

## Six Sites

Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architects Inc.

### Outside

Each city is a manifestation of a specific geography and particular culture, an expression of its singular spot on the globe. This uniqueness, this particular *suchness*, is its being.

Places used to be easily distinguished by architectures which expressed their individual geographies and culture. The great cities which emerged to temper nature and provide comfort each had particular expressions related to local conditions. For all building types, important civic institutions, commerce and housing, there was a consistent form language providing identity.

This is no longer the case, and while globalization has not yet managed to totally eliminate climate and culture, it is destroying local architecture. San Francisco was made up of a variety of neighborhood architectures which led to a rich urban fabric. The 50 gridded hills are a rolling topography of crystalline geometry. The sweeping views where streets wrap the hills like some encrusted map, or boxes strung along hillsides, are synoptic images that give the city its mythical character. The detailed order of repeating bays that line streets reinforces this. The cadence that results from many scales of oscillating repetition is an essential aspect of the city. By contrast, most new buildings focus on variety rather than the rich possibility of repetition that so clearly characterizes the historic fabric. These wrapping paper facades are completely unlike the context with which they try to fit. Our

work in San Francisco has focused on addressing the question of how to build an authentic contemporary city.

The lessons of San Francisco travel with us to other places where the exteriors of our buildings weave the interiors with the city, climate, and geography. Each project involves conversations with the found conditions of the particular site, both immediate and general, each infecting and inflecting the other through:

*Continuity*, where consistent addition is woven with the whole.

*Abstraction*, where general rules and concepts are extracted from found conditions.

*Condensation*, where image, memory and thought merge to create a displacement and something new.

*Densification*, where concentration intensifies.

*Measure*, where reference and reflection provide dimension.

Translation, where meaning is communicated through equivalency.

### Inside

For a long time I have searched for ways of unbundling form and function, of producing space as dispassionate frameworks of opportunity. The goal is to construct indeterminate fields, to build freedom. Our work essentially celebrates the instability of program, the idea of neutrality, the prospect of change. We are focused on space more than meaning, on the architecture of movement and flux, time and event, rather than object and monument. We are inter-

ested in the emptiness that material constructs. We are interested in the invisible.

We have always aimed to make architecture as apparatus rather than object, as instrument rather than monument. We think of buildings as support for human events, more like a camera than a photograph, more like a telephone than a conversation. We are interested in generosity and opportunity rather than program and stasis. This has led to the development of two typical plan types: thickened walls and pods. The thickened walls sweep all the fixed programs out of the space, leaving it open and free, and accumulate them as part of a defining wall of the space. The pods use the same principle of compression, but rather than sweep into a wall, they become compact elements that float, dividing and defining the fields of space.

Materials and form are the means of architectural expression. They can operate synchronously where form is a result of the method of construction, an expression of the properties and logic of material. Material expression makes personal expression secondary. This calls for plans that are open ended and ambiguous, abstract and free of agenda, that express their own reality rather than artistic impulse. I am interested in perceptible process that is captured in the object and remains part of its experience, like objects in nature. Architecture as legible intention, articulated in the accumulated language of form.

This is sometimes structural, sometimes material, and always spatial. In the search for the authentic over the image, the actual materials and systems of assembly, the processes of construction, become the expression.

*Insides* deal with program and content, the private world within, the blank canvas to be completed through habitation, an instrument to facilitate, a tool to liberate, using:

*Compression* of fixed programs to maximize indeterminate space.

*Space* as a framework of opportunities.

*Time* as a dimension of space.

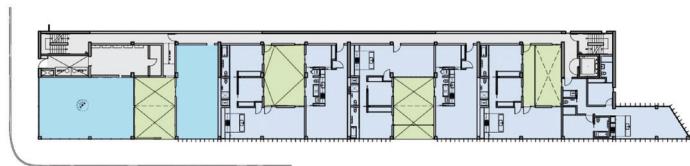
*Instruments* to facilitate rather than determine.

*Construction* and assembly as the aesthetic.

