

### STUDIO PROSPECTUS PROBLEM STATEMENT

*Hurricane Harvey made explicit the consequences of developing single-family housing in a reservoir. Canyon Gate in the Barker Reservoir was one community of 721 homes that made headlines. As the residents begin to move back in debate raged over if the neighborhood should even have been built at all. However, there is another view, one that positions rain events as amenities and water views as something more than an impetus for spiking land prices. In the words of Manon Mollard "Could we rediscover [these] waterways as sites of production, of fundamental use and value to our cities?" Can we view the reservoir as an asset that strengthens the vitality of the life surrounding, and the sense of community on an urban edge condition? This studios focus will be spent on questions of site design, positioning, environmental envelope considerations and the enrichment of living through architecture.*

### Context As Material | How to Read Place

read (v.): To examine and grasp the meaning of (written or printed characters, words, or sentences).

place (n.): An area with definite or indefinite boundaries; a portion of space.

context (n.): The part of a text or statement that surrounds a particular word or passage and determines its meaning, or the circumstances in which an event occurs; a setting. *[Middle English, composition, from Latin contextus, from past participle of contexere, to join together : con-, con- + texere, to weave; see teks- in Indo-European roots.]*

Context by definition is inconclusive and thus is always open to personal interpretation. PLACE and how one reads it is of course in the eye of the beholder but in my view, as architects it is our utmost responsibility to hone the necessary skills to interpret / unearth / re-present / frame / manifest meaningful, memorable, soulful place (s) for our clients, our constituents, and our communities; hopefully ones that possess the latent ability to sustain the whims of fashion and the test of time. Sustainable Design is first and foremost GOOD DESIGN that touches the hearts and souls of the people / community / PLACE (S) that it serves. It is important to know that history teaches us that TIME is on the side of good building -- good place making.

As students of architecture, "how do you begin to read place?" First, you begin by observing and experiencing the world around you. Context and how we interpret it, is one of the malleable materials from which we construct architectural space, light is another. Peter Zumthor, the pre-eminent Swiss architect simply states, "I experience the world". One of my central interests in teaching architecture is how do we as Professors of Architecture kindle the curiosity required for you as students of the world / architecture / life to begin to passionately engage the world around you, observe the realness of it all and start assimilating your own personal experience (s) into your own critical local / global view such that your eyes can touch PLACE and reinterpret it in architectural terms. In my experience, there is never excellence without passion.

In this studio, you will build an argument as you design. The Studio will begin researching specific aspects of the Houston, the bayou waterways and "how we live here" (past, present and future) concurrent with case study analysis of relevant projects with similar program, through large-scale models and other means. After completing this analysis, we will visit the bayou waterways, specifically the Buffalo Bayou, the Barker Reservoir and their City Parks as a studio. The goal of our studio will be to produce an alternative vision for "how to live along the bayou" in our case acknowledging the Barker Reservoir as a Central Park and the potential heart of a latent Edge City condition. It is intended that the quality of your work will spark a dialogue with Houston; its' citizens, its' community leaders, the City Parks system (our collective client) about how we can build along its' bayou park / flood control system in a way that recognizes this system as both asset and necessity. The studio ethic will be to work at this problem through thinking, drawing (visualization) and handcrafted three-dimensional making. A holistic project should confront a new paradigm for a local / global architecture for this "place", its' history, climate, material culture with an eye both to the past and to the future. No patent definition exist for context; it is often up to you to perceive / imagine it and sell a different view. Art / Architecture is often simultaneously an act of resistance and an act of collaboration. As such, each student in this studio will be expected to passionately and actively engage a process of defining your own "context as the malleable material" for a successful alternative solution to the current patterns of living along the Houston Bayou System, and again in our case the Barker Reservoir / George Bush Park.

