest in the discursive spatio-material relationships that characterized and directed their social practice as architecture students. *The Glass Corner* project reconfigured a generic sheetrock classroom into a hyper-articulated assemblage of individuated tectonic components (wall, ceiling, aperture, column, corner, floor) that collectively "extended" the room beyond its spatial boundaries while providing a new event space for public programs (e.g., The Glass Corner Faculty Series). The assembly hall's 14 ft. tall glass corner faces the entry to the department and welcomes each visitor as a lens on its academic practices.



*construction plan*

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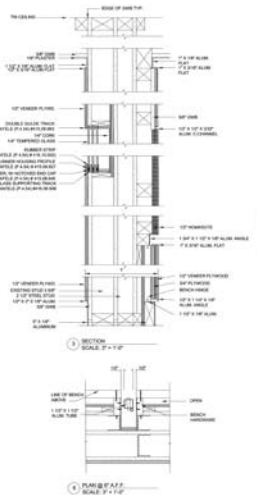




intersection of glass corner and gallery



view from gallery into the glass corner lecture room



wall section detail



view from inside glass corner lecture room to gallery



# 2000

25 E. 13th Street, New York, NY

## THE SWING ROOM

### STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Rise Endo  
Rita Castro  
Yuki Kubota  
Andrew Magnes  
Nicole Pappas  
Adam Phillips  
Ryuji Saito  
Daniel Smith  
Francisco Simmons  
Jung Gun Suh (studio only)

### STUDENTS: SUMMER FABRICATION

Mischa Khakshouri  
Fernanda Leal  
Yeon Lee  
Aya Mamuro  
Joo Young Oh  
Lucy Wong

### FACULTY

Craig Konyk (Design Studio IV)  
David Van Handel (Construction Technology II)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

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Parsons The New School for Design

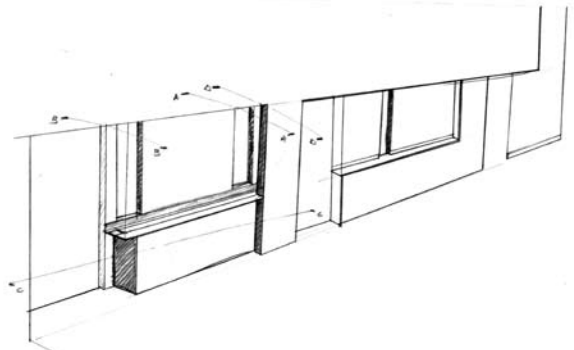


swing door, open and closed

While in its metonymic aspect, *The Glass Corner* has become a key part of the department's formal and public identity, *The Swing Room* was conceived as "joint" space which serves to bring together both the public and private aspects of the department's academic life. Designed as a prototype for creating local pin-up enclosures along the column grid of the studio west wall, the rotating/sliding polycarbonate panel draws the studio space into the room or provides enclosure for seminar space. At the other end of the room, a series of glazed vitrines extend into the public gallery to *The Glass Corner* showcasing student work and completing the spatial circuit begun in phase one.

The decision to use the site of the architecture students' own spatial and social life proved to be an important one.

It both forced a reflexive critique of the departmental experience but also provided a kind of research and development opportunity for *The Design Workshop* itself and set the terms by which the program would evolve.



perspective of exhibition vitrines



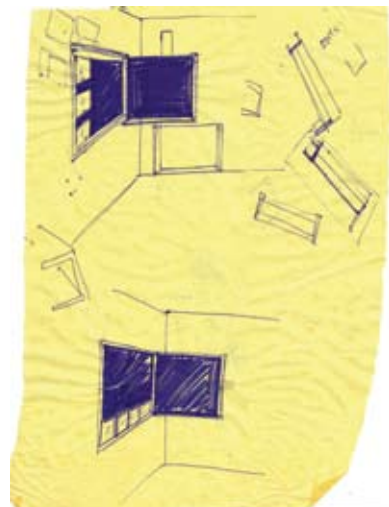




swing door



joint between swing room entry and hallway vitrines



sketch of operable chalk board

17



# 2001

451 Greenwich Street, New York, NY

## PRODUCTION/PRESENTATION: *A Choreography*

### STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

J. Christopher Forman  
Richard Gribble  
Benjamin Koenig  
Fernanda Leal  
Sarah Ludington  
Sumika Paties  
Lucy Wong  
Heejung Yoon

### STUDENTS: SUMMER FABRICATION

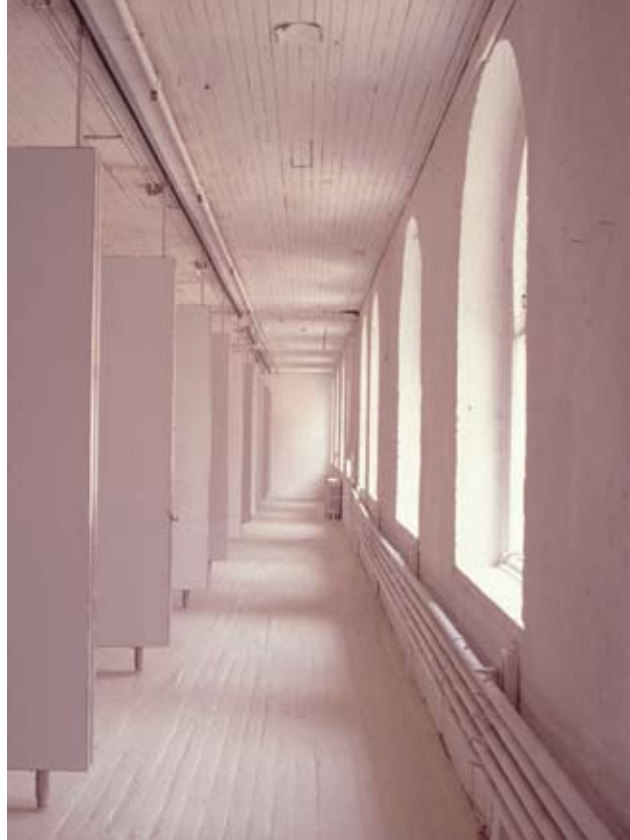
Lucas Cascardo  
Alex Chan  
Jeffrey Chong  
Dash Ervin Hirsan  
William Oberlin  
Rich Suk-Min Yoon

### FACULTY

Charles Wolf (Design Studio IV)  
David Van Handel (Construction Technology II)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

### CLIENT

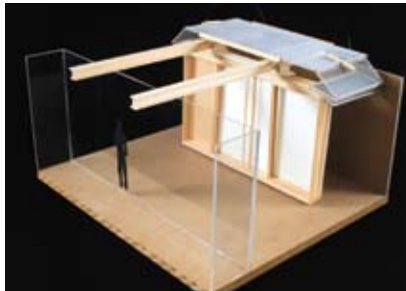
New York Studio Program  
The Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design



*panel wall system in open position in studio space*

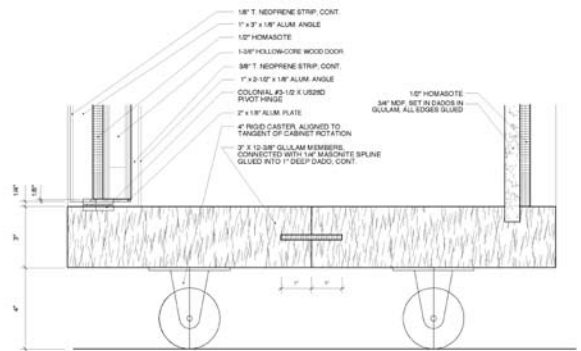
The department renovation gave *The Design Workshop* something to show and in 2001 it received its first major outside funding from Turner Construction as well as its first outside non-profit client, The New York Studio Program (NYSP). Sponsored by The Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design, the NYSP provides studio-art students from around the country an opportunity to work in the heart of New York's art community. In this conversion of a raw 4000 s.f. loft space characteristic of lower Manhattan's Tribeca architecture, *The Design Workshop* was confronted with its first taste of the "hybrid" program. With the demand for both individuated studio working stalls for up to 20 artists conflicting with the need for a large open End of the Year Exhibition space, the architecture students drew on their research from *The Swing Room*

and developed a system of sliding, rotating, and stackable prefabricated "stress-skin" panel walls. During the semester, these walls are arranged to structure 12 x 12 studios along the length of the loft. An open perimeter provides access. Large pivoting cabinets of glulam ash and homasote supported along the loft's central column spine provide the end walls and storage for each studio space. For the End of the Year Exhibition, the flexibility of the system offers a range of presentation possibilities to address the type and diversity of artwork produced during the year as the stalls are re-configured in a choreographed performance of lateral slides, twirls, and "retreats."









