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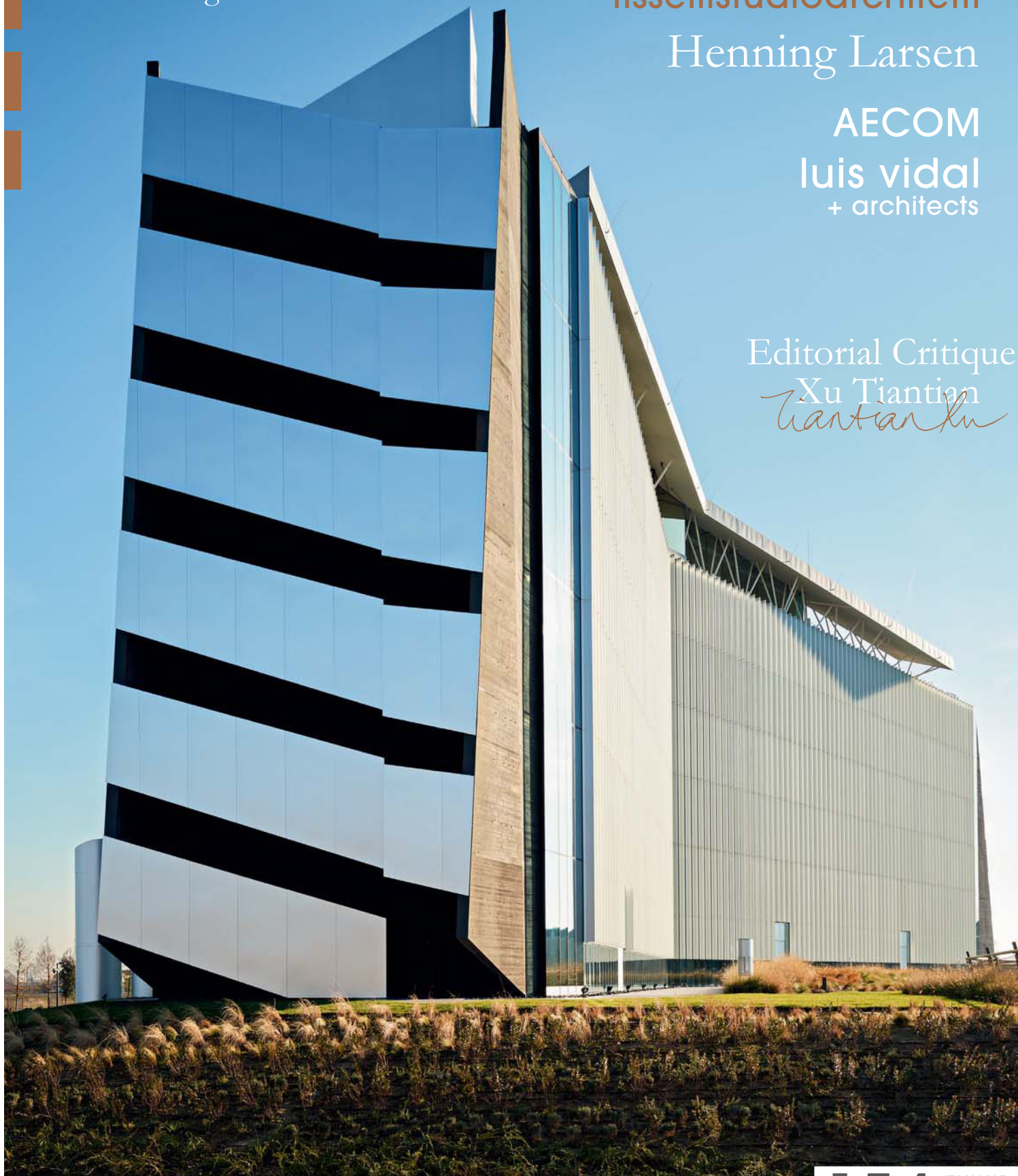
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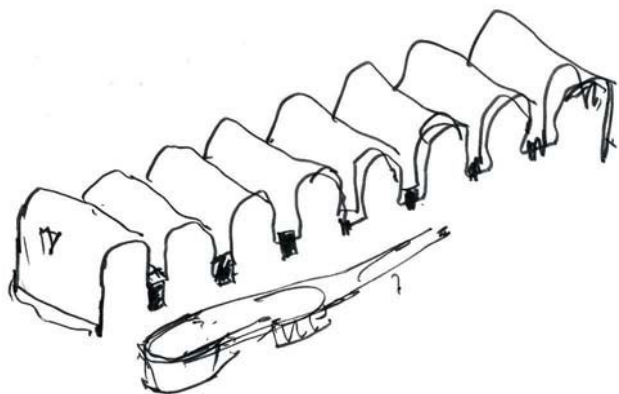
Editorial Critique
Xu Tiantian
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"PS1200"
MIXED-USE
COMPLEX

