



Studio 6

Chicago, Illinois —Archer / Ashland Vicinity

Spring 2003

When we talk about "fixing the worst first," the area around Archer and Ashland avenues on Chicago's near southwest side always comes to mind. Even though these bleak sites combine the worst features of urban and suburban living, they also can be the easiest to redevelop into vital neighborhoods. This was our shortest studio, lasting only half a semester (5 weeks), and our first studio to propose a roundabout for a major intersection. And it's the only one where students had a chance to figure out how to use all that waste space underneath an elevated expressway!

THE CHICAGO TRANSIT AUTHORITY'S ASHLAND el station on the Orange Line sits right next to Archer Avenue, the Stevenson Expressway (I-55), the south fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River, and the Riverside Square shopping center. The station itself is empty and unwelcoming. The walk from it to the shopping center is only a tenth of a mile, but it's so noisy and uncomfortable that it seems much farther. Nor is the shopping center parking lot itself especially friendly to pedestrians. (There is no riverside square.) The intersection of Archer and Ashland and its immediate surroundings have managed to combine urban congestion with suburban inaccessibility, enthroning the car and intimidating pedestrians. Twelve fourth-year Notre Dame students participated in this studio, directed by Sallie Hood and Ron Sakal.

And yet this place has untapped potential. It's within minutes of the Loop by CTA train, and also by bus and car outside of rush hours. If the CTA builds a super-Loop circle line, this station would be a transfer point. The Chicago River—here, the south fork of the South Branch—is cleaner than it has been in more than a century. Some upscale residential development is taking place nearby. The surrounding street grids are intact and human-scaled. And once cars are stowed elsewhere, the shopping center parking lot can be enlivened and turned into comfortable well-defined spaces for commerce and community. Similarly, across the river, the site of the former cement plant lends itself to a new neighborhood that would blend into historic Bridgeport.

CTA station and nearby

The empty, echoing glass-box CTA station needs to be rethought. As things stand, few of those passing through it and outdoors will realize that one of the neighborhood's distinguishing natural features is just steps away, hidden behind a white metal fence. A station-area redesign should open up at least a view of the south fork of the South Branch of the historic Chicago River. Better yet would be access to a water taxi stop that would offer an alternative transportation choice to and from the Loop. The neighborhood's connections with the rest of the city (and within itself) are already good, but this improvement is uniquely possible here, and sets this neighborhood apart from most others in the city.

In front of the CTA station stretches enough empty space to make the station behind seem almost cozy. Students proposed reconfiguring the huge bus turnout in front of it into smaller, more manageable spaces, such as a streetside arcade housing 24-hour businesses like fast food and fitness centers.

Students proposed converting both Archer and Ashland into boulevards with planted medians, which would allow pedestrians to cross these busy streets in two stages. On Ashland, the median can be widened to serve as the bus stop. The two major streets can also be calmed and made safer for both drivers and pedestrians by another