### Projects

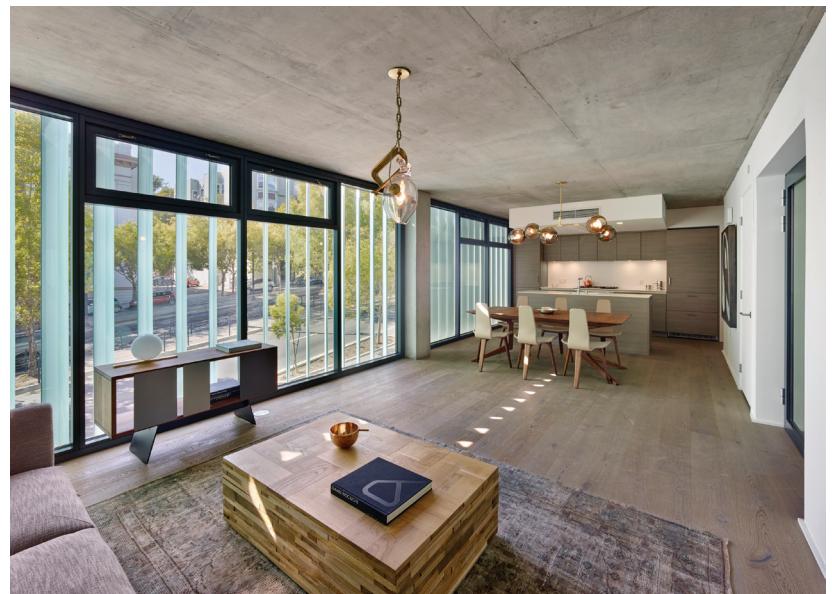
#### 8 Octavia

Where the 101 Freeway ends, a gateway building announces contemporary San Francisco. Victorian decoration is replaced by a contemporary instrument, more like an iPhone than an image, with operable fins that enable occupants to modulate light and sound in their units, registering as an ever changing billboard façade in the city. Both thick wall and pod plans give inhabitants freedom to program their homes.



LEVEL 3

- CIRCULATION/GARAGE
- RESIDENTIAL UNIT
- COMMERCIAL
- REAR YARD/COURTYARD

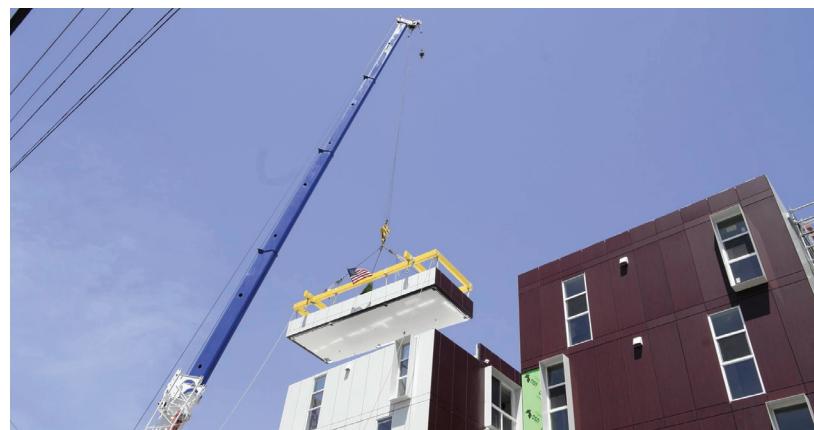
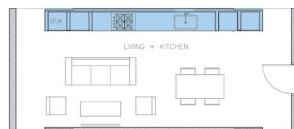


Images by: Bruce Damonte  
 Drawing by: Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architects Inc.

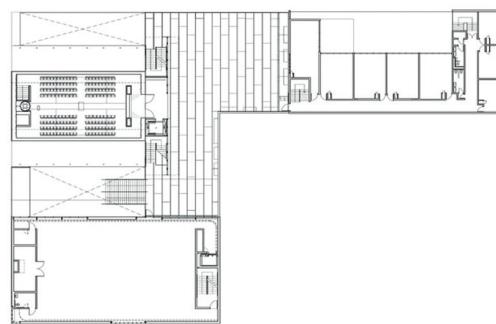
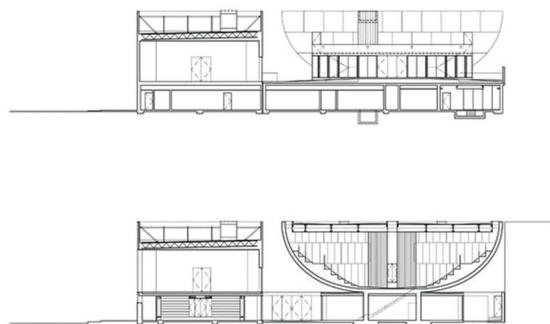


### Garden Village

Garden Village student housing densifies the detached fabric of Berkeley with a woven assembly of compact modular buildings made of two types, A and B, assembled in four-bedroom units stacked in a series of towers, joined by paths, separated by courts, threaded with walkways with a shared living room roof and topped with a farm. This village is more like the town of Berkeley, and a distinct alternative to typical student dormitory arrangements.



