

THE FAST & THE FRUITFUL

Author Nikole Bouchard

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture & Urban Planning

From Waste to Wonder

For thousands of years humans have experimented with various methods of waste disposal — from burning, to burying, to simply packing up and moving in search of an unscathed environment. Habits of disposal are deeply ingrained in our daily lives, so casual and continual that we rarely ever stop to ponder the big picture effects on social, spatial and ecological orders. Rethinking the ways in which we produce, collect, discard and reuse our waste, whether it's materials, spaces or places, is essential to ensure more feasible futures.

The Great Lakes Region was once the industrial core of the country. As we all know, the territory has suffered from the post-industrial period, leaving these vast lakes lined with “rust belt” cities which have been stigmatized by the shifting populations and industries that have migrated elsewhere. In many of these scarred areas, leaders are making impressive efforts to reinvigorate the urban core via programs that support the good food movement, adaptive reuse and urban revitalization projects.



Figure 1 The post-industrial palimpsest of Milwaukee's Inner Harbor. (Photo by Nikole Bouchard)

The Urban Edge Award

Every two years the School of Architecture & Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee presents *The Urban Edge Award*— a biennial prize that recognizes excellence in urban design and the ability of individuals to create major, positive change within the public realm. This award honors internationally recognized design professionals who bring fresh, innovative, and effective thinking to the field of design, with a focus on urbanism and landscape. Traditionally, *The Urban Edge Award* has been given to a single individual or office, but in the spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration, I shook things up in the spring of 2017 by inviting six design professionals to conduct three design workshops with Milwaukee students, faculty and stakeholders throughout the semester.

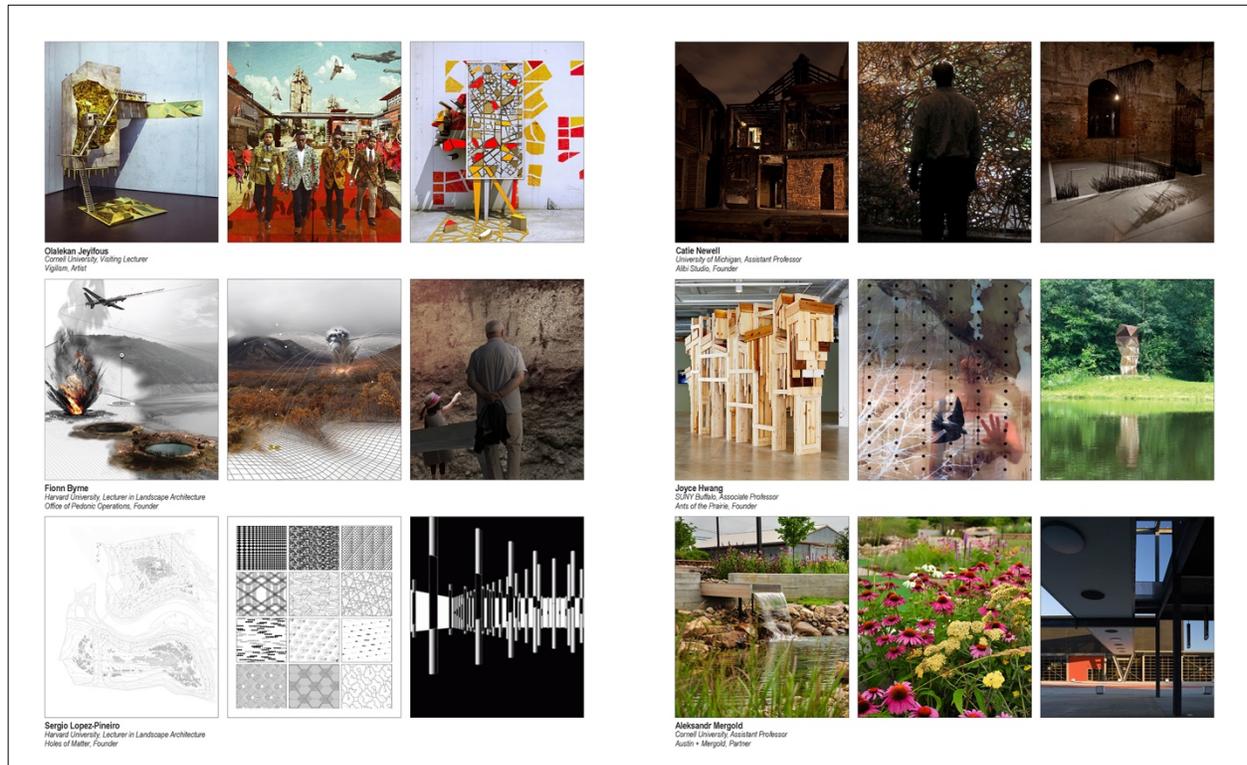


Figure 3 The 2017 Urban Edge Award Design Workshop No.01 Leaders were Olalekan Jeyifous and Catie Newell (top). Design Workshop No.2 Leaders were Fionn Byrne and Joyce Hwang (middle). And Design Workshop No.3 Leaders were Sergio Lopez-Pineiro and Aleksandr Mergold (bottom).