Archer Cinema and Retail Building Section
K. Borchardt, S. Ponko



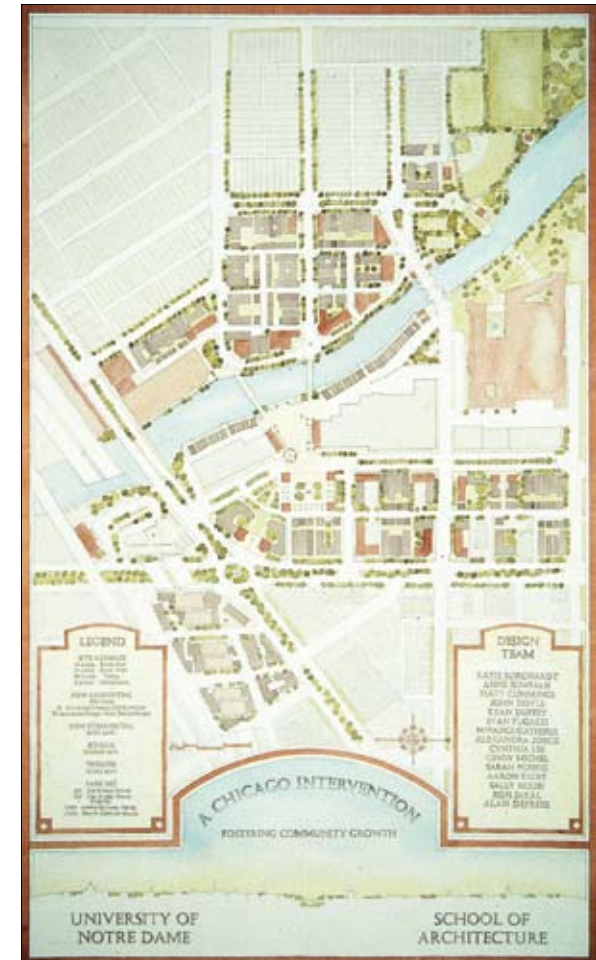
Archer Ashland Aerial

structural change: convert their intersection into a signaled traffic roundabout.

At present most bus passengers debarking here would be headed east across the northbound lanes of Ashland to the CTA station. But the largely disused space on the west side of Ashland could accommodate a combination of uses: automated parking structures under the expressway, faced with well-insulated, sound-isolated, affordable loft and live-work apartments for practitioners of the noisier arts and crafts. Cars have a way of enlarging and distorting the scale of cities, simply because they take more space



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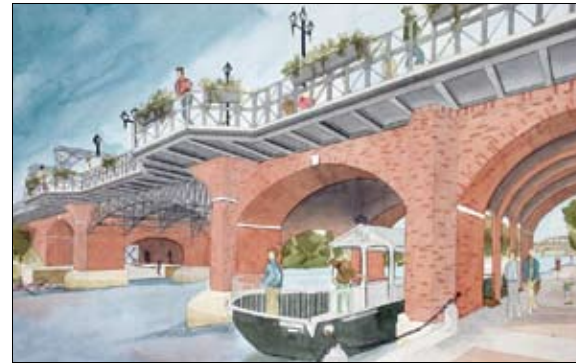
Archer Ashland Redevelopment Plan
Entire Studio Section

than people do. The proven technology of automated parking is safer and more compact than parking structures, and does a better job of minimizing the destructive effects that cars have on city space.

Riverside Square

With handy automated parking available nearby and additional parking underground, the vast Riverside Square parking lot can be converted to a new mini-neighborhood that's easy and pleasant to walk in. Students designed it as a series of linked plazas, plus four small blocks of residential and commercial buildings and a park. None of these changes would require demolition; all existing structures and businesses (and a few short-term and handicapped parking spaces) would remain (see p. 124).

Less obvious than the parking lot is the space going to waste behind the shopping center and along the riverbank. Students designed a public river walk along the river's west bank, with row houses on the walk's landward side. Besides providing living space just steps from essential shopping and transportation, these row houses would shield the Riverside Square dumpsters and loading docks from walkers' view. Another improvement in neighborhood connectivity is possible here as well: students added two pedestrian bridges from the shopping center to the east side of the river, where a new neighborhood would replace the defunct cement factory's yard. To make the