*detail of base of mobile storage cabinet*



*stable and mobile storage cabinets*

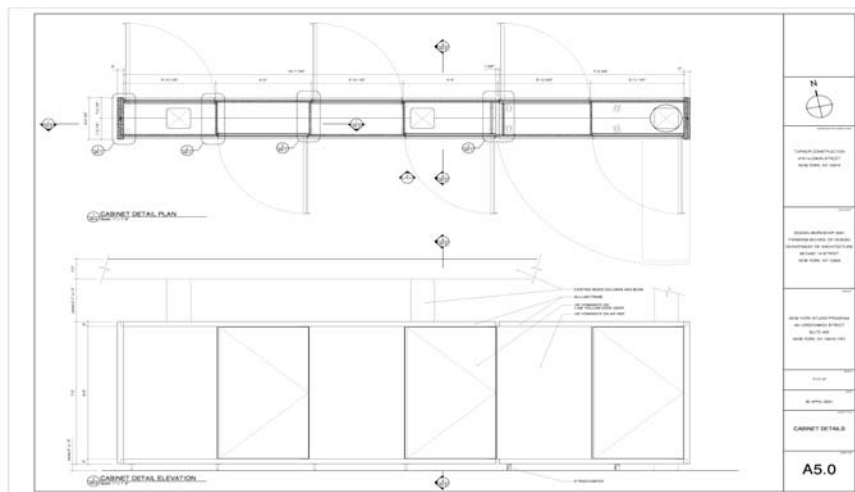


*transformable storage cabinet*  
**20**





mobile storage cabinet



mobile storage cabinet construction drawing

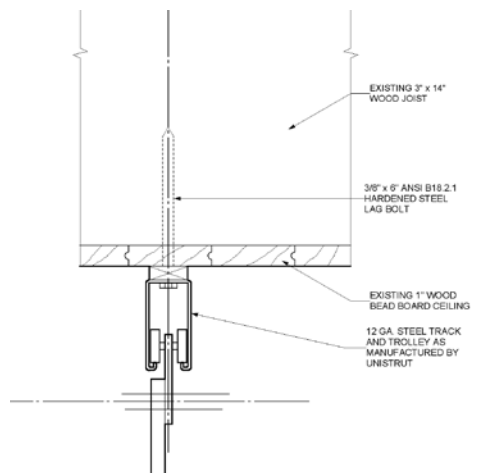






detail of divider walls in open position

22



detail of hanging system

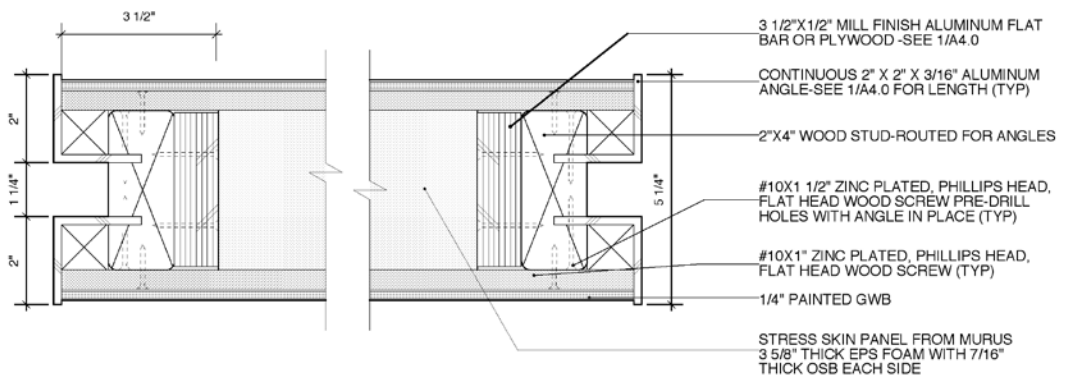


hanging divider walls in closed position





*hanging divider walls in closed position creating large open reception space*



*construction details of hanging divider walls*



# 2002

2 West 13th Street, New York, NY

## THRESHOLDS AND THE EXTENSION OF IDENTITIES

### STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Robin Blodgett  
Lucas Cascardo  
Angeline Espino  
Derek Haas  
Jason Lee  
Coby Linton  
Nick New  
William Oberlin  
Harold Shin  
Lucien Vita  
How Zan  
Ana Maria Gutierrez

### FACULTY

Charles Wolf (Design Studio IV)  
Matthew Baird (Construction Technology II)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

### CLIENT

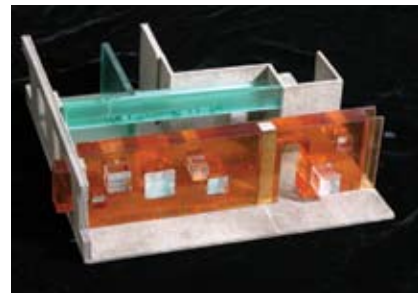
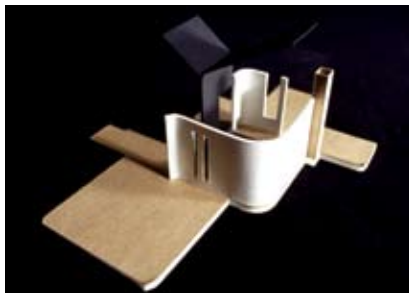
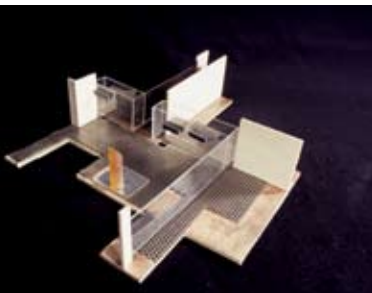
Parsons The New School for Design  
Department of Design and Technology  
Department of Associate in Applied Science (AAS)



cast polyurethane identity sign

By the time *The Design Workshop* entered its fifth year, the issue of interiority had become thematic. This was driven in large part by the exigencies of making architecture in a dense urban fabric where the work of most architects involves the renovation of this fabric's interior conditions. One of the lessons of *The Glass Corner* had been the close study of the conventional elements that constitute the interior (wall, door, window, ceiling, etc.) and the request by The New School/Parsons to construct two small (250 s.f.) academic lobbies provided another opportunity to investigate the conjunction of their functional and narrative possibilities. Situated at the elevators which serve the 12-story design school and each of its different design departments, the lobbies are conceived to establish both the threshold and identity for a unique academic department while referencing

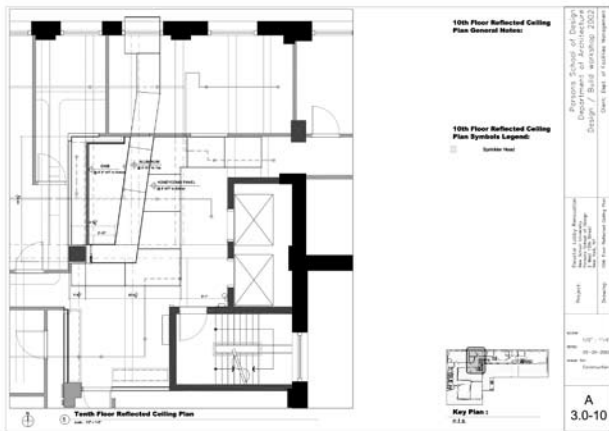
its place in the larger identity of an urban school of design. Rather than avoiding the dense network of existing conditions (HVAC ducts, sprinklers, waste lines, and electrical) typical of urban interior renovations, the students saw them as opportunities for their own intervention. The small space draws on the formal vocabulary of the existing infrastructure but re-assembles and re-materializes it (cast polyurethane, lit acrylic and polycarbonate, tinted thin-set concrete, and hand-brushed metal plates) to provide departmental display, shelving, seating, and information. A large suspended light "duct" overhead guides the visitor through the textured space into either the rear studios or the department offices where it punctures the exterior wall of the building drawing in daylight to the interior and projecting the department's own light (and presence) into the city at night.