The theme of *The 2017 Urban Edge Award* was *From Waste to Wonder: Working with What Remains*. The goal of the three design workshops was to create a variety of design projects that address selected urban sites, situations and social inequities that are specific to Milwaukee, but similar to scenarios in post-industrial cities throughout America. Each design workshop had a unique theme, site and cast of characters. From Waste to Wonder participants developed design projects at a variety of scales that explored issues of urban vacancy, adaptive reuse and productive landscapes. Collaborators used the power of design to re-imagine a Milwaukee where cultural, social, economic and environmental issues are foregrounded and fortified.

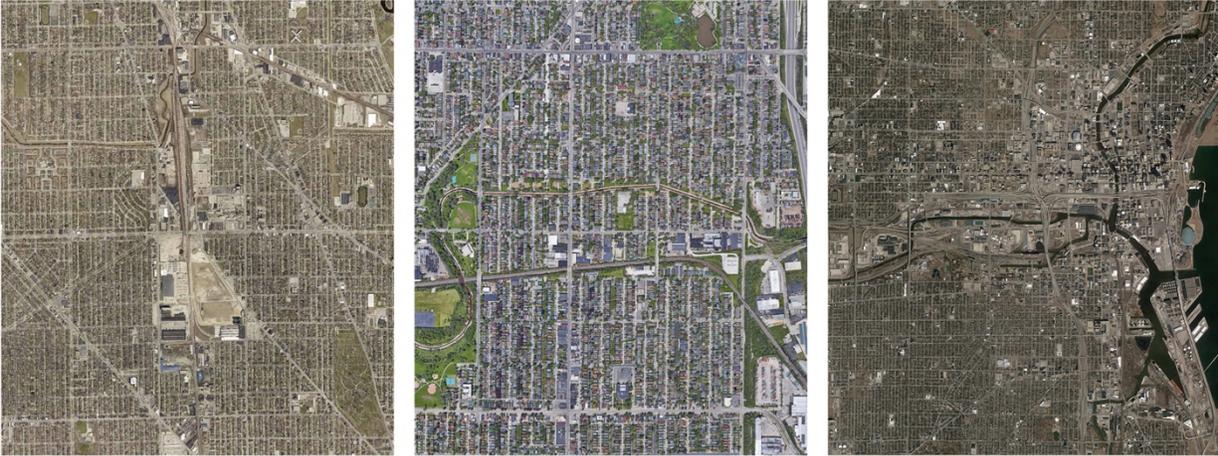


Figure 4 Aerial photographs of the Design Workshop No.01 Site: The 30th Street Industrial Corridor (left), the Design Workshop No.2 Site: The Kinnickinnic River Corridor (middle) and the Design Workshop No.3 Site: The Menomonee Valley (right).

The Urban Edge Award culminated on Saturday, April 15th with a day-long final review and public symposium where the workshop research and design projects were presented, discussed and debated amongst the invited keynote speaker, Walter Hood, the six design professionals, students, faculty, stakeholders and city officials.



Figure 5 *The Urban Edge Award* final review and public symposium was a chance for students to receive critical feedback from the keynote speaker, Walter Hood, the six design workshop leaders, faculty, stakeholders and city officials. (Photo by Milo Bonacci)