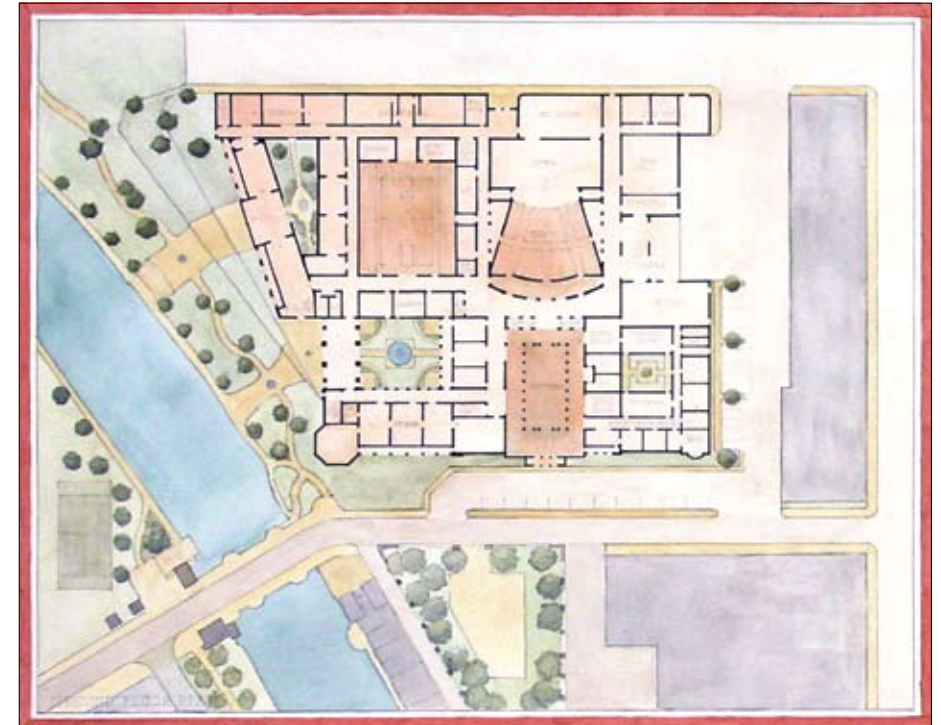


New 33rd Street Bridge
M. Cummings, R. Duffey

crossing today, you'd have to trudge back north to Archer; a walkable city should have lots of different ways to get where you're going.

Around 32nd Place

South of Riverside Square, students proposed building a public magnet Oscar Micheaux High School devoted to cinema arts, with public terraces leading down to the river and forming the southern terminus of the river walk. They would extend 32nd Place across the river via a full-use bridge. The bridge would be designed with extra width to accommodate planters and public bays for boulevardiers. Underneath would be a water-taxi stop and storage for high-school crew equipment (see p. 122).



Micheaux Film Arts Magnet High School
A. Bowman, C. Michel



Micheaux Film Arts Magnet High School
A. Bowman, C. Michel



Mixed-Use Building Elevation
J. Doyle

East of the River

The old cement plant yard offers a blank canvas for designers. Students here looked to nearby Bridgeport's human-scaled grid of streets, and proposed diverse housing types for a variety of income levels and family situations—single-family homes and mid-rise apartment buildings, with apartments over the small restaurants and shops. Immediately north of this neighborhood and south of Archer, students proposed building a multiplex theater building and a residential mid-rise next door on Archer. Parking would be located under both buildings. The theater would be multiple use, accommodating students from area colleges and Micheaux High School by day, and theatergoers by night. Its indoor lobby and river-facing arcade would include concessions and small businesses, and provide a pleasing landmark when viewed from across the water (see p. 123).

One of Chicago's oldest areas is approaching the tipping point from urban to suburban. These proposals aim at bringing it back from the brink, while accentuating the features, like the river, that make it unique. Near the heart of a great city is the last place we need fast traffic and surface parking dominating and controlling the landscape.

Archer/Ashland Vicinity Studio Participants

4th-year Architecture Students, School of Architecture

Katie Borchardt

Anne Bowman

Matthew Cummings

John Doyle

Ryan Duffey

Evan Fugazzi

Mwangi Gathinji

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Cynthia Lee

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Notre Dame Faculty:

Sallie Hood

Visiting Associate Professor,
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Transportation, and Community
Development, Center for Neighborhood
Technology, Chicago, Illinois; Board
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Aaron N. Gruen

Esq., Principal, Gruen Gruen +
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Market Strategists, Land Use/
Public Policy Analysts

