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For and about the emerging architect

archrecord2

A young architect takes Manhattan, while students in New Orleans take on the housing crisis in their damaged city. What's the connection? Both are finding the right housing solutions for their chosen clients. Go to architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2 to learn about other inspiring designers in Design, Work, Live, and add your opinions in Talk. ONLINE: Is submitting to international competitions worth the effort for young U.S. firms? Respond at construction.com/community/forums.aspx.

Design

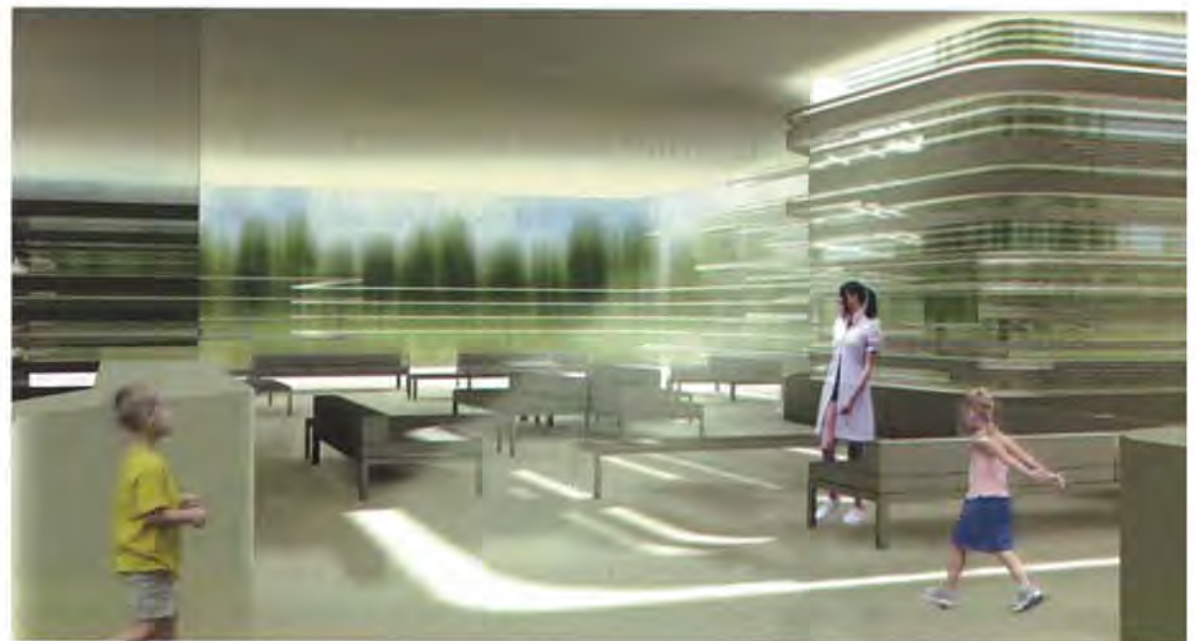
Studio ST: From inside to the ground up



When Israeli architect Esther Sperber left Pei Partnership Architects to strike out on her own with Studio ST in 2003, she was excited, nervous, and up to the challenge. "Having the opportunity to work so closely with Mr. Pei was amazing," she says. "It

felt like we were dealing with the end of High Modernism. I knew it was a gamble to start my own firm, but I was interested in trying something new, and putting into practice some of the technologies I had learned in school." That was Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, which Sperber attended after moving to New York from Jerusalem in 1997. "There was a huge emphasis on doing those crazy computer-generated blobs when I was there," she says. "The blobs weren't that interesting to me, but the technology was. I'm very interested in expanding the palette of forms, construction methods, and ways of making spaces, as a means of allowing a better focus to try to create places and spaces for human activity and interaction."

Sperber spent her first year on her own sharing an office with another young firm, dZO, and the two practices collaborated on a number of international competition submissions. "Competitions are refreshing and fun," she says. "Though there's a side to them that's a little exploitative, they're an opportunity to think through design challenges." After that first year, word of mouth got Sperber interior renovation jobs, and she has been able to put her philosophies and expertise into action ever since, as her two-person firm now has a roster of high-end residential renovations completed or under way, as well as new construction projects for real estate developers. While she enjoys the high-end residential projects' big budgets,



Mediatheque, Carnoux-en-Provence, France, unbuilt

A modern library (above) where a bookshelf/wall of stacked glass-and-concrete blocks links inside and out.