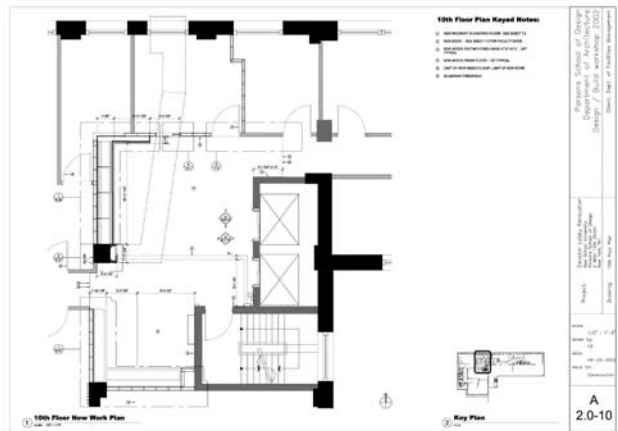




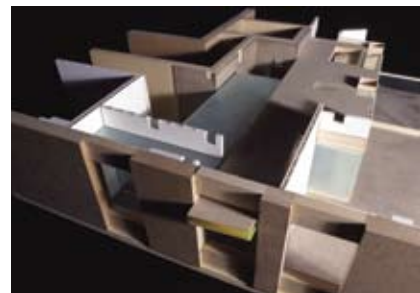
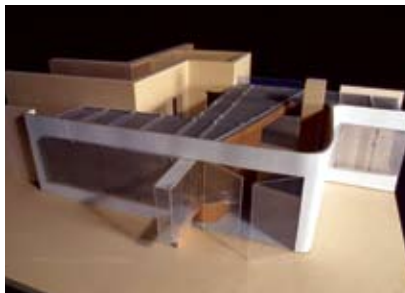
department of design and technology lobby showing panelite clad duct



*reflected ceiling plan, 10th floor*

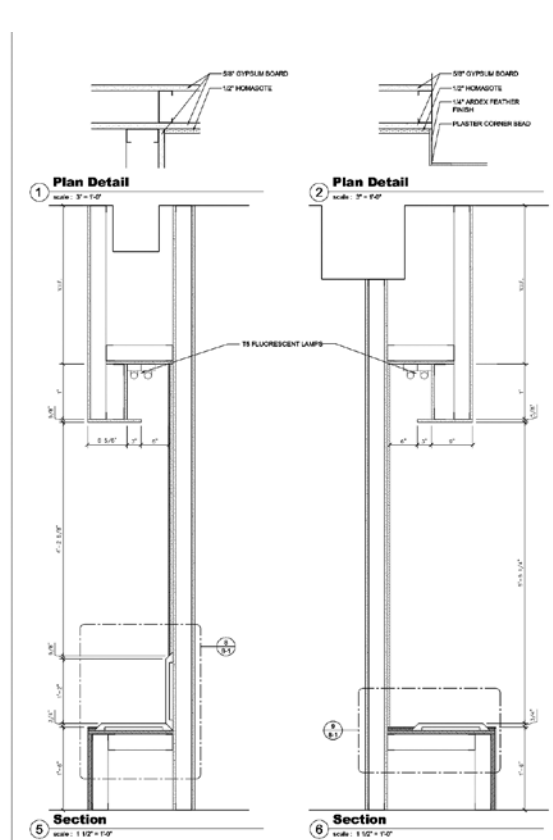


**construction plan, 10th floor**

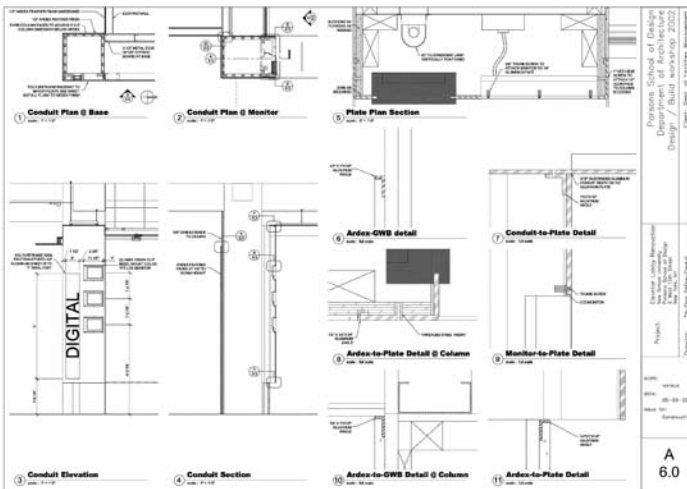




polyurethane conduit and sign and acrylic illuminated ceiling duct



construction drawings of built-in seat

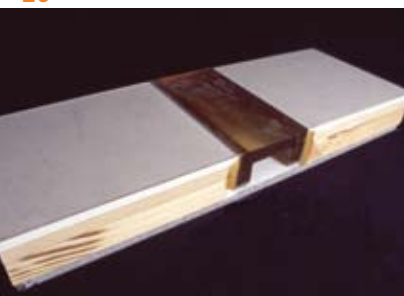


construction details of polyurethane conduit and sign



polyurethane conduit and sign

26







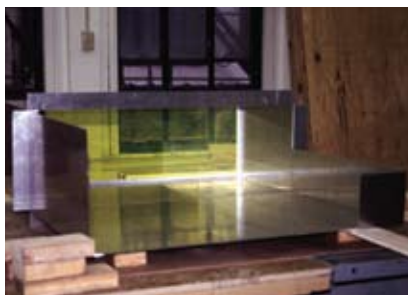
rendering of light apertures marking exterior facade

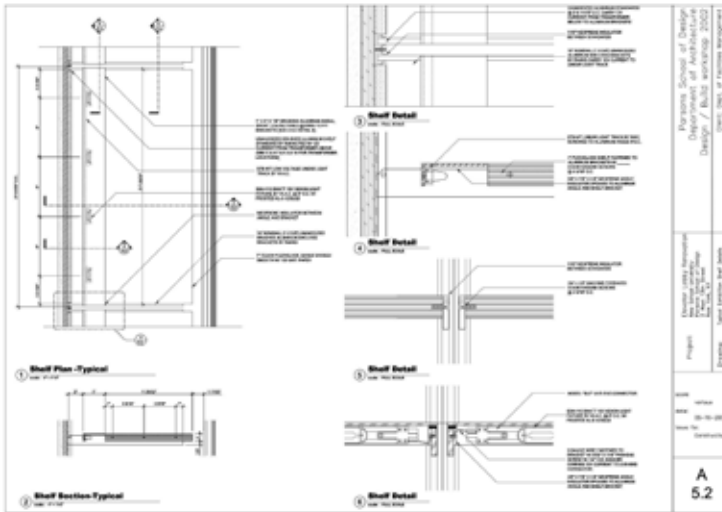


daylight drawn into interior through colored filter



juncture of daylight aperture at exterior wall





details of illuminated shelving system

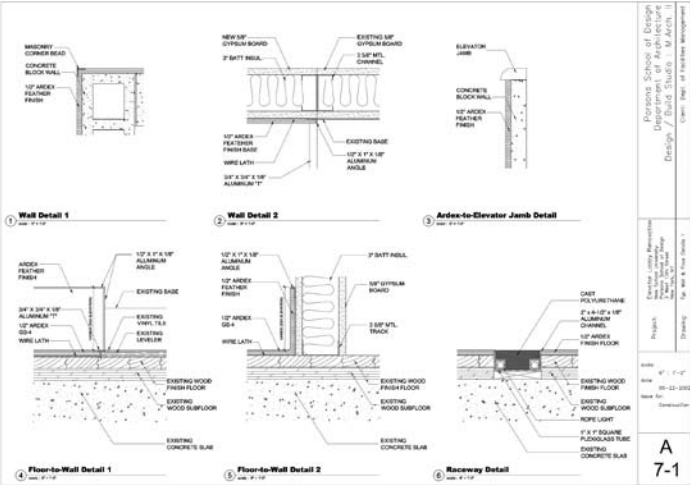


illuminated shelving system





lobby with digital design installation screen



finish construction details



sign and illuminated display shelving



# 2003

Grand Street Campus School, Brooklyn, NY

## TAKE THE FIELD

### STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Jarrett Boor  
Francisco Cruz  
Jonathan David  
Brina Goldfarb  
Ted Klingensmith  
Jeannie Lee  
Federico Negro  
Caroline Razook  
Ryan Ward