Harold Henderson

Journalist, Chicago Reader

John Torti, FAIA, LEED AP

President, Torti Gallas and Partners

**Members of the School of Architecture
Faculty, University of Notre Dame**

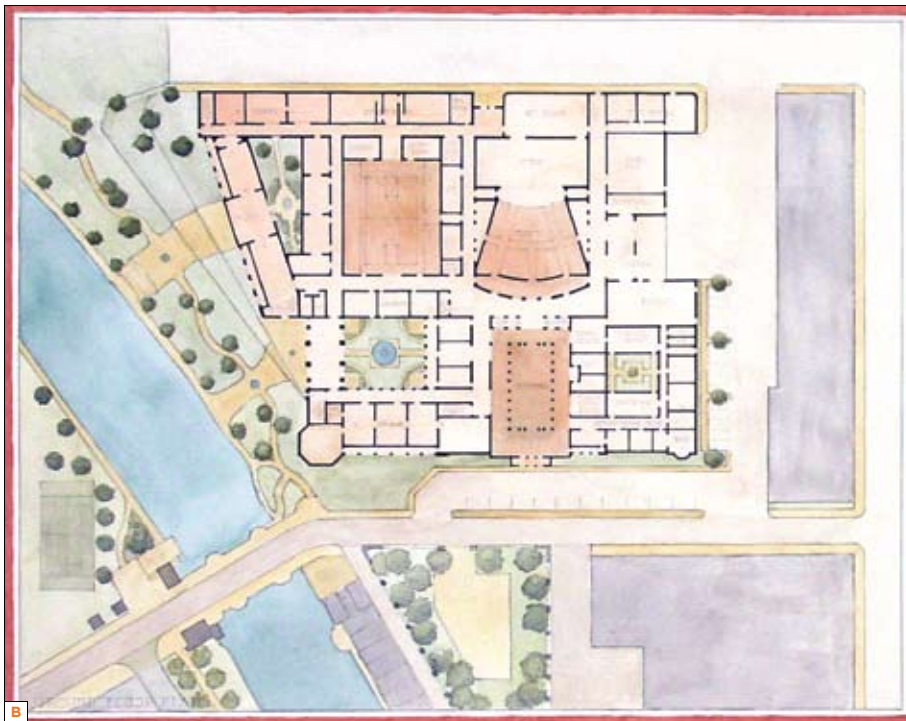
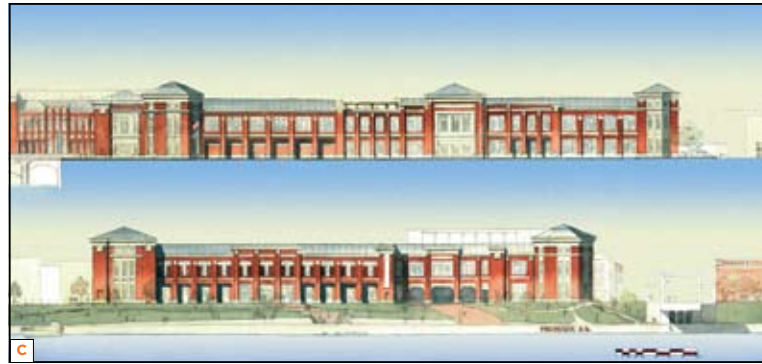
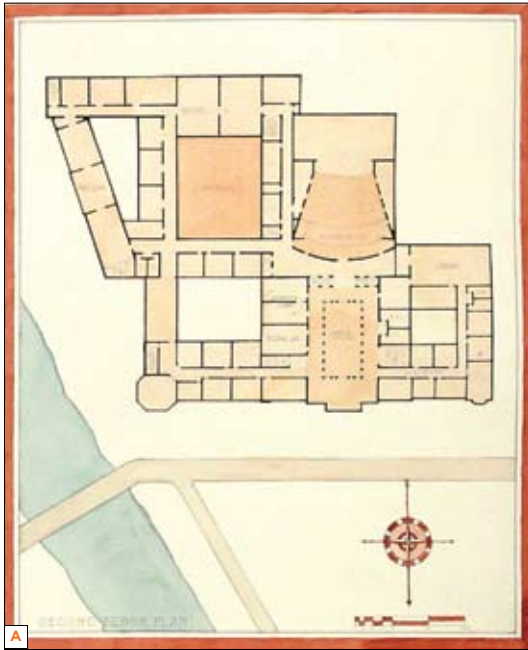
Student Reflections

The project we completed at Archer and Ashland on the southwest side of Chicago was both enlivening and educational. We were able to apply schematic planning and design, a vital part of a sound architectural education, to a real-life situation. Although members of our studio came from a variety of backgrounds we all agreed that the area was in desperate need of vitalization. To summarize the current state of the site: There is no there there; except, of course, for a strip mall and layers of desolate concrete comprising the Stevenson expressway. So we set out to create a destination rather than an area best experienced through the window of a passing car.