NEW COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

FORT WORTH, TEXAS,
USA



Meryati Johari
Blackwell



Marlon Blackwell



Marlon Blackwell
Architects





Community is a word frequently heard these days in the United States. Community signals authenticity and is usually, in one way or another, in opposition to rampant capitalism. Neighborhoods can reinforce themselves against divisive development in ways that may not be immediately visible – maintaining rights to low-income housing, for instance, or mitigating energy consumption. Building community in terms of new construction and urban design does, however, entail visibility and certain preconceived notions we all have regarding home, shelter, and gathering.

With PS1200 in Fort Worth, Texas, Marlon Blackwell Architects and client Prince Concepts have realized a cheeky prototype for how urban zones across the United States might accommodate adventurous residents and gutsy small businesses in eye-catching architectural forms. These forms and the programs they accommodate talk to and reinforce one another to mutual benefit.

Marlon Blackwell is himself an authentic, an independently minded architect working out of Arkansas, a state hitherto known as the birthplace of Edward Durrell Stone, designer of decorative landmark buildings for the U.S. Establishment in the 1950s and '60s, and the fertile native ground for E. Fay Jones, architect of many poetic houses and chapels inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. Blackwell has more in common with Jones, working with the realities of regions he has closely scrutinized. He typically harnesses available materials and modes of construction to achieve a new, legible, and provocative architecture.

In Fort Worth, architect and client have engaged the generic Quonset hut as the literal building block for the multivalent community at 1200 6th Avenue. Mass-produced for rapid installation and maximal interior space during World War II, the Quonset hut has been cloned and tweaked across North America ever since.

Blackwell's client (perhaps patron is a more accurate description) is Detroit-based Philip Kafka of Prince Concepts. In Detroit, he has already commissioned a small live/work community known as True North from L.A. architect Edwin Chan (a second cluster by Chan is already under construction) and a single extruded terrace, Caterpillar, by Bangladeshi-born, Detroit-based Ishtiaq Rafiuddin. With PS1200, Kafka is returning to Texas, his home state, and to another city undergoing economic and demographic change. Each of his projects (he has also rehabilitated redundant or abandoned small industrial structures) is an experiment in facilitating new live/work groups in harmonious proximity.

Travelers most likely view Fort Worth, the smaller urban node in the sprawling Dallas-Fort Worth conurbation, from one of several freeways. Motorists will register the outcrop of Downtown high-rises, the most distinguished of which are the chiseled glass towers built for the local Bass family by the uncompromising Modernist, Paul Rudolph, in the early 1980s. Whereas Rudolph also built an astonishing mega-villa for Sid and Anne Bass in the wealthy western suburbs, PS1200 is found amid the low-rise sheds and other post-industrial structures now favored by younger Bohemians south of Downtown.

On a skinny lot aligned north-south, Blackwell has placed eight tall and broad Quonset shells along the west perimeter lane. They are

paired, sharing external access stairways, and handed so that each interior is a mirror image of its twin. The shiny metallic outer membrane is lined to make an interior envelope that is smooth and coolly white, a sensuously minimal retreat with morning and afternoon light to either end of the longitudinal space.

If the exterior skin and the primary construction technique are a reworking – a customization, as with bespoke automobile culture – of American products, these interiors channel, at least in part, the Purist modern ideal of the naturally lit, double-height artist atelier, specifically those envisaged by Le Corbusier in 1920s Paris. There is even a plywood box-within-the-box – an *aedicule* in nomenclature favored by witty Postmodernist Charles Moore – providing a zone for sleeping and private bathing above kitchen and other services below. The provision of generous open shelving behind the mezzanine balustrade suggests that the people who designed PS1200 must also be book lovers.