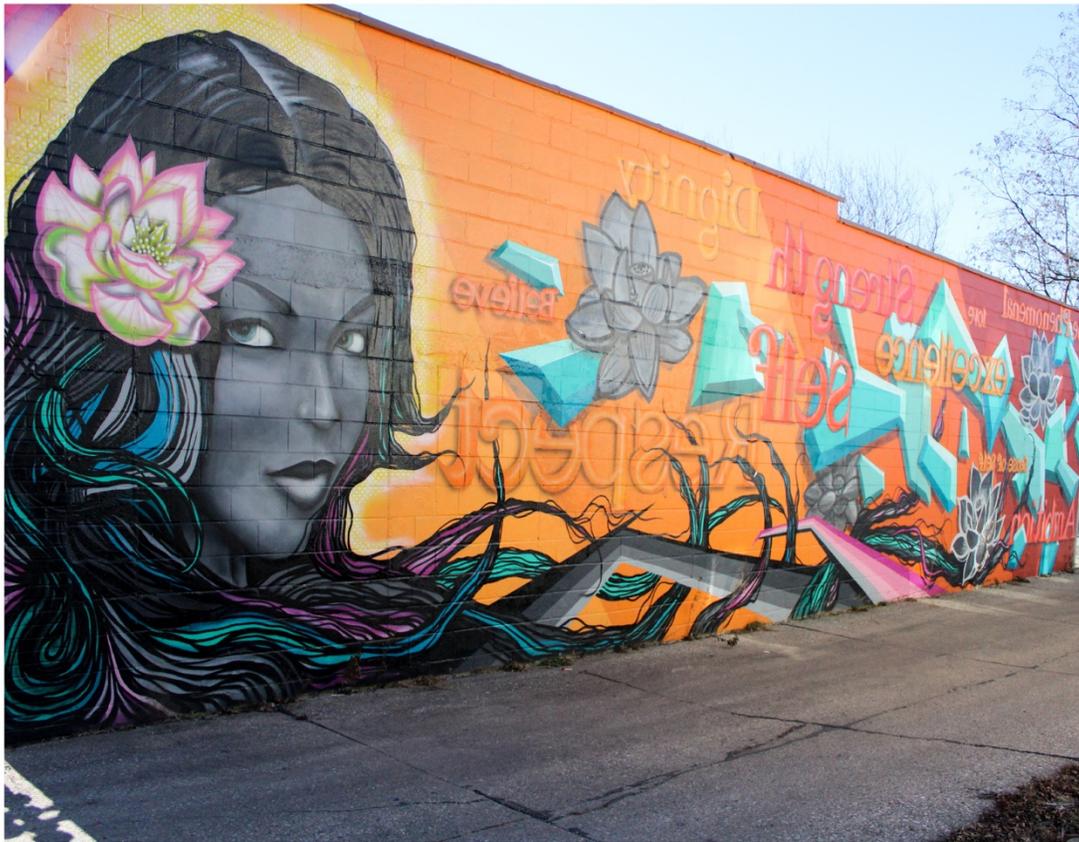
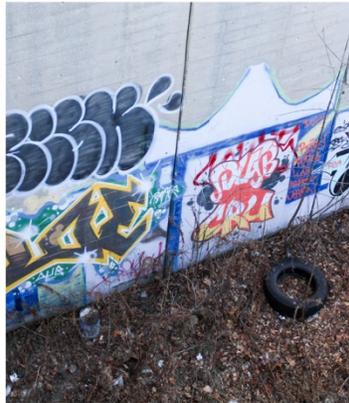
DESIGN WORKSHOP No.01: Urban Vacancy & Milwaukee's 30th Street Industrial Corridor

Milwaukee's 30th Street Industrial Corridor is the quintessential post-industrial city site. The entire area is approximately four miles long and encompasses 880 acres of urban land. Nearly 100 acres of The Corridor are currently vacant with pockets of blight scattered across the landscape. Milwaukee has a rich industrial past as it was once home to various machine makers, steel corporations and automotive parts plants. Like in most post-industrial cities, de-industrialization began in the 1970s, resulting in an economic downturn that has left Milwaukee's north side ravaged with issues of unemployment, abandonment and crime. The 30th Street Industrial Corridor was once emblematic of opportunity, but today it represents the severe struggles that the city and its people have encountered since the industrial decline. In its heyday, this urban infrastructure efficiently imported and exported Milwaukee's manufactured goods, but today it divides the urban fabric, isolating neighborhoods and accelerating urban decay. Seen through a hopeful lens, there's tremendous potential to revive what was once the heart of the city.

The Urban Edge Award Design Workshop No.01 in January of 2017 brought Brooklyn-based artist Olalekan Jeyifous of Vigilism and Detroit-based designer and academic Catie Newell of the University of Michigan to UW-Milwaukee to work with elective seminar students over a 4-day design charrette weekend. The goal was to develop research and design proposals that address the pressing issues of urban vacancy that surround Milwaukee's 30th Street Industrial Corridor. Elective seminar students were asked to re-appropriate and reconfigure existing architectural, mechanical, political and cultural structures to produce fantastical projects that are inspiring, critical and cautionary. Design proposals focused on capturing the spatial, material and atmospheric effects of the 30th Street Industrial Corridor's contextual and cultural conditions. During the 9-hour design charrette, Jeyifous and Newell asked students to work quickly with open eyes, swift hands and a willingness to alter directions based on discoveries that were found in the act of working with the physical, ephemeral and emotional circumstances of the site.

DESIGN WORKSHOP No.02: Adaptive Re-Use & Milwaukee's Kinnickinnic River Corridor

Milwaukee's Kinnickinnic River Corridor on the south side of the city was once a vibrant and lively waterway that was lined with native trees and filled with freshwater springs, fishing hot spots and thriving flora and fauna. In the 1960's the riverbed was channelized, leaving a negative impact on the ecological and urban landscapes that surround it. The concrete channelization and recent encroaching urban development have strangled the Kinnickinnic River, resulting in a man-made riverbed, or more accurately, drainage ditch, that no longer has the capacity to contain and absorb floodwaters. Between 6th and 16th streets, a .7 mile stretch of the Kinnickinnic River is sandwiched by dense residential neighborhoods where public health and safety are consistently compromised. After numerous studies, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) developed an initial plan to rehabilitate the river and manage area flooding. Because of this strategy, many of the homes in the dense residential fabric that line the detritus ditch have been acquired and razed through the process of eminent domain. The Kinnickinnic River, sometimes called the Lost River of Milwaukee, may soon run through the lost south side of the city.