Images by: Bruce Damonte  
 Drawings by: Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architects Inc.  
 Aerial Photo by: Steve Proehl

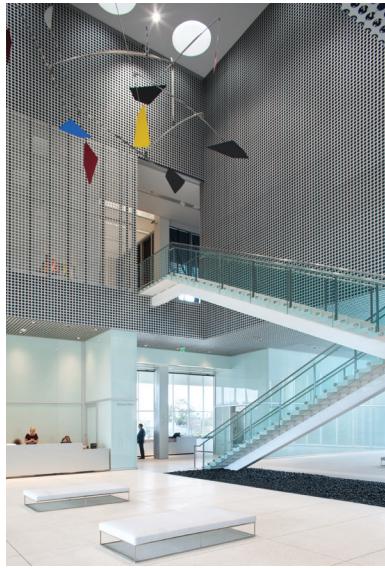


**Beth Shalom**  
 Beth Shalom is a concrete vessel focusing worshippers in a single community with two facing tiers of seating centered on the bimah. All light enters from above, with the only view as sky, establishing a sense of sanctity in the midst of the bustle of city. A shadow menorah, created by the structure supporting the roof, ornaments the space. This room, expressed on the exterior, is the form of the synagogue. Another building containing the communal elements anchors the corner. The plinth connects them with courtyards and houses the offices and daily chapel.

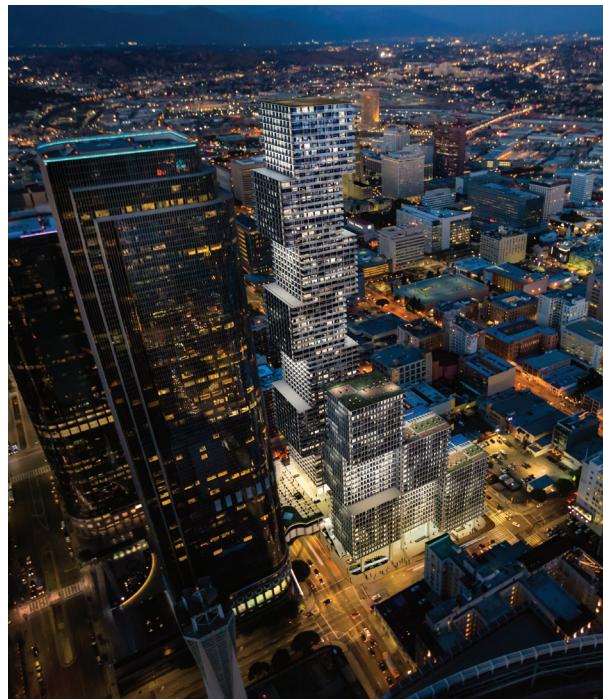
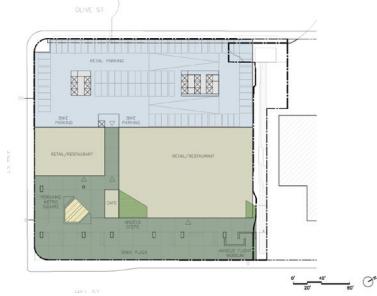
*Images by: Rien van Rijthoven*  
*Drawings by: Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architects Inc.*

### Tampa Museum of Art

The Tampa Museum of Art is a metal jewel box floating on a glass pedestal above the flood plain, in a park. A huge urban porch overlooks the park and city beyond. The building is both *in* landscape and *is* landscape—a perforated metal exterior skin creates shifting moray patterns like water or clouds. The interior is a neutral frame; walls, floors, and ceilings all shades of white, an empty canvass to be filled with paintings. At night, the building turns itself inside out, lighting the city.







## Angels Landing

The historic core of Los Angeles is an expression of traditional American urban development of grids and cubes. Angels Tower and Stepped Slab are assembled by stacking these blocks in the sky. Our hyphen architecture is a bridge, merging the rectangular masses of the historic core with the towers of Bunker Hill. The steep natural hill is terraced to create a series of habitable landscape platforms which support a variety of programs, both commercial and institutional. Like the Spanish Steps in Rome, Angels Steps links the plaza at the bottom of the hill to another plaza at the top with many opportunities for inhabiting and use.

Images by: Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architects Inc.



**The Chicago**  
 Chicago is for Modern architecture what Florence was for the Renaissance, and the same significance that the column had for ancient architecture can be attributed to the gridded frame. In Chicago, the grids which create the geography on the ground extrude vertically to organize the sky. The Chicago is steeped in this logic, a palimpsest of the flat topped towers that create the city of extruded grids, absorbing and being absorbed into the fabric. As an inverted radiator, balconies are incised out of the wind, bringing deep light into the spacious urban homes with thick walls of service and open plans as frames for contemporary life.