Each of the eight airy studios sits atop an orthogonal unit to be used for retail (hipster clothing and retro barbershop) or office suite. With longitudinal walls made from exposed cinder block, small ancillary spaces (utilities and restrooms) are tucked beneath the exterior landings giving access to the studios overhead.

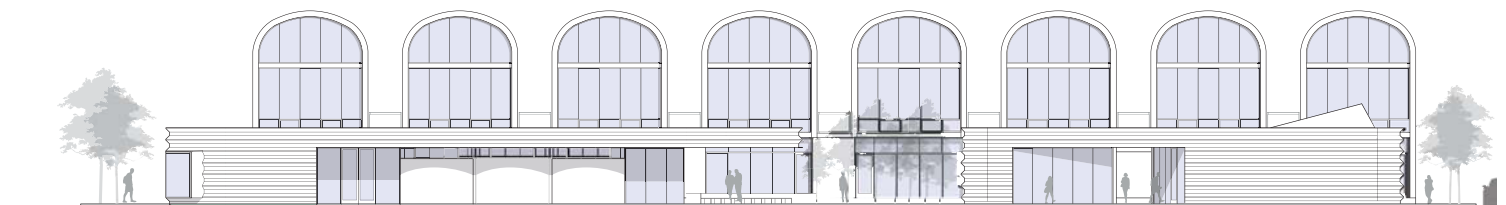
One of these skinnier bays is left open to facilitate circulation through the urban block, a concern for site porosity reinforced by both the splitting of the smaller of two pavilions along 6th Avenue into a doughnut store and a coffee shop/bookstore/gallery, and the shaping of the larger pavilion, cut back to create a roofed restaurant terrace and with three apse-like protrusions whose volumetric geometry echoes that of the vaulted studios behind.

These pavilions – and the interstitial landscape, by Julie Bargmann from D.I.R.T. studio, of irregular flagstones and slim cypress and cedar trees – expand the PS1200 experiment beyond simply architecture and into the realms of urban design. Atypically for the U.S., there are no gates to impede natural pedestrian flow. PS1200, by the way, stands for Public Space 1200, the street address on 6th Avenue.

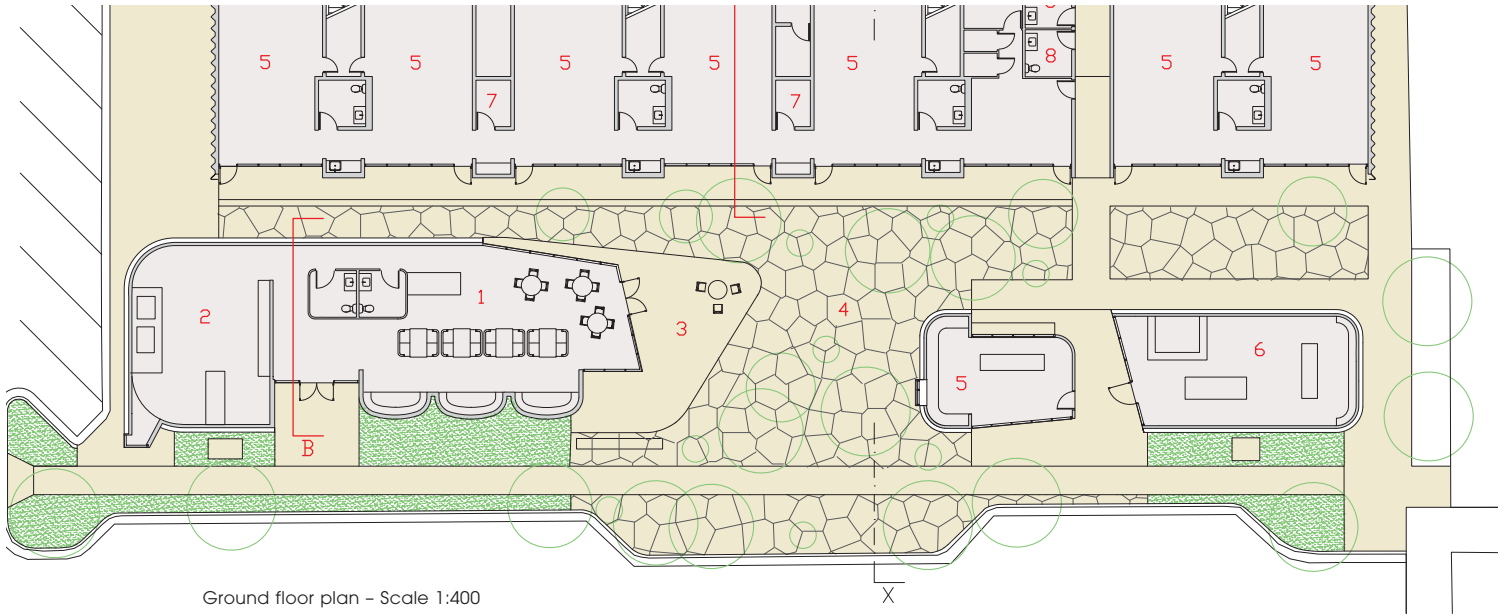
For the single-story pavilions, Blackwell has taken the corrugated Quonset shell and flipped it on its sides so that the wall surface of these lower units bring a dynamic horizontal striation of the street façade, wrapping around corners to soften the general massing and allowing for a dramatic punched window, from a kitchen/server, in the southwest corner.