THE 30TH STREET INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR
Students thoroughly document all aspects of the Workshop No.01 site.

Figure 6 Documentation of Design Workshop No. 1: Milwaukee's 30th Street Industrial Corridor. (Photos by Jarincy Flores-Rodriguez)



Figure 7 Design Workshop No.1 proposal by Jeremiah Huth, Jarincy Rodriguez-Flores and Matt Winder titled "Ghost Parade".

The Urban Edge Award Design Workshop No.02 in February of 2017 brought Cambridge-based landscape designer Fionn Byrne of Harvard University and Buffalo-based architect and academic Joyce Hwang of SUNY Buffalo to UW-Milwaukee to explore adaptive reuse ideas with elective seminar students over another 4-day design charrette weekend. The goal of the 9-hour design charrette was to imagine potential design projects that reconsider spaces and situations that might not necessarily be seen as opportunities for design. Students were encouraged to discover these lost opportunities and to develop design ideas that confront the contemporary ecological conditions of the Kinnickinnic River Corridor through creative means. Design proposals incorporated wildlife habitats, responded to social inequities and questioned the ethics of proposed and projected design interventions. Students produced drawings, models and collages that registered



Figure 8 Documentation of Design Workshop No.2: Milwaukee's Kinnickinnic River Corridor. (Photos by Nikole Bouchard)

traces of inhabitation, projected programs, interrogated infrastructures and forecasted fanciful but feasible futures.

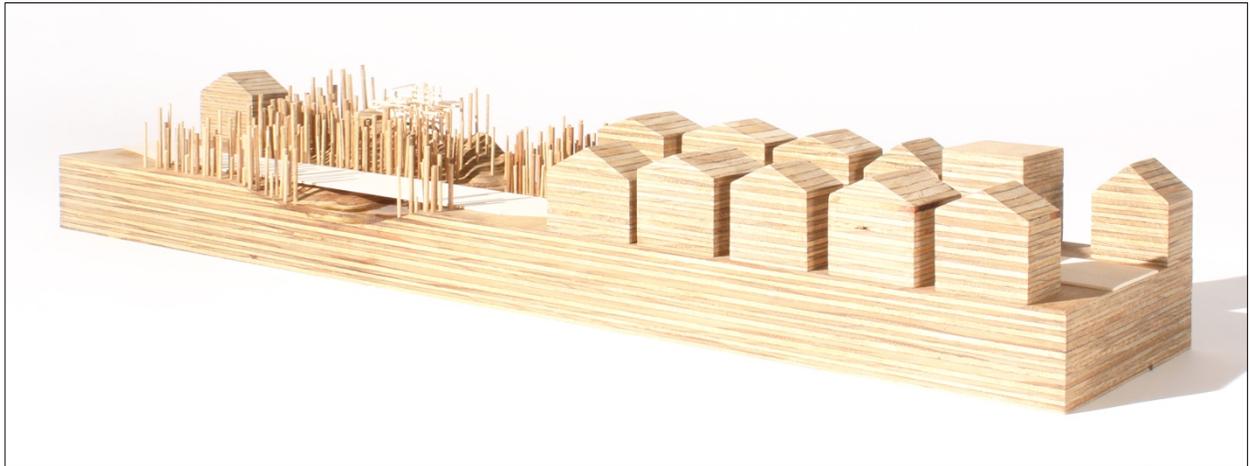
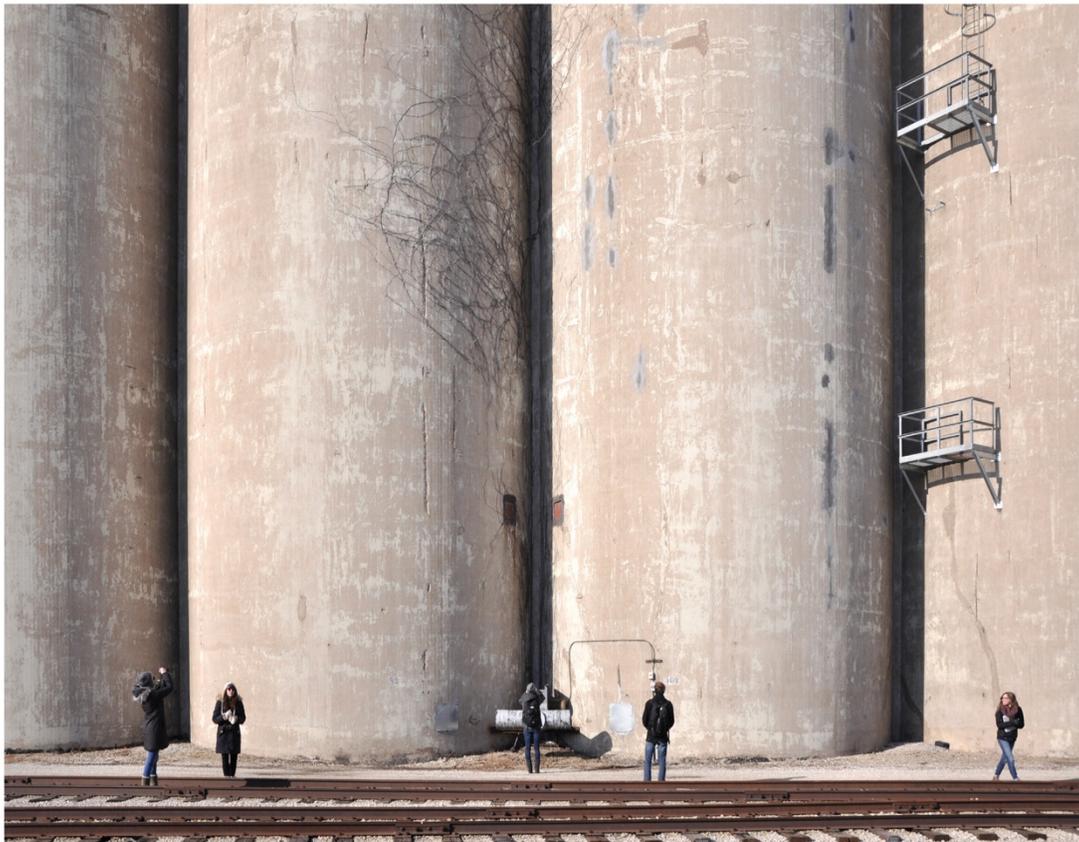
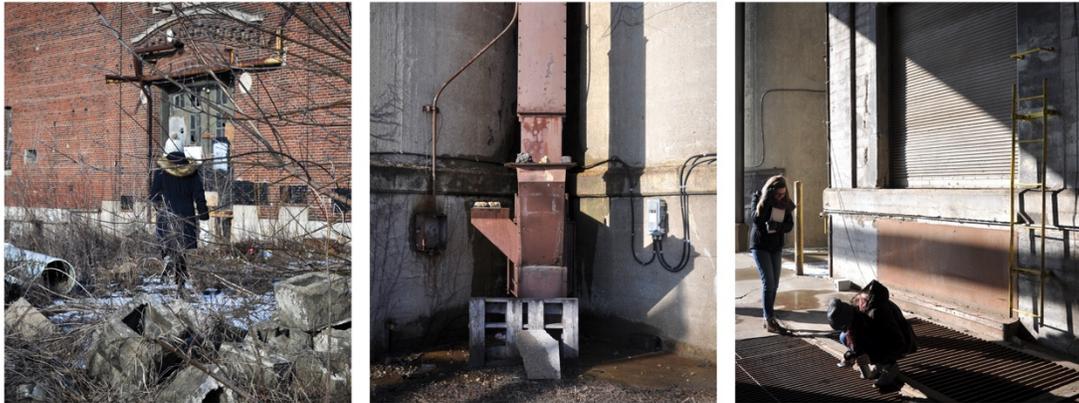