### FACULTY

Charles Wolf (Design Studio IV + Construction Technology II)  
Matthew Baird (Design Studio IV + Construction Technology II)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

### CLIENT

Take the Field  
The Grand Street Campus High School, New York Public Schools



*operable storage wall*

As well as addressing specific programs, clients and problems, the early projects of *The Design Workshop* served to set the terms by which the program would evolve. They established the limits of what was possible at the interface of the academic and public realms. Through these projects, the program learned what was realistic to expect from students constrained by their limited experience as designers (not to mention builders), an inflexible academic calendar poorly adapted to the contingencies of construction, and the complex regulatory environment which controls the urban life of New York City. As *The Design Workshop* gained confidence, it began to reach out more seriously to an under-served public realm by offering its design-build services to non-profit advocacy groups. In 2003, the students were approached by Take the Field, a public-private partnership dedicated to re-building the athletic facilities of the city's inner city public schools. The program for a proto-type

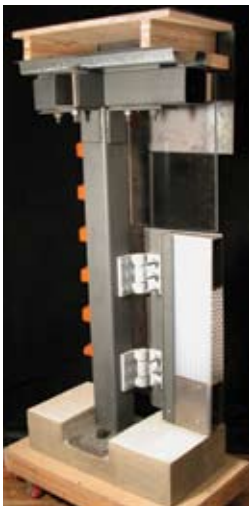
field house located at The Grand Street Campus High School in Brooklyn resulted in *The Design Workshop's* first freestanding building.

Situated at the final turn of the running track and the end zone of the football field, the 600 s.f. field house takes its cue from the scale, form, and texture of the industrial neighborhood seen beyond the field while also serving as a ceremonial gateway from the high school behind. An array of steel components (weathering Cor-Ten, structural tubes and connectors, galvanized corrugated decking, porcelain and perforated screens) were assembled to produce varying patterns of transparency and opacity and to differentiate the concession stand east of the portal, the operable storage door-wall facing the field, and the porcelain steel half-time huddle "chalk board" privately facing the home-team school building.

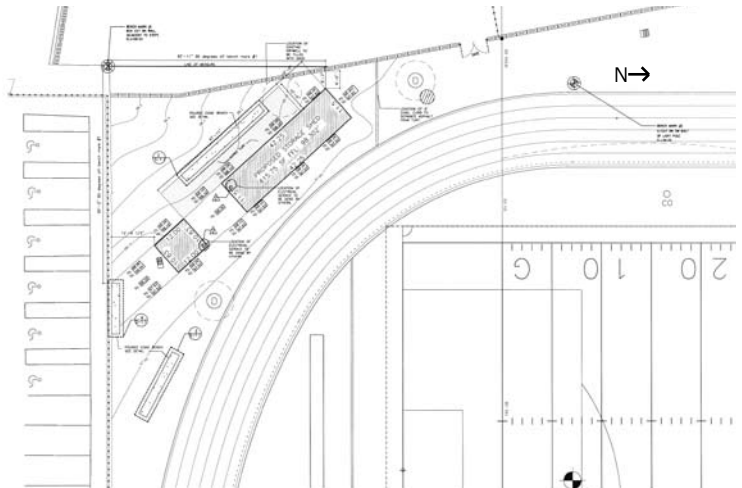




field house and field in brooklyn context



typical full size material mock-ups from construction technology II



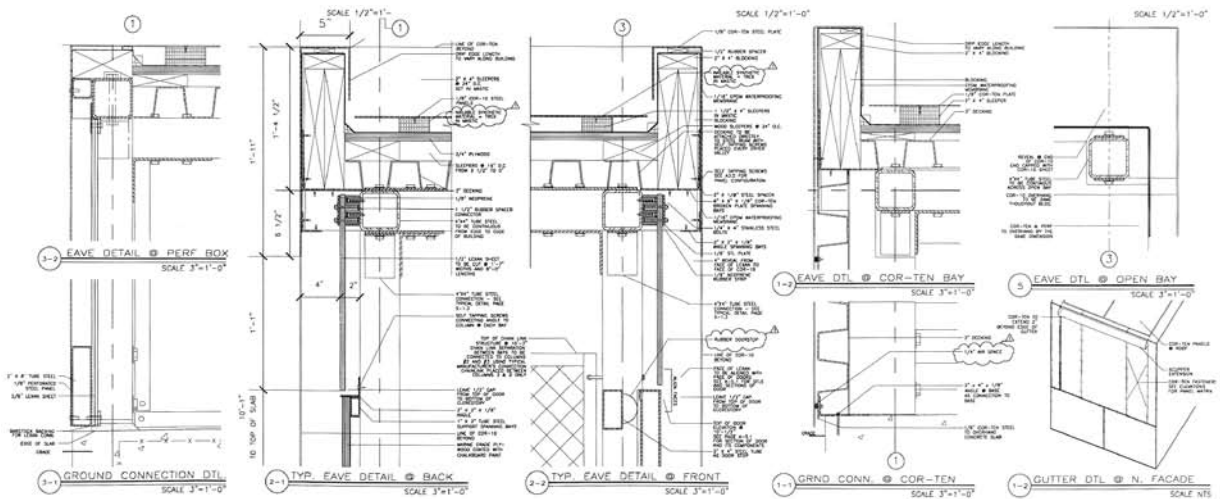
site plan







field house sited along the curve of the track



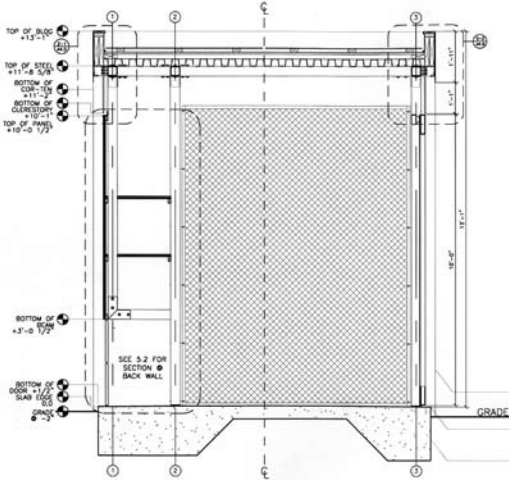
construction details







*operable wall made from doors of perforated metal panels*

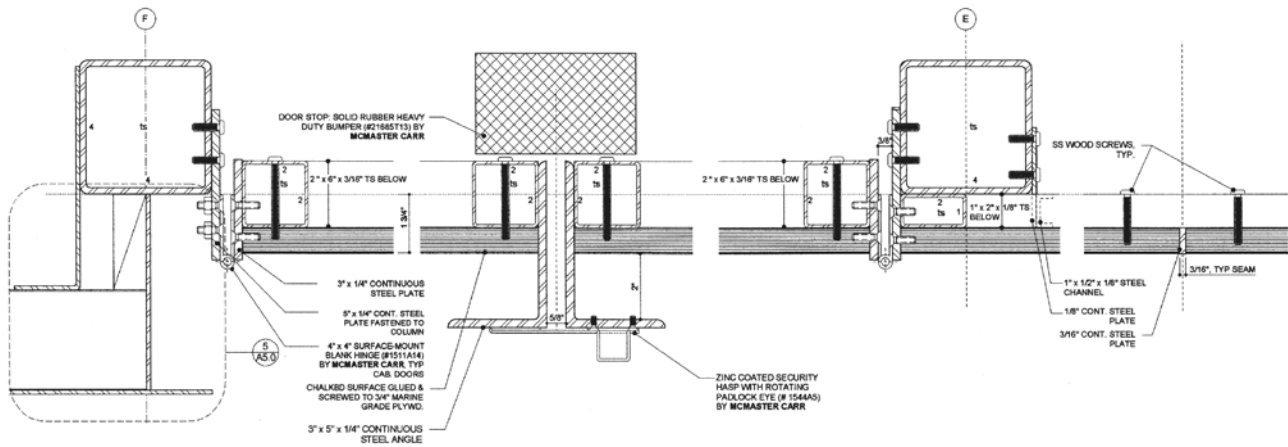
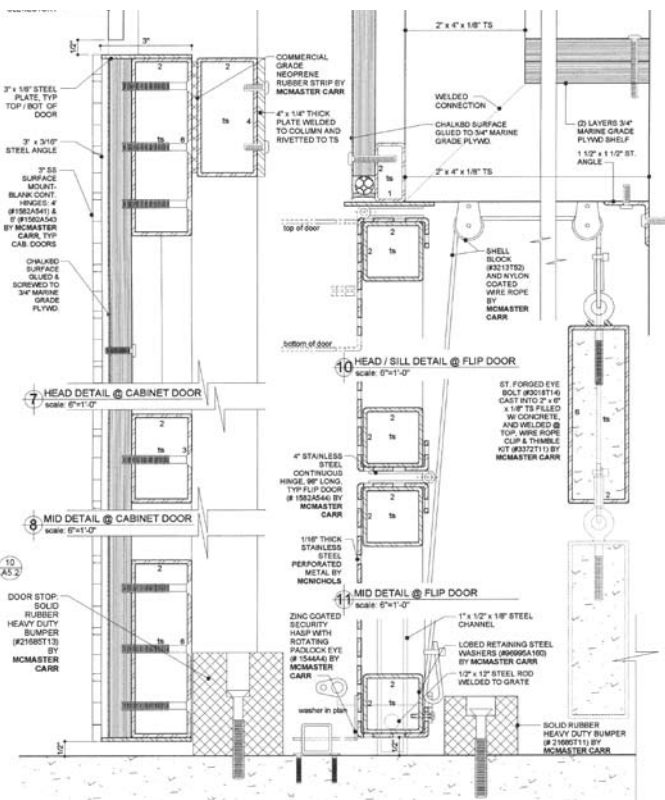