*"A building should be able to open up and say, 'I am alive and looking after my people,' or instead, 'I'm closed now, and I'm looking after my people as well.' This to me is the real issue: buildings should respond. ...They should open and close and modify and re-modify ...That is a part of architecture for me, the resolution of levels of light that we desire, the resolution of the wind that we wish for, the modification of the climate as we want it. All this makes a building live."*  
- Architect Glenn Murcutt

How could this new paradigm learn from the best examples of environmental design, past and present, that have explored the various meanings of the aboriginal saying, "to touch this earth lightly"? How could we learn from the time before the advent of affordable air-conditioning (1950) leveled all environmental responses to the specifics of climate? How could our impact on the land be less and the value of this experience, this respect for the land and the specifics of a particular 'place', become more - perhaps through the sharing of a "living experience" that is passed onto others via storytelling? Good environmental design is not just about limiting our carbon footprint, although this is becoming increasingly important, it is just as critical to our psyche, as well as our physiological being, that we continue to engage the light, the open air, the sounds and smells of our natural world in order to live our lives more joyfully, more completely.

*"The best magic of all is the magic that is real."*

- Artist James Turrell

## **STUDIO PHILOSOPHY STUDIO OBJECTIVES**

*"Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the Masters, seek what they sought."* - Zen teaching, 8th century.

Through their work, contemporary architects are actively engaged in a daily process that initiates creative thought and making, allowing them to bring insights to contemporary society. Our primary collective concern within this studio is to pursue a similar level of critical inquiry with emphasis on making, as we bring architecture into being through discourse and work. This graduate studio is dedicated to helping each of you understand contemporary practice and to further clarify your own personal voice. There will be an emphasis on making founded connections between the environment, culture, other disciplines, and architecture. Therein lies the necessity to connect and integrate knowledge and critical inquiry from the arts, humanities and sciences in ways that will enrich the value and exploration of each project you will undertake. Ponder, question, and to generate valid alternatives to what architecture is today, relative to this context. Each student is expected to develop a personal methodology that reflects a critique of architecture, and to test and clearly express it through one's work. Students will study the ideas and methodologies of other artists and professionals as a means of further developing and understanding their own work, realizing that the process of making architecture is just as important as the product. A variety of representational media and notational devices (digital, graphic and physical modeling) are to be explored and developed that will enable you to capture the spirit of your design inquiry, and clearly visualize and communicate its qualities to lay people and to other professionals. Additionally, the underlying spirit of all the studio investigations and work will be grounded within the realities of critical making (i.e. the tectonic: poetic construction). All work will address architecture's built realities (space, light, structure, material) and its' lived experiences.

*"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men - that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall become the universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost."*  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 1841

### **Perform Site Research and Publish Studio Book**

When visiting the site in a few weeks, sketch the site and its qualities, record your impressions, write narratives, and exasperate any and all other means of understanding the site personally (also consult Field Trip I Required Documentation (Individual) described below). Collectively as a studio, assemble data and perform site research (consult minimum expectations listed below - tasks to be coordinated / divided). Students will continue to reflect back on their individual and collective research throughout the semester. Upon returning, assemble your research in a concise Studio Book (Collective). The book will be the Studio's introduction to stakeholders as to site understanding and potentials, and as to why each individual student's unique program belongs on the site. The Studio Book will help you create a base of information (Collective) and an easily understandable personal perspective (Individual).

Site History - Comprehensively investigate the natural and cultural histories of this region from distant past to present day. Consider their interconnectedness and disconnectedness through time.

Regional, State and Local Economy - Research the economic history of this region from distant past to the present day.

Full Climatic Data Research - Latitude Location, Sun Angles (Equinox & Winter and Summer Solstice), High and Low Temperatures (Day and Night), Prevailing Winds, plus additional Weather Data for developing a Psychrometric Chart of Comfort for Passive Cooling / Passive Heating Design. Investigate alternative methods for maintaining relative comfort day and night through the winter, summer and shoulder seasons through passive / active environmental design.