Figure 9 Design Workshop No.2 proposal by Joe Gaudreau, Alessandra Maurtura and Andrew Weiskopf titled "Vertical Ecologies".

DESIGN WORKSHOP No.03: Productive Landscapes & Milwaukee's Estuary Area of Concern

The confluence of the Milwaukee and Menomonee River sits at the eastern end of the Menomonee Valley—A four-mile-long and half-mile-wide swath of land that cuts directly through the center of downtown Milwaukee. This landform acts as both a barrier and a bridge between the north and south sides of the city. The valley was once rich with natural resources, rice, grasses and cattails that attracted wildlife, game, fish and ultimately, settlers. In the mid-1800s the first railroad lines were laid in the valley. This was the start of a major shift that transformed this natural wonder into a Wisconsin wasteland. Heavy industry came and went, leaving the valley to be nothing but a toxic urban embarrassment. In 1998, the Menomonee Valley Redevelopment Plan exposed the valley's promise and potential. The plan laid out land parcels to purchase, brownfield focus points and sites that were ripe for redevelopment.



THE MEMOMONEE VALLEY
Students thoroughly explore and document the post-industrial palimpsest.

Figure 10 Documentation of Design Workshop No.3: Milwaukee's Menomonee Valley. (Photos by Nikole Bouchard)

The Urban Edge Award Design Workshop No.03 in March of 2017 brought Cambridge-based landscape designer and architect Sergio Lopez-Pineiro of Harvard University and Ithaca-based architect and academic Aleksandr Mergold of Cornell University to UW-Milwaukee to develop design proposals with elective seminar students over the third and final 4-day design charrette weekend. The ambition of this workshop was to ideate on making Milwaukee's post-industrial environments productive landscapes once again. Students were asked to consider the Menomonee Valley as an "urban attic". They saw voids as opportunities for the unplanned and the unpredictable to emerge and considered themselves as the choreographers of deliberately designed movements with often times unforeseeable outcomes. In many cases, abandoned building types and vacant spaces were arranged within a designed framework to reconnect the severed spaces within the urban fabric. The notion of spolia was a driving force in the conceptual development of their design proposals. Students worked to repurpose all that is mundane, common, available and dispensable in the Menomonee Valley environment. The 9-hour design charrette resulted in pragmatically absurd proposals by-way of sampling, misusing and misunderstanding bits of historical ideas, objects, buildings and infrastructures to create new urban contexts that straddle the fine line between the real and the radical.