*construction section*



*perforated metal panel and cor-ten steel*









*back side with concession wing to the right*



*gateway*



*back side with porcelain steel chalk board and gateway toward field*



*cor-ten steel cladding*





# 2004

15 East 27th Street, New York, NY

## COMMON GROUND COMMUNITY

### STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Bronwyn Breitner  
Haanwa Chau (studio only)  
Min Cho  
Brian Geller  
Samanta de Jong (studio only)  
Tara Lockitch  
Brooks McDaniel  
Coralina Meyer (studio only)  
Raquel Perez-Puig

### STUDENTS: SUMMER FABRICATION

Alexander Liberman  
Juanita Wichenkeuer  
Aileen Park  
Jin Hee Park

### FACULTY

Matthew Baird (Design Studio IV + Construction Technology II)  
Amanda Sachs (Design Studio IV)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

### CLIENT

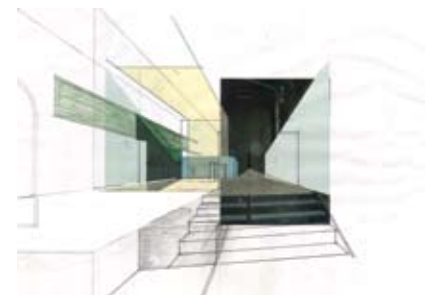
Common Ground Community HDFC



stairway to cantilevered mezzanine

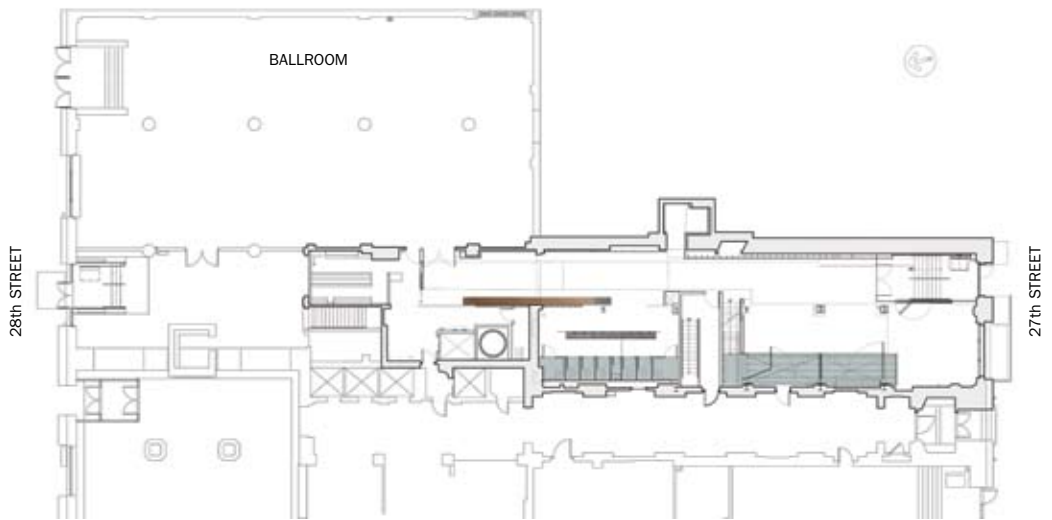
Since its inception, *The Design Workshop* has had a strong effect on the rest of the architecture program at Parsons. Its studio design work, material research, collaborative spirit, and engagement with the public life of the city has influenced both the curricular and social culture of the department as a whole. It has helped direct its urban focus on the future of post 9/11 New York City and sharpened attention to what is at stake for architecture in that future. In 2004, *The Design Workshop* undertook a project in collaboration with the "Common Ground Community," a non-profit organization dedicated to providing supportive housing for the formerly homeless. Charged with creating a new public entry and exhibition gallery at its recently restored Prince George Hotel, the new 2400 s.f. space provides coat-check, bar, catering stations and bathroom in support of the landmark Grand Ballroom used by Common Ground for its public programs.

The design of the space was largely informed by Common Ground's own philosophy of social and material sustainability: rather than hiding the homeless or ignoring the city's derelict properties, the organization aims to restore both with dignity and respect. The students, in turn, chose to celebrate the complex history of the Prince George by stripping away the layers of material neglect and revealing the original brick and terracotta tile beneath. Within this exposed condition, but always standing slightly apart, a new architectural vocabulary frames the viewers' experience. The poured concrete, glass and steel entry wall provides apertures into the raw space where an expressed structural steel assembly of supports a cantilevered translucent acrylic mezzanine floor allowing close inspection of the old terracotta detailing. Beneath the mezzanine, reflective lightweight aluminum panels swing in various configurations to provide exhibition display while a backlit floating stepped ceiling exaggerates the perspectival promenade to the Grand Ballroom entrance.





