

acre lake, surrounded by a carefully landscaped park. Several recently constructed mid-rise apartment buildings overlook the park, which boasts a popular playground and splash pad that draw in families from surrounding neighborhoods. The sight of children playing in a carefully designed park, in the midst of human-scale residential development and a multi-use path, conveys a very European sensibility in its overall aesthetic; something many may be surprised to find in Atlanta.

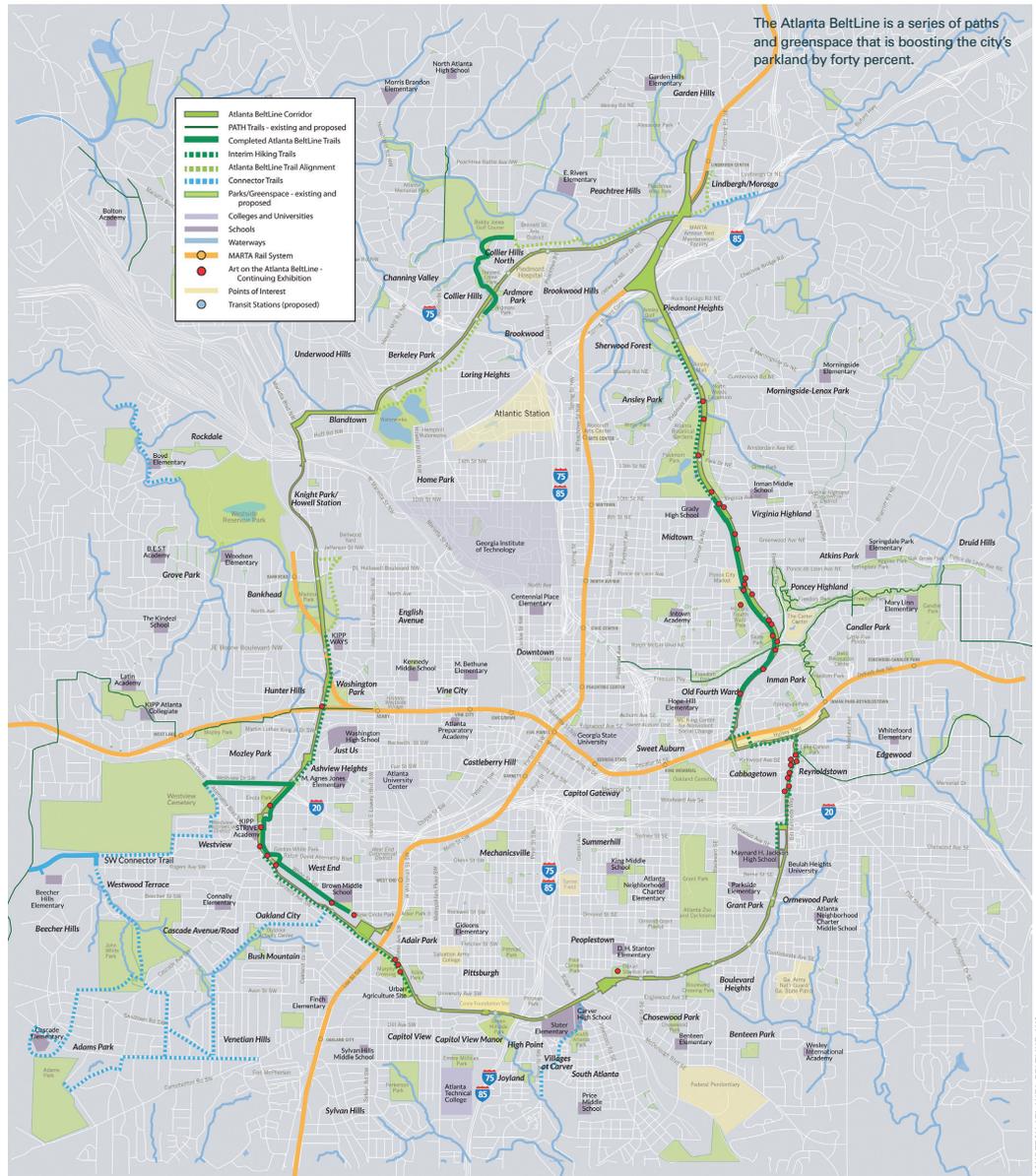
Struggling to find connections

In a city that is sliced through its core several times with interstate highway infrastructure, as well as large arterial roads that serve highway entrances and exits, finding pedestrian-friendly connections from place to place can sometimes be a challenge. In many cases the urban fabric can be repaired, but sometimes the city seems content to develop islands of activity set apart from each other.

Atlantic Station is 138 acres of a former brownfield site that became a master-planned, mixed-use city within a city. Opened in 2005, it has an impressive six million square feet of office space that sits among a varied array of housing, including townhomes, apartments, condos, and detached houses. Its central retail area is an outdoor shopping mall outfitted with gridded streets that host popular shopping destinations, with levels of parking stacked directly underneath.

But despite being walkable in itself, there is a rough transition between Atlantic Station and surrounding nodes of activity, from which it is separated by a combination of interstate highways, car-centric corridors, and freight rail lines. Without a safe pedestrian connection to the rest of Midtown to the east and west, or to Buckhead to the north, it is largely a car destination.

Car destinations are also a big part of the landscape of Atlanta's affluent Buckhead section, on the north end of the city. The commuter congestion on its central Peachtree Road corridor is known by locals as something to be avoided as much as possible. One attempt to link Buckhead's destinations for human-powered transportation is PATH400 Greenway Trail. This north-south multi-use path will eventually link up with the BeltLine on its south end. Its first phase opened in January 2015, and the full 5.2 miles of trail will eventually connect a series of parks, schools, and neighborhoods to the urban center of Buckhead.



COURTESY ATLANTA BELTLINE, INC.

WE ASKED SOME OF OUR FAVORITE ARCHITECTS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES TO ANSWER ELEVEN QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STATE OF THE PRACTICE TODAY. THE FOLLOWING SELECTION OF RESPONSES WAS ASSEMBLED TO FIT THE SPACE AVAILABLE WHILE PRESENTING A SUM OF THE MANY AND SOMETIMES CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES.

VOICES OF ARCHITECTURE

What are the forces and philosophies driving architecture today and how do they mesh with your approach to design?

The current focus seems to be on envelopes, form making, and the use of technology. There's quite a bit of creative and good work going on in a more generic path, but the things that seem to be in the limelight and which so many young architects are

striving to achieve have to do with works of architecture that are iconic in their use of technology. That as an agenda seems to throw out the baby with the bathwater when it comes to creating useful and socially engaging work. The place of architects in terms of placemaking and taking advantage of the impact their building is going to have on the surrounding environment I think is diminishing. It reflects an increasing isolation

of the architect from an engagement with the city as a whole and becoming more and more engaged with the machinery of design. This doesn't match with our design approach. We've followed in the wake of people like Aalto and Eames and people who saw architecture and design as a sophisticated and entertaining way to engage with the environment and with the people that use it.
- Craig Hodgetts, Hodgetts + Fung

The ones we are most tapped into in our practice have to do with making. There is a general movement towards making, and that is not just design in terms of architects but also in learning and in other fields like education. We set up our studio as both a design studio and fabrication practice and it has very practical advantages and, more

importantly, an ethos about the virtual and the physical