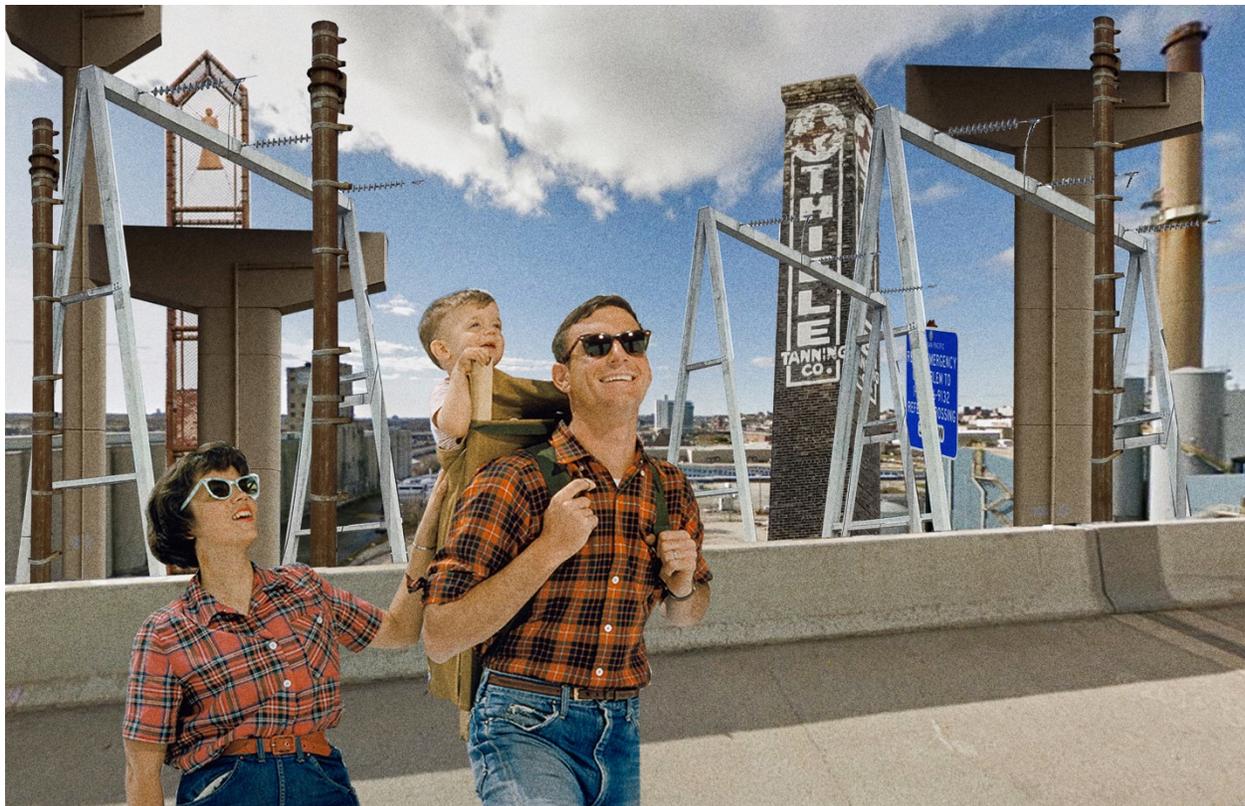


Figure 11 Design Workshop No.3 proposal by Hayden Newton, Leeann Wacker and John Young titled "Monument Valley".

Testing Pedagogical Approaches, Creative Processes, Collaborative Practices & Dissemination Design

The Urban Edge Award structure set up a series of design discipline questions that were tested through an iterative, semester-long process. These questions can be broken down into the following four primary lines of inquiry:

Pedagogical Approaches

The Urban Edge Award seminar structure experimented with the fast-paced, multi-perspective design charrette approach to pedagogy in contrast to the more traditional single-voice, semester-long design seminar and studio. Both design workshop leaders and seminar students are required to think and act in a focused and somewhat frenzied manner to develop design briefs and proposals, respectively, that are simultaneously insightful and intuitive based on site specific experience and research. The semester ebbed and flowed, with time built in to oscillate between intense ideating during design charrettes and pensive periods to digest, discuss and develop design ideas.

Creative Processes

Throughout the semester, both seminar students and design workshop leaders were exposed to new creative processes. Each design workshop asked two design professionals to collaboratively combine their creative processes to develop their specific design workshop brief. Thus, throughout the semester, seminar students were exposed to six individual and three hybridized creative processes, as opposed to only one, which is more typical in traditional design seminars and studios.