*exhibition gallery and mezzanine with promenade to the ballroom straight ahead*

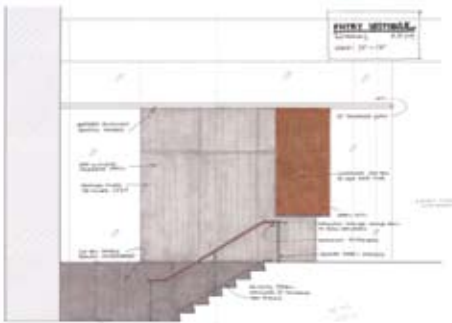


*plan showing 27th street entrance and sequence to the ballroom*





public entrance from 27th street and exhibition space



construction sketch and detail of cast concrete entry vestibule wall

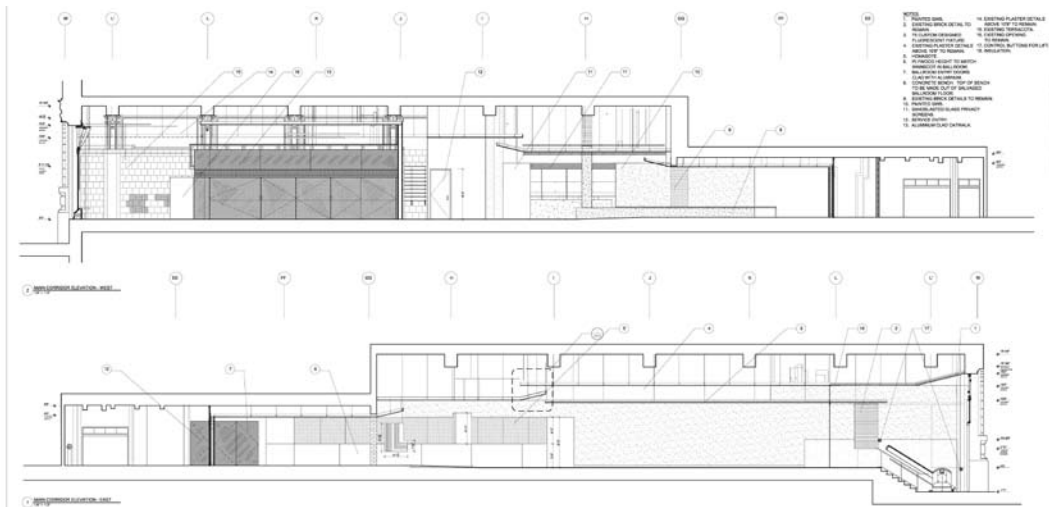
38







cast concrete and wood reception bench at entry to ballroom

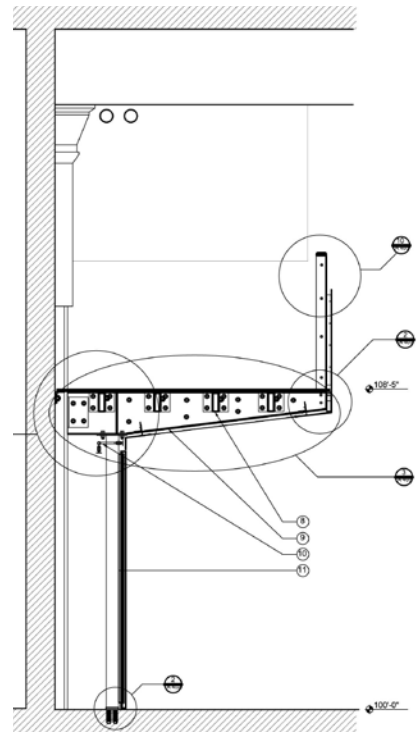


construction sections  
39

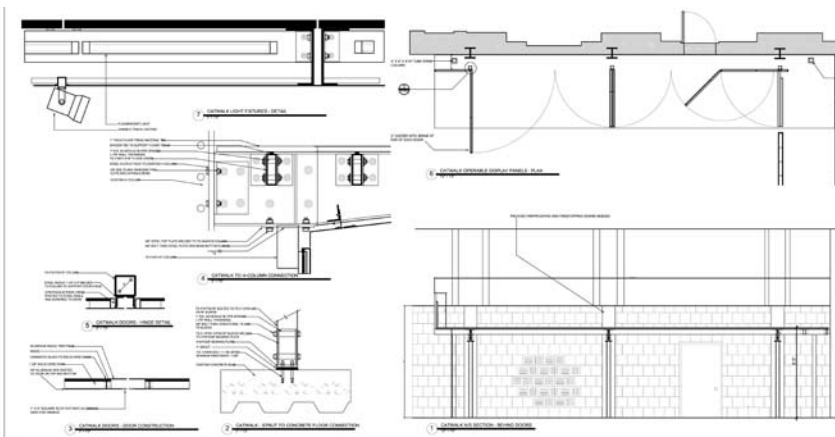




illuminated and cantilevered mezzanine with pivoting exhibition panel system below



construction section of mezzanine



construction plan and details of mezzanine and exhibition panel system

40



wood and steel handrail details







mezzanine adjacent to existing ceiling and terracotta detailing



mezzanine and pivoting exhibition panels



illuminated balcony with steel and wood handrails





# 2005

15 Nassau Street, New York, NY  
**INTERCHANGE: NASSAU**

## STUDENTS: STUDIO + SUMMER FABRICATION

Seth Baum (studio only)  
Wing Yee Ng Fung  
Kameron Gad  
Komal Kehar  
Keith Kohn  
Alex Liberman  
John Mealy  
Emily Mechesney  
Maria T. Laboy-Perez  
Julie Puaux (studio only)  
Aaron Tweedie  
Karla Uyehara  
Juanita Wichienkuer

## FACULTY

Karen Frome (Design Studio IV + Construction Technology II)  
David Ruff (Design Studio IV + Construction Technology II)  
Matthew Baird (Construction Technology II)  
Terry Erickson (Summer Construction)

## CLIENT

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

In the evolution of *The Design Workshop*, there is a detectable DNA. Spatial and scalar issues, material and detail choices, program interpretations and narratives, etc. tend to re-appear to inform the new projects and critique the old ones. It is the kind of discursive/recursive looping that one would expect from a research enterprise which *The Design Workshop* has surely become. But in this genealogy, there is also the self-reflexive relationship of the students themselves to their work in *The Design Workshop* which comes with trying to understand the meaning of their own social practices as developing architects.

At the time of this writing, the architecture students of *The Design Workshop* have just begun their eighth summer staging their equipment and tools at this year's construction site where they will be constructing a series of adaptable, de-mountable, and transportable "event" structures for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Artist-in-Residency program. Besides addressing their client's program, budget,



entry view with docking wall beyond and light brackets and conduits above



view of docking wall

and legal issues, they have spent their spring semester dealing with the city and state agencies which govern municipal development, the NYC Landmark's Preservation Commission and Department of Buildings which govern city codes, zoning and other building restrictions, and finally the site's building management agency and union representatives who maintain their own form of oversight. However, once again, the students find themselves having broken through the bureaucratic layers that direct the practice of architecture in New York City. In this transitional moment, the link between their interpretation of immaterial program (the social diagram) as designed with the material form it will take in social space (architecture) begins its testing. What can be expected?

Hopefully, and at the very least, the sense of purpose, sociality, and delight that comes with sharing with others both the intended and unanticipated effects of the thing well designed and built.



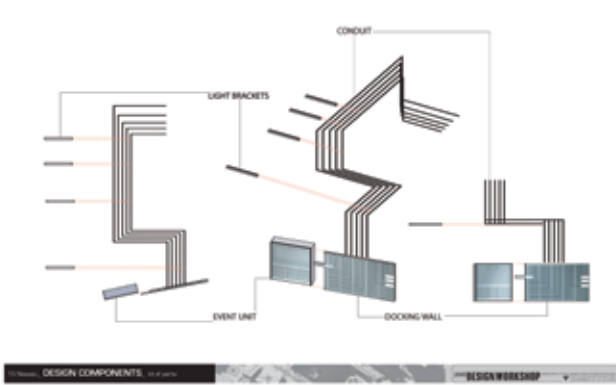


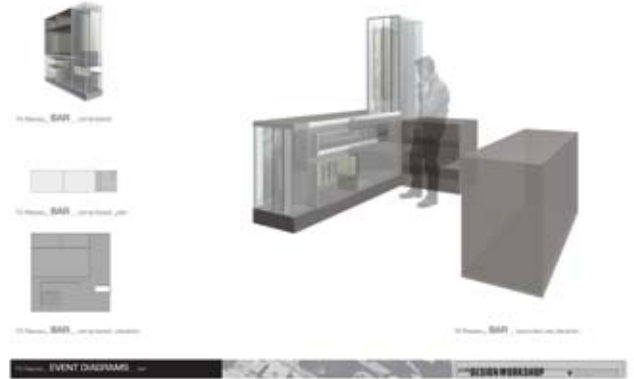
diagram of kit of parts



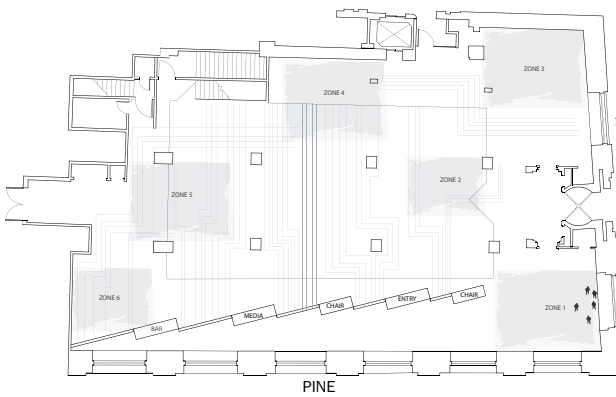
entry event unit



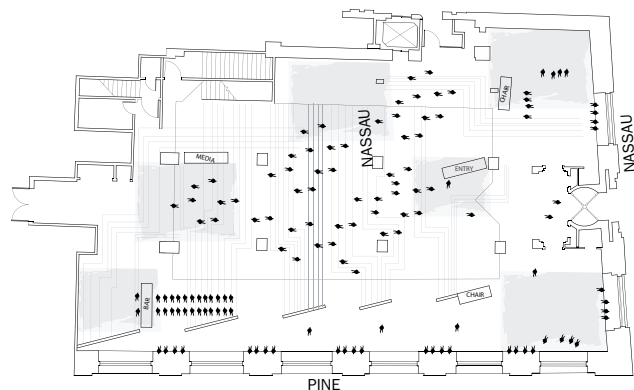
media event unit



bar event unit



plan showing occupation by event for 5-10 people



plan showing occupation by event for 75-100 people



## Design Build: Pedagogy and Social Action

### Joanna Merwood–Salisbury

The Parsons' *Design Workshop*, in which second year graduate architecture students design and build a real project, can be situated within the "Design Build" movement that has been growing in strength in the last fifteen years. This movement advocates for "architecture in the public interest," by attempting to bridge the academy and the wider community.<sup>1</sup> It has been defined as an, "architecture of social engagement whose members develop projects and programs for clients rarely served by design professionals."<sup>2</sup> The two most recent *Design Workshop* projects, "Take the Field" and "Common Ground," are public/private partnerships aimed at increasing student awareness of social issues and solving social problems through direct action.