After surveying the site we realized the best asset of the area was the Chicago River running parallel to Ashland Ave. Instead of turning our back to the river, as the current site had, we embraced the river and made it the focus of our designs ranging from a magnet high school for the arts to a cineplex complete with river-walk and underground parking facility. We also proposed a series of lofts and studio apartments to allow new opportunities for affordable housing in the community. Along with the design of new buildings we also aimed at creating a pedestrian-friendly area with the addition of a roundabout to slow traffic at the busy intersection and a park to bring beauty and natural life to the area.

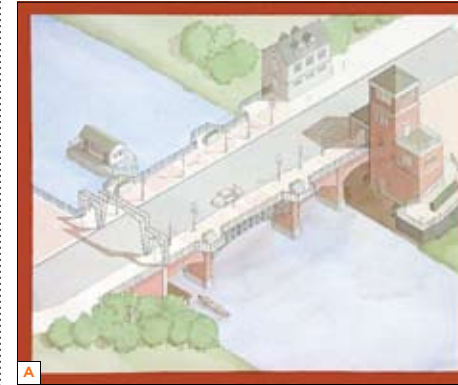
Upon completion of our project we presented our design to interested parties from the City of Chicago. We received positive feedback and expression of a job well done. However, the most rewarding part, when our hard work as a team was manifested in our final presentation, we felt that not only had we accomplished the design of a vitalized area, we had given new life to a community.

Micheaux Film Arts Magnet High School



A-C Micheaux Film Arts Magnet High School,
A. Bowman, C. Michel

33rd Street Bridge



A New 33rd Street Bridge, M. Cummings, R. Duffy; B 33rd Street Bridge Plan,
M. Cummings, R. Duffy; C 33rd Street Bridge Section, M. Cummings,
R. Duffy; D View North from 33rd Street Bridge, M. Cummings, R. Duffy;
E New 33rd Street Bridge, M. Cummings, R. Duffy

Archer Cinema & Mixed-Use Building



A, B, E, G *The Archer Cinema*, K. Borchardt, S. Ponko;
C, D *Archer Cinema and Retail Building Section*,
K. Borchardt, S. Ponko

Archer Ashland CTA Station



A-B *New Archer Ashland CTA Station*, M. Gathinji, A. Rigby

Mixed-Use Development



A *Mixed-Use Building Ground Plan*, J. Doyle;
B *Mixed-Use Building Elevation*, J. Doyle

Mixed-Use Development



C



D



E

- C Pedestrian Bridge, J. Doyle;
- D Apartments above Shops, J. Doyle;
- E New Infill Plan, J. Doyle

Existing Conditions



A



B



C



D



E



F

- A-B South Branch of Chicago River, Unknown;
- C Elevated I-55 at Ashland Avenue, Unknown;
- D I-55 at Ashland Avenue, Unknown;
- E-F Existing Condition of Riverside Square, Unknown

Parking Lot Infill Housing



A



C



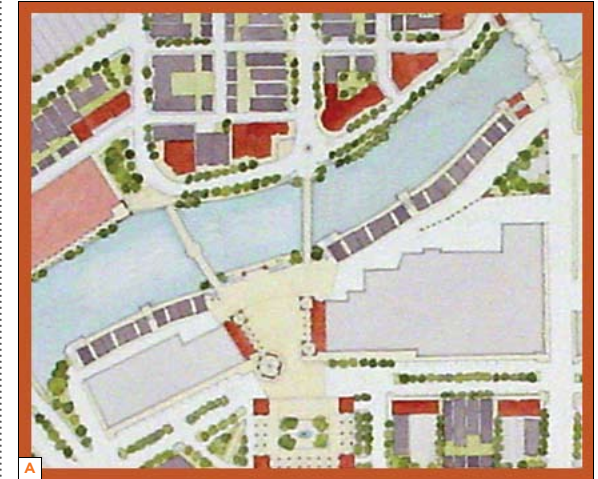
D



E

- A-E Infill Housing on Former Parking Lot, E. Fugazzi

Riverbank Housing



A



B



C



D

- A-D Riverwalk Townhouses, A. Jorge

Under Expressway Lofts



A-C I-55, C. Lee

Master Plan



A Archer Ashland Redevelopment Plan, Entire Studio Section; B Archer Ashland Aerial, Unknown; C Archer Ashland Studio on Site, Entire Studio Section; D Chicago Reader Front Page, Chicago Reader