Collaborative Practices

Collaboration happened in numerous ways throughout *The Urban Edge Award* semester. For each design workshop, the two design professionals collaborated intensively to develop their design charrette approach and articulate their design charrette insights. Seminar students worked collaboratively in groups of three throughout the entire semester to develop their three site-specific research and design projects—one project per each workshop.

Dissemination Design

Due to the plural approach of the semester, *The Urban Edge Award* seminar was essentially taught by seven design professionals, not just one, who come from diverse locations across the country. Thus, *The Urban Edge Award* research findings, design ideas and event experiences were extensively disseminated across multiple social media networks, academic communities and professional practices. *The Urban Edge Award* research and design work has transformed into a book project, expected to be published by 2020, that will contain a comprehensive collection of *From Waste to Wonder* related case studies, interviews, essays and progressive design proposals.

Figure 12 Design Workshop No.2 leaders Fionn Byrne and Joyce Hwang work with students Jeremiah Huth, Jarincy Flores-Rodriguez and Matt Winder during the 9-hour long design charrette. (Photo by Nikole Bouchard)



Working with What Remains

Every design profession needs to incorporate time and space for self-reflection and creative contemplation. When we stop, and take a long, hard look at the world around us it becomes clear that given today's pressing social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions more forward-thinking, responsible and collaborative design approaches are necessary.

We all know that the present global population expansion and the related increase in resource consumption poses a major threat to the future of our environment. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Americans produced 254 million tons of waste in 2013. Approximately 87 million tons of this refuse was recycled or composted.¹ The remaining 167 million tons of detritus ended up in America's 3,091² active landfills where the waste continues to pollute our environment every day.

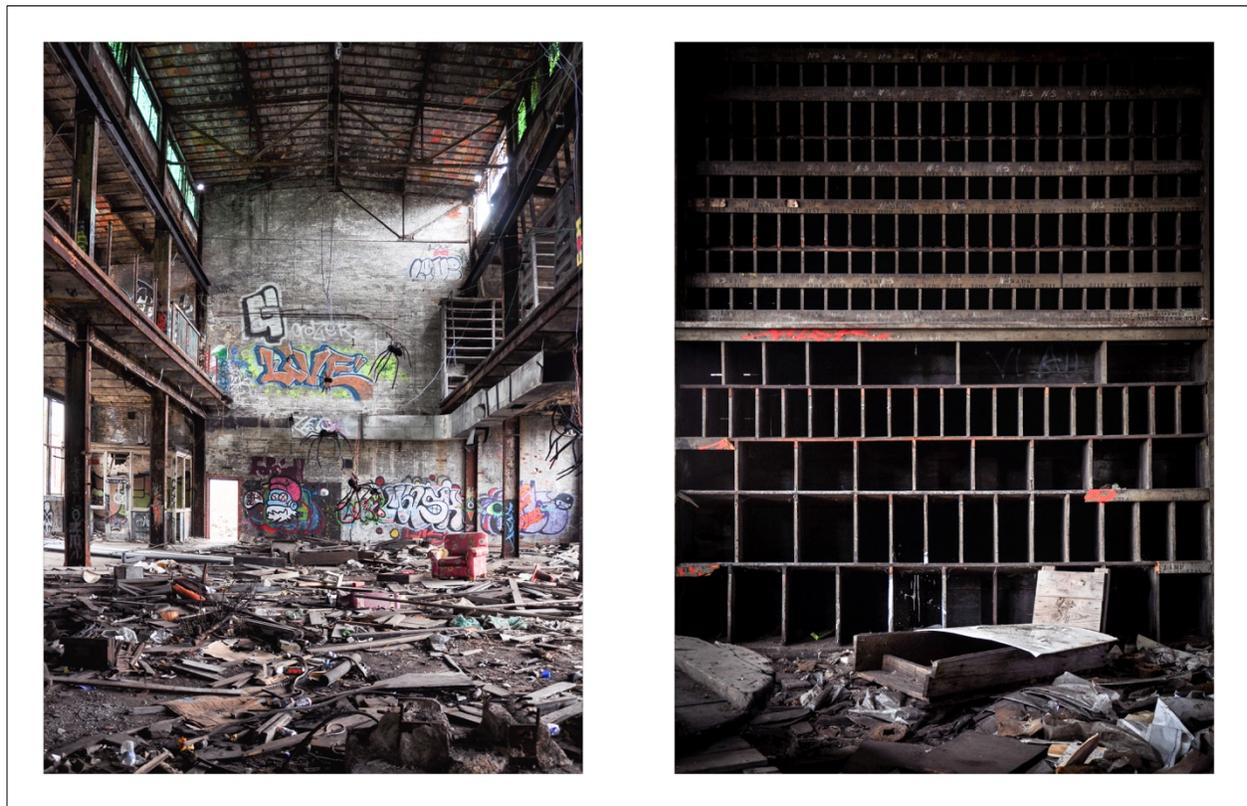


Figure 13 The post-industrial palimpsest of Milwaukee's Inner Harbor. (Photo by Nikole Bouchard)

The Urban Edge Award: From Waste to Wonder approach sees the post-industrial city as a living laboratory where opportunities for design exploration and experimentation are abundant. This approach interrogates the overlapping connections between urban and social forms and explores design agency when working in the replete resource of the post-industrial palimpsest. As Buckminster Fuller once said, "pollution is nothing but the resources we are not harvesting. We allow them to

¹ "Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: Facts and Figures," EPA: United States Environmental Protection Agency, October 10, 2015, <https://www.epa.gov/smm/advancing-sustainable-materials-management-facts-and-figures-report>.