National Library of the Czech Republic, Prague, unbuilt

This library (below) calls for reading halls, a theater, lecture halls, offices, work spaces, labs, and book-storage areas that celebrate interaction with the public.



Village Duplex, N.Y.C., 2006

A 2,200-square-foot duplex (above) with a series of differentiated spaces including a glass-and-metal conservatory and large dining room.



IMAGES: COURTESY STUDIO ST (THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE, TOP TWO)



State Street Town House, Brooklyn, N.Y., 2005

A gut renovation, this town house was divided into four apartments, adding 320 square feet to each floor.

she's excited about her latest ground-up projects, including a private house in New Jersey. "It's a small budget, but with clients who are very open to new ideas. And working with a tighter budget forces you to focus on simplicity, space and light, and efficient proportions."

Efficiency is a big part of Sperber's design philosophy, which is where her love of new technology comes in. "When anything is cut by a computer-generated machine, you can use smaller pieces and save materials and time," she says, referring to a home project in Atlanta, Georgia, currently in design called the Slice House (view plans at architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2/), where she will use precut and prewired structurally insulated panels that are attached to one another and don't require additional stick framing. The home will also have everything in place to easily add photovoltaic panels if and when the client decides to take the next step with sustainability.

For Sperber, the next step personally is taking a few months off to have a baby, which she admits is not easy to schedule when you run your own very small firm. With as many projects as she has in the works, however, she'll be back in the office soon. "There's nothing like the smell of wet concrete," she says, "so I know I won't be away from the joy of making buildings for long." *Ingrid Spencer*

ONLINE: To view additional photos and projects by Studio ST, and to comment on this article, go to architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2/.

Work

URBANbuild students bring hope to New Orleans



Even before Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans, housing in the city was a problem. Tulane University's School of Architecture, under an umbrella program of the school called Tulane City Center, had been working to help since the summer of 2005, with a design-build studio called URBANbuild. "Thirty-three

percent of people in Orleans Parish were living below the poverty line before Katrina," says Byron Mouton, codirector of URBANbuild. "Our program was designed with a 'macro scale,' which concentrates on research at the regional/city/neighborhood scale, and a design-build 'micro scale,' concentrating on research at the neighborhood/dwelling/material scale." According to Mouton, since the hurricane, these and other outreach programs under Tulane City Center's auspices have gained strength, as justification of their necessity has been established and funds have become available.

Thanks to that urgency, the partnership with community nonprofit agencies that specialize in affordable housing and neighborhood redevelopment, and the hard work of faculty and 12 undergraduate students, URBANbuild has completed its second design-build project, Prototype 02—a variation on the typical New Orleans camelback home, and an experiment in new building technologies. Located in a blighted area called Central City, the 1,320-square-foot house was built with panelized steel-stud walls.

"This is the second prototype house we've completed in this studio," says URBANbuild project manager Emilie Taylor. "The first one was a more cautious effort done with traditional stick framing, but because the panelized walls for 02 were made in a warehouse, we could save time during the construction process."

And because the two-semester time frame of the class meant one semester for design and one for building, more time was essential. Except for the licensed trades, the students do all the work. "Starting in January, we were putting in well over 40-hour weeks to stay on our 15-week schedule," says student Matthew Shaver. "We want to disperse the product," says Mouton.



The Prototype 02 house (above) was designed and built by students from the URBANbuild design-build studio (left).

"Our goal is to replace homes to repair neighborhoods." While the URBANbuild studio continues to modify its design to reach the best solution for mass production, a separate studio at Tulane led by local architect Coleman Coker, called Greenbuild, and producing a modular home, will also be completed this year. With that house the third in the series, the Tulane City Center program is well on its way to helping provide alternative housing solutions to the city at an affordable cost. Until the program gets the plans for the URBANbuild homes mass-produced, neighborhood housing agencies are finding buyers for the prototypes. The first has been sold for \$120,000 (had the buyer qualified for low-income status, he would have been able to purchase the property for less), and the second is currently available for purchase.

With all the success of the program, Mouton admits it's still a struggle. "We're often trying to build in parts of the city that should become green-space," he says. "But the people from these areas are proud, and they're not about to give up the neighborhoods they've lived in for years. It's a larger urban issue that we're very much involved in." *I.S.*

ONLINE: To view additional information about URBANbuild, and to comment on this article, go to architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2/.