The rhetoric of social engagement inherent in Design Build programs is sometimes presented as freeing architecture from the confines of abstract thought. Part of the success of Design Build, it is argued, is that it shakes up the hide-bound institutions in which architects and architecture have become enmeshed. One of these is academia. Within the university, Design Build programs are supposed to loosen students from purely conceptual thinking about design and encourage them to participate in real community building projects. The Design Build movement has sometimes been characterized as a response to the theory-based architectural education of the 1980s and early 1990s, in which architecture was engaged at a conceptual rather than material level. In this way, the movement sometimes appears anti-intellectual, arguing against the value of classroom education in favor of "hands-on" experience and "real-world" activity. Inherent in this attitude is a dubious privileging of making over thinking, of practical solutions over conceptual thought.

However, despite these characterizations the Design Build movement cannot escape its origins in the intellectual history of twentieth-century architecture.<sup>3</sup> The movement's desire to exploit new materials and construction methods in the service of cheaper and better-designed habitation for all is undoubtedly a direct descendent of early twentieth-century Modernism. For example, under the influence of the socialist philosophy of Weimar Germany, Bauhaus architects like Walter Gropius saw the potential of industrial building materials and processes to provide well-designed shelter for all. But while the Design Build movement shares the modernist fascination with technological solutions, with new materials and construction methods, it

breaks away from modernism in rejecting the philosophy of mass production, of "one size fits all," in favor of site- and client-specific design. It can be seen as part of the post-modern rejection of high Modernist architecture because of Modernism's perceived lack of concern for the opinions of those it was trying to house.

Emerging in the 1970s from a desire to return architecture to a communal rather than authoritarian practice, Design Build mediates the hierarchy between architect and client. Influenced by a new appreciation for the vernacular lead by theorists such as Christopher Alexander,<sup>4</sup> and teachers such as Samuel Mockbee of the Rural Studio at Auburn University, the Design Build movement encourages the creative exploration of local building traditions rather than the mass application of industrial techniques. Informed by the Green Design movement of the same era, it also often incorporates the sustainable use of materials and resources.

The Design Build process is a two-way exchange between students and clients. Students learn about design, materials and construction techniques through practical experience, as well as learning about those other vital aspects of architectural practice, communication and collaboration. In the most successful cases, they learn to expand the role of the architect beyond the provision of technical and aesthetic advice, to community assistance and advocacy. It allows them to measure the success of their designs in quite different terms than are usual in design studio. In turn, community groups draw on the skill and labor of architects that they might not otherwise be able to afford. People who have been without power in the design decisions made for them are able to claim a more active role.

Ideally, the goals of the faculty, students and clients in a Design Build project can all be satisfied, but more often than not the process involves a series of very real conflicts. One of the largest problems in balancing the educational and practical needs of Design Build programs is the lack of time. Community development works very slowly and its projects require a long-term commitment to be really fruitful. On the other hand the academic calendar is relatively short. How can students be actively engaged in on-going community issues such as building athletic facilities for high school students and helping mediate the problem of homelessness within the short time frame of two semesters, less than eight months? This problem may even be compounded by the length of time it takes essentially unskilled students to construct a project. What ethical responsibility does



the university have to finish the tasks it starts, and what is its ongoing responsibility to the client groups with which it starts a dialogue?

These conflicts may be exacerbated when working in urban sites, as Parsons has done recently. In this case the question of who the “real” clients are is somewhat ambiguous. Do the nonprofit organizations that act as intermediaries in these projects render the advocacy role of the architect less relevant or unnecessary? What happens if students perceive a conflict between the desires of these groups, between high school students and Take the Field, or between the homeless and Common Ground? Part of the ethos of Design Build is the design and construction of an architecture responsive to the needs and desires of the local community. This goal is harder to achieve in the fluid environment of the city where the inhabitants are more transient and there is a much more diverse set of cultures to deal with. In this situation communication between the architect and the final client is perhaps not so close and direct as in rural sites. How can the architects of an urban Design Build project create a strong relationship with the clients who will use it if they don’t even know who they are? Finally, what happens if the goals of academy and the community come into conflict?

There is as yet no way to evaluate the success of Design Build programs. Any component of the equation may outweigh the others. In unfavorable circumstances the students may end up operating a free drafting service for a community group or institution that has already made up its mind what it wants. If the dynamic leans too far the other way, the community’s desires are dismissed in favor of its assumed needs. (At its most extreme the rhetoric of Design Build can sound like a proselytizing mission). Perhaps the success of Design Build hinges most not on material innovation but on communication. The Design Workshop can be most valuable by teaching a skill that is not given a large emphasis in architectural education: listening.

Ultimately, the success of the Parsons *Design Workshop* leads not to the conclusion that “hands-on” design and construction teaching is inherently more valuable than traditional studio courses, but that a balanced design education must include instruction in both independent critical thinking and direct social action. The success of *The Design Workshop* depends on a balance between advocacy and critical thinking in design education, between working directly with community groups and thinking widely about social and intellectual issues. Proponents of Design Build programs within universities argue that archi-

tecture students should be encouraged to develop a social and political consciousness. One of their strongest arguments is that architects must take on a public role as advocates for their own communities, or for communities in need. This admirable desire for architects to participate in community building through practical effort should no doubt be part of a complete architectural education. However it ought not to be the privileged part.

The primary role of a college education, architectural or otherwise, is to teach students to analyze information and think for themselves. Too much pushing of a certain agenda, a certain view of what architecture is, and how architects should behave, narrows the view of what is possible. Both studio and seminar-based courses have a responsibility to teach students not only current practice but also the history and theory of their discipline, so that students can analyze professional motives as well as techniques. Current Design Build programs have their own clearly defined agendas for what is possible and desirable in building for specific communities. But this answer isn’t necessarily going to be the same in a different city, town or country, next month or next year. Students must be taught not only to make but also to think, so that different solutions can be arrived at in the future, and the process of social action remains fluid and dynamic. Despite the complexities and competing interests involved, there is no doubt the Parsons *Design Workshop* offers an extremely rich opportunity for graduate students to extend their design education. It helps stretch student’s ideas about what architecture can and should be today, materially, conceptually and socially.

*July 2004*

<sup>1</sup> See Abby Bussel, “Architecture in the Public Interest,” *Architecture* (April 2004), 27-29. On academic Design Build programs see Jason Pearson ed., *University/Community Design Partnerships* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002) and Bryan Bell ed., *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Bussel, “Architecture in the Public Interest,” 27.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gutman refers to this often elided intellectual tradition in “Two Questions for Architecture,” his introduction to Bell ed., *Good Deeds, Good Design*, 15-22.

<sup>4</sup> See Christopher Alexander, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (1977) and *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979).

## Why There is No Such Thing as “The Real World”

### *Peter Wheelwright*

In 1947, Le Corbusier wrote: “I have never been able to accept the instruction of the schools for the simple reason that I have a bad character...”<sup>1</sup> I was struck by this phrase for two reasons. Firstly, because I think that it is precisely that “bad character” that made him a great student of architecture and ultimately a great, albeit unaffiliated, teacher. But, my other thought was how much this contrary comment corresponds to my hesitation in joining the AIA. Le Corbusier, of course, was thinking of the doctrinaire and conservative practices of the Ecole des Beaux Arts with its self-sustaining and exclusionary claims to the “truth about architecture.” In my case, I have bridled at the AIA’s regulatory claim on the profession and the education of architects. But it may be that I have a bad character too.