² Lynn Landes, "LANDFILLS: Hazardous to The Environment," *ZERO WASTE America*, October 12, 2015.

disperse because we've been ignorant of their value." Today's post-industrial cities are overflowing with invaluable resources. The *From Waste to Wonder* mentality challenges us to view post-industrial conditions not as abject environments, but as opportunities to revive our urban ecosystems with insightful and imaginative design interventions.

The Urban Edge Award: From Waste to Wonder design workshops inspire us to consider how working with what remains, at multiple scales, can be imaginative, innovative, inspiring and intellectually stimulating. As pedagogues and practitioners, it's our responsibility to face these issues head-on. We must question our preconceived notions of waste and develop design ideas that strive to conserve resources and challenge the imagination. These design ideas are not self-referential, but instead they have the potential to engage a wide-range of audiences, including artists, architects, industrial designers, landscape architects, ecologists, environmentalists, anthropologists and garbologists. They are examples of thoughtful, creative and collaborative design projects that are rooted in reality, but reach for the radical.

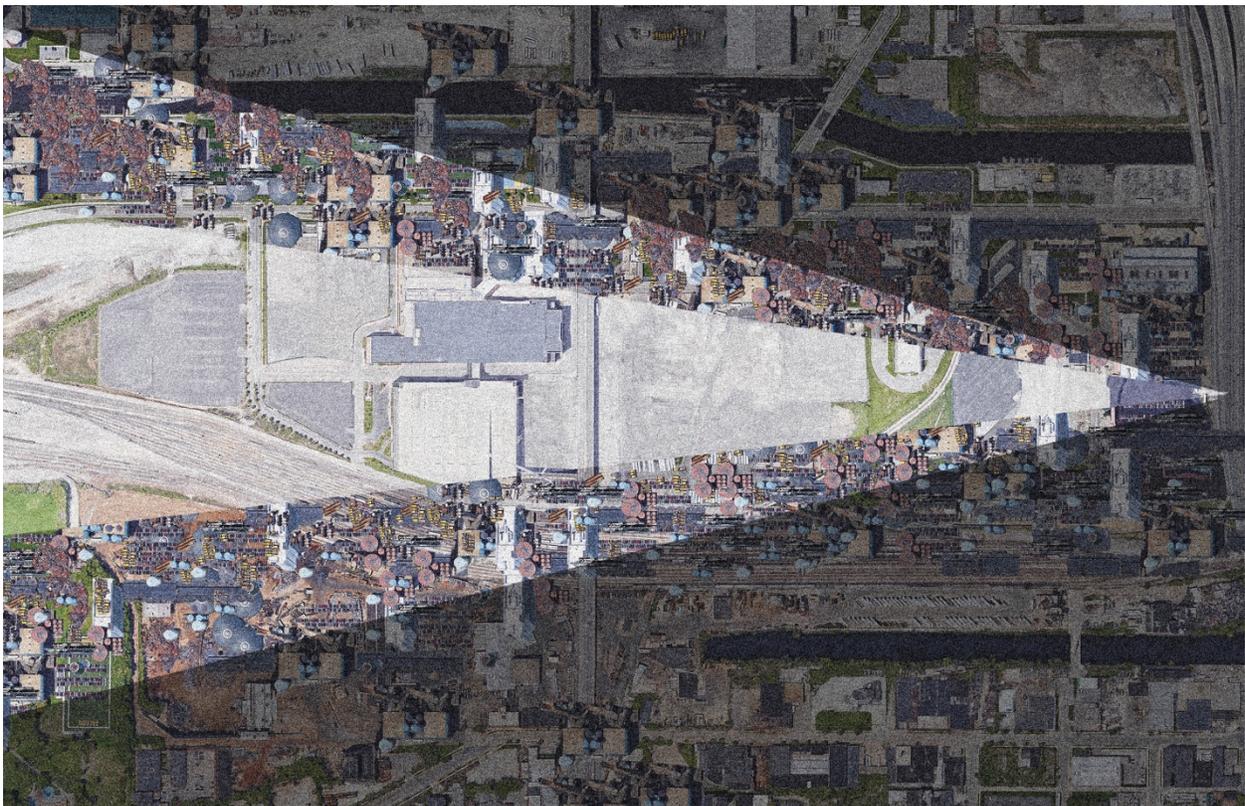


Figure 14 Design Workshop No.3 proposal by Hayden Newton, Leeann Wacker and John Young titled "Monument Valley".