With PS1200, Marlon Blackwell Architects add to their already impressive engagement with the building and material cultures of the contemporary United States. It is the latest in a sequence of projects exhibiting the possibility of a better urban environment, one not mindlessly regurgitating “historic” styles but inventing new vital modes for communal life. This then is an architecture that infuses the vernacular with the formal, spatial, and social hopes of Modernism.

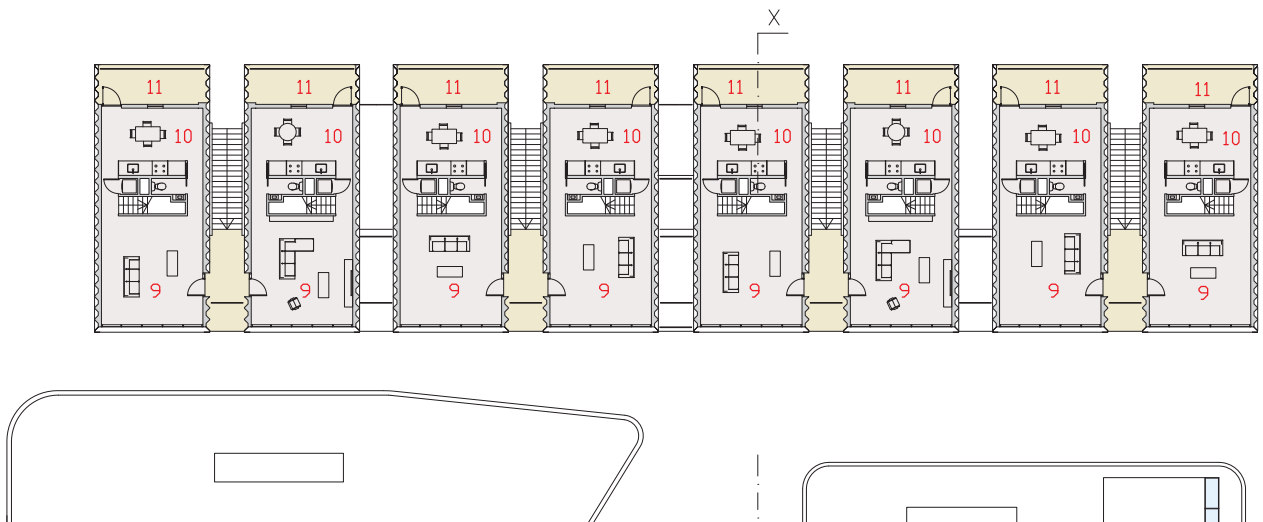
To realize such meaningful syntheses is a hard-won feat amid the banalities of current building conventions. As Glenda Farrell opined in *Gold Diggers of 1937*, “It is so hard to be good under the capitalistic system”.







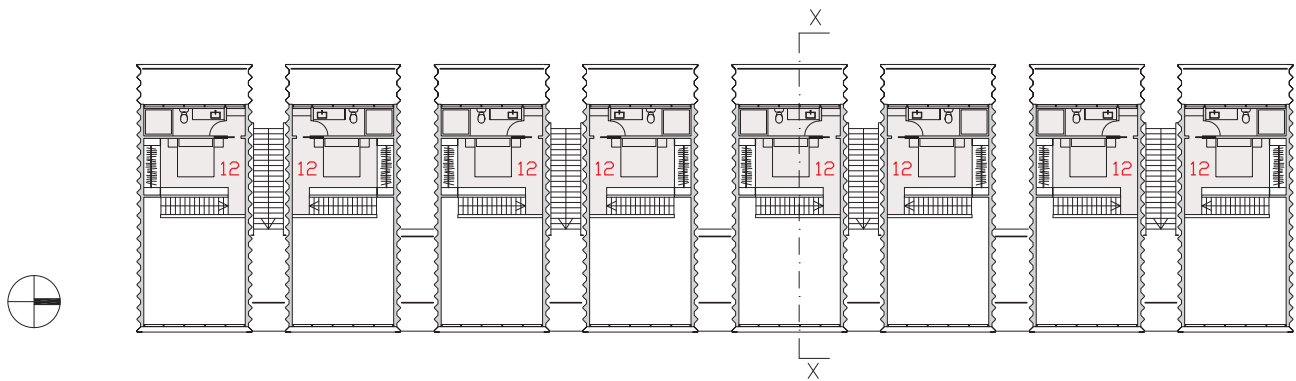
First floor plan – Scale 1:400

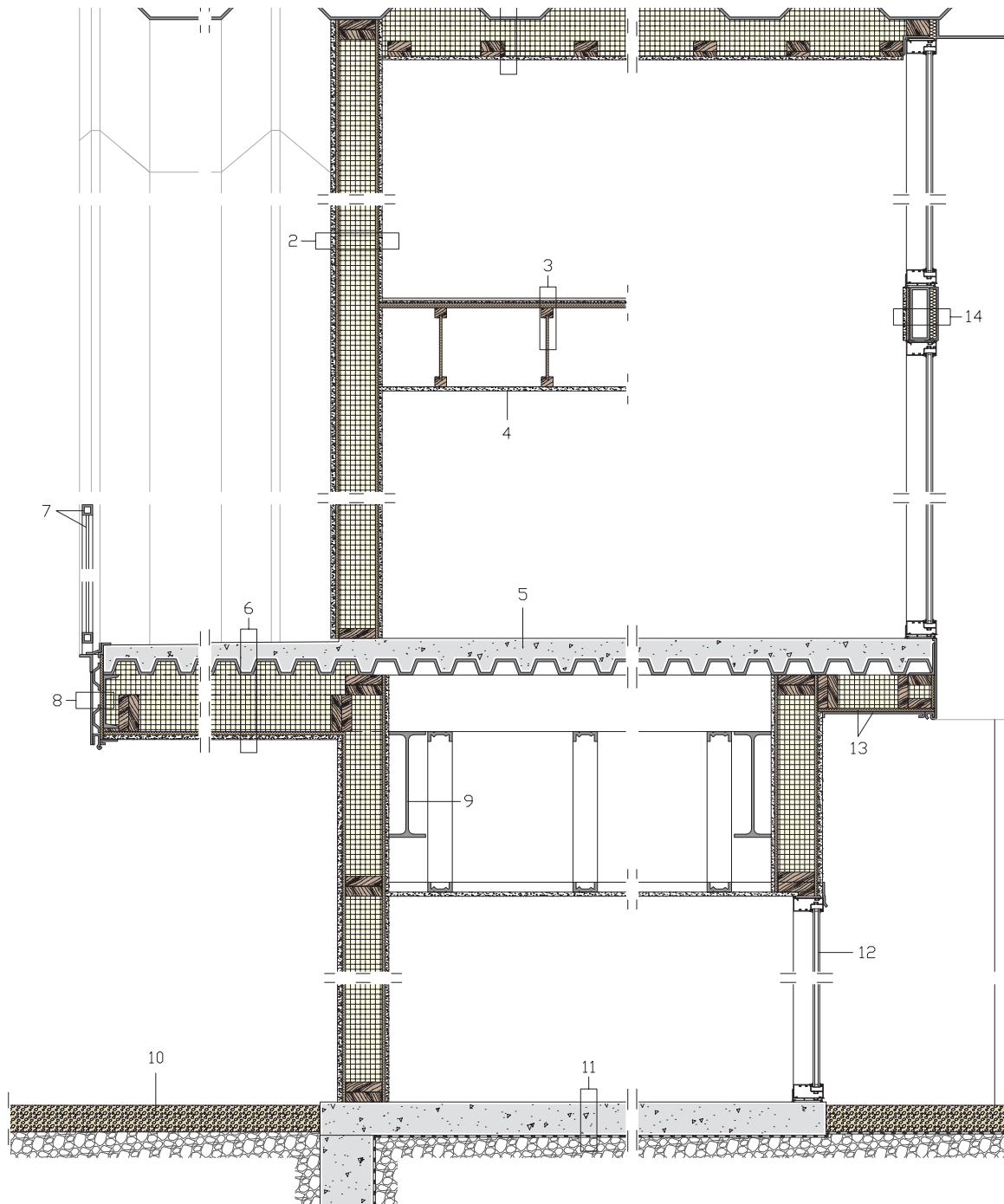




Second floor plan – Scale 1:400

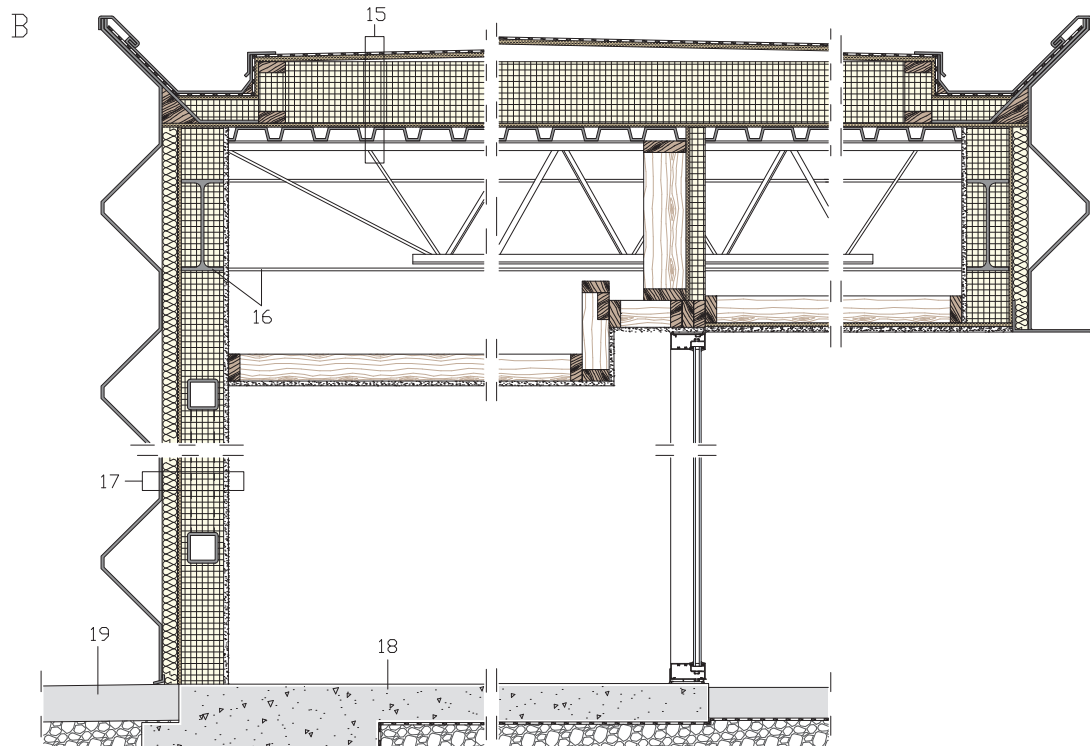
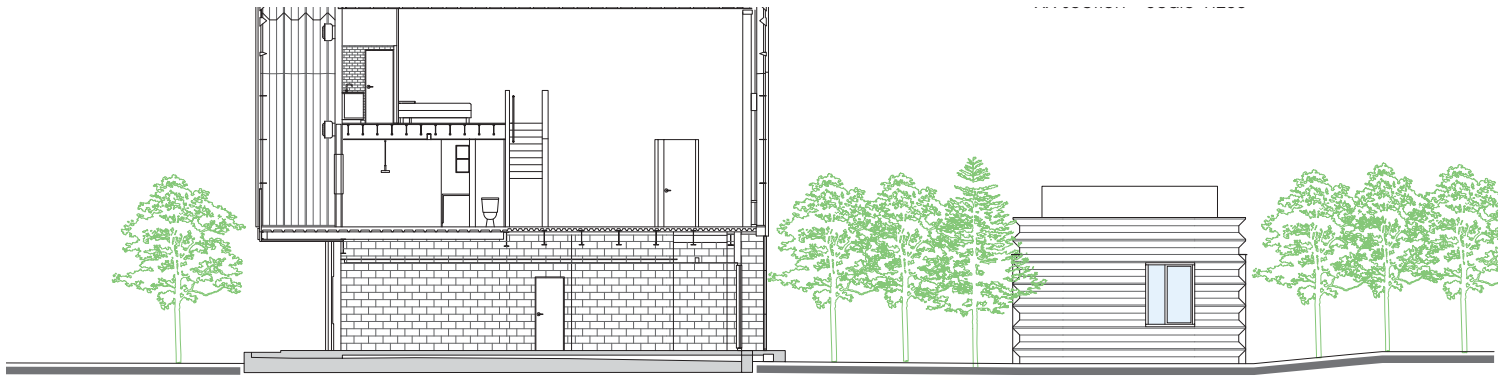
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|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1- Restaurant | 4- Plaza | 7- Technical room | 10- Kitchen/dining room |
| 2- Kitchen | 5- Retail | 8- Public restrooms | 11- Porch |
| 3- Terrace | 6- Gallery and coffee shop | 9- Living | 12- Bedroom |





Details A, B: Construction system
Vertical sections – Scale 1:25

- 1- Roof comprising corrugated steel roofing, spray insulation, timber framing, 1/2" (12.5 mm) plasterboard suspended ceiling
- 2- Façade comprising stucco on reinforcing mesh, 1/2" (12.5 mm) OSB sheathing, 5 1/2 x 1 5/8" (140x40 mm) timber framing with insulation, 1/2" (12.5 mm) rigid insulation, 1/2" (12.5 mm) plasterboard
- 3- Tile flooring, screed, 3/4" (20 mm) plywood panel, timber beams with OSB web
- 4- Plasterboard suspended ceiling
- 5- 5 1/2" (140 mm) composite slab of concrete fill over corrugated decking with polished finish
- 6- 4 7/8" (125 mm) composite slab of concrete fill over corrugated decking with polished finish



- 5 1/2 x 1 5/8" (140x40 mm) timber framing, insulation fill, OSB sheathing, stucco on reinforcing mesh
- 7- Balustrade comprising steel box profiles and flat bars
- 8- Fascia comprising steel flat bars, metal Ω-profiles, plywood panel, 7 7/8 x 2 3/8" (200x60 mm) steel C-profile
- 9- 15 3/4 x 5 1/2" (400x140 mm) structural steel I-beam
- 10- Concrete sidewalk with exposed aggregate finish
- 11- 5 1/8" (130 mm) reinforced concrete slab with polished finish, vapor barrier, gravel layer
- 12- Aluminum curtain wall with 1/4 - 1/2 - 1/4" (6/13/6 mm) glazing unit
- 13- Soffit comprising flat steel bars on plywood panel
- 14- Aluminum plate, rigid insulation, 7 7/8 x 2" (200x75 mm) steel
- 15- Roof comprising waterproofing membrane, 5/8" (16 mm) OSB sheathing, ventilated air space, 7 7/8" (200 mm) spray insulation, 5/8" (16 mm) OSB sheathing, corrugated decking, metal framing
- 16- 11 3/4 x 5 1/2" (300x140 mm) steel I-beam structural framing
- 17- Façade comprising corrugated steel cladding, 2" (50 mm) rigid insulation, 1/2" (12.5 mm) OSB sheathing, 4 x 4" (100x100 mm) steel box profile framing with spray insulation, plasterboard
- 18- Sealed concrete paving
- 19- Concrete slab paving





CREDITS

Location: Fort Worth, Texas, USA – **Completion:** 2022 – **Developer:** Prince Concepts – **Site Area:** 2,100 m² – **Built Area:** 1,670 m² – **Architect:** Marlon Blackwell Architects – **Main Contractor:** PGP Construction

Consultants

Structural: Datum Engineers, The Sadler Group
Civil: Salcedo Group – **MEP:** Root Engineering Services – **Landscape:** D.I.R.T. studio, Studio Outside

Photography: Timothy Hursley

Portrait images: Mark Jackson/CHROMA

All images courtesy of Marlon Blackwell Architects