So, what exactly did Le Corbusier mean here? First, I think he was referring to his discomfort with institutions that appear to spend more time establishing rules and regulations than in discovering the contingent and life-affirming exceptions to rules and regulations. I also know he did not like diplomas with their “signatures and flattering emblems.” He underscored this by declaring: “I know quite well that later on, when the students are thrust into real life, they are forced to acquire a different diploma: that of reality.”<sup>2</sup> While I suspect we all know what he was driving at, this does provoke the question: where exactly had the students been before, if not in “real life?” It is this peculiar and pervasive trope, “the real world,” which I want to visit here. The notion of a “real world” has been the shibboleth of the architectural profession in the long-standing and mutually confusing education wars, conjuring a number of the now familiar dichotomies that have come to characterize the combatants: theory versus practice, knowledge versus experience, ideality versus physicality, and designing versus making. But how useful has this call to the real world been, really? Not very, I think.

This cleaving of existence into the real versus whatever its alternative might be – the false, the inauthentic, the illusionary, the unreal – has only served to devalue the importance of teaching and learning, while raising up the

specter of a retributive professional life. It calls into question the very validity of intellectual endeavor in our field, and injects a moralizing ethic into any quest for understanding of it. But let me continue, for the moment, with a still remarkably fresh jibe from Le Corbusier. “I admire”, he says, “the dazzling manual skill acquired by the students through their instruction at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts...I recognize the elegance, which guides the solutions of plan, façade, and section. But, I should like to see intelligence dominating elegance and not being disregarded.”<sup>3</sup> “Design has killed architecture,” he continues, “Design is what they teach in the schools...the school kills; the school kills by being shut off far from crafts and materials. Reality is lacking.”<sup>4</sup>

Again, Le Corbusier’s rhetorical point is clear. The idea of the “real world” reminds students once more of their poor decision-making in choosing to attend architecture school, and dissuades anyone in their right mind from any interest in teaching in one. But while I think his reaction against the Ecole des Beaux-Arts was legitimate, I also think he was somewhat careless with language in his attack on what he called “the Academy.” For it is this notion of “the Academy” that also validates the notion of the “real world.” Both are abstractions, misleading generalizations that neatly but reductively bundle up systems of perceived value and set the stage for discursive and unproductive tirades.

Architecture is the only discipline I can think of that has so consistently experienced this battle between its academic world and its professional (or so-called real) world. Does this happen in medicine, law, or business? I think not. Teaching architecture has always been problematic because there is the assumption that the object or goal of this education is professional competence in the material design and making of a building, and yet most students spend three or more years attempting this not even once. This is unlike other professional disciplines, such as medicine or law, where the professional education provides direct hands-on testing of one’s facility to practice. And it is for this reason that I suggest to students that we do NOT teach them to do architecture but rather teach them to THINK about doing architecture. Later, when they become professionals they will learn how to do it in the true

sense. In my judgment, this is what good schools have always done. Good schools are typically speculative in the sense that they take seriously the fundamental goal of gathering up knowledge in order to facilitate social change. They are, by nature, contentious, experimental, and critically reflective about the world as given. Most significantly, they are future-oriented quite simply because for students, the future is the only possible real world.

In a redemptive turn, for me, Le Corbusier later begins to distinguish between the Academy as social abstraction and teaching as social practice. He says: “Learning? That is the joy of every day, the ray of sunlight in life.”<sup>5</sup> “I would not be hostile to the School if the commentary went thus: ‘Here is what was done; here are the reasons for it. In the present circumstance, such things can no longer be effective. On the other hand, they show, how in all times and places, the spirit created, made new things, and marched forward based on existing contingencies. And so, investigate the contingencies, establish their nature clearly and set your feet on that mobile springboard in order to leap forward. In that way you will do things which are true, useful, and of unquestionable value’.”<sup>6</sup> And so I am suspicious of attempts to professionalize education in architecture. For the profession has little choice but to operate within the constraints of an existing real world. As an alternative, I would hope that professionals, while remaining vigilant in their responsibilities to that world, might better recognize their roles as teachers – to teach their young acolytes what they have learned while remaining open to new possibilities that these same acolytes set before them.

This past spring and summer the second year graduate students at the Parsons Department of Architecture, Interior Design and Lighting designed and built a proto-type Cor-Ten steel field house for the New York City public school system. I think these students were lucky to have had this opportunity; they got a taste of what Le Corbusier felt was important in his notion of the real world. But when I see this building, in all of its robust materiality and craft, I do not see it as symbol of the real world at all. I see it, most significantly, as an idea - an idea about people, place, time, and architecture’s capacity to direct light on such things in new and valuable ways. Toward the end of his book *When the Cathedrals Were White*, Le Corbusier, after

noting his “bad character” demurs and says: “I consider that he who is not conscious of grace does not have the right to be an architect.”<sup>7</sup> I agree, and I hope the educators and professionals will all learn to be more graceful in their dealings with each other from within whichever real world they find themselves.

These remarks were first delivered for the “design-in-education” panel at the opening of the AIA Center for Architecture in New York City, October 2003 and reprinted in *The Journal of Architectural Education* vol. 57, issue 4 (May 2004), 56-57.

<sup>1</sup> Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals Were White* (1947 reprint; New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 208. My italics.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 209.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **Faculty:**

Special thanks to Terry Erickson, who has had a hand in every project since 1998; first as a student, and later as the summer construction faculty. He has taken over 75 students into the field, many without any building experience, and brought all safely back to school each subsequent fall. In addition, his empathy for the students' intentions and his fine eye for the adaptive detail always ensured the desired relationship between the designed and the built. Also, to faculty members Charles Wolf and Matthew Baird, who have shouldered the bulk of the studio and construction technology load. Charles was there from the beginning and was instrumental in helping Matthew Baird carry on so successfully afterwards.

Thanks to *The Design Workshop* Faculty since 1998:

Matthew Baird (2002, 2003, 2004)  
Karen Frome (2005)  
Craig Konyk (2000)  
David Ruff (2005)  
Amanda Sachs (2004)  
David van Handel (2000, 2001)  
Charles Wolf (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003)  
Peter Wheelwright (1998)

Thanks to *The Design Workshop* Faculty prior to 1998:

James Garrison who provided "test runs" from his construction technology classes.  
Former M.Arch Director, Joel Sanders, and Marc Tsurumaki, whose first Design Workshop project did not get built but, nevertheless, helped to show the obstacles to avoid. Lastly, and most importantly, to former department Chair, Karen van Lengen, for her bold initiative to start an urban design-build program in the first place.

### **Clients/Supporters:**

Thanks to *The Design Workshop* clients and their support staff:

The New School, particularly James Murtha, Executive Vice President, who while at first a skeptic, has become a generous supporter and client. And to Parsons School for Design, particularly former Dean, Randy Swearer, who believed in *The Design Workshop* in the early years  
John Tomlinson (NY Studio Program), Bill Barrett (AICAD), and Parsons Vice Dean Lesley Cadman (AICAD) who had the idea.  
Mary Musca (Take the Field) who probably took the greatest leap of faith with an ambitious project and organized her support team at TDX brilliantly.  
Rosanne Haggerty and Lucia Fanjul (Common Ground Community) who showed unflagging confidence in the students and  
Carlos Cardoso of Beyer Blinder Belle who, necessarily, had to fear the worst but got the best of the students.  
Tom Healy and Erin Donnelly (Lower Manhattan Cultural Council) who are just getting started.

Thanks for material contributions over the years that have come from Commercial Plastics, Dave Sanders & Co., Design Source, Haefele, Homasote Co., Janovic, Julius Blum & Company, Inc., Kam Cheng Glass Corp, McMaster-Carr, McNichols Co., Miron Lumber, Murus Company, Pittsburgh Corning Co., Unistrut.

Special thanks to funding supporters of *The Design Workshop*: The Bruce Ford Brown Charitable Trust; Steven Roth of Vornado Realty Trust; and David Childs, Skidmore Owings and Merrill.

Finally, thanks to Peter Davoren of Turner Construction. His sponsorship during the midyears provided much needed funding for tools, equipment, and the general resources to raise the ambition of *The Design Workshop* and to Parsons Senior Associate Dean, Nadine Bourgeois, whose long-standing support has made this publication possible.

### **Peter Wheelwright, May 2005**

#### **Photography:**

Terry Erickson  
Eliza Hicks  
Paul Warchol  
Charles Wolf

The students of *The Design Workshop*, notably  
Tara Lockitch and Brooks McDaniel for 2004

#### **Design and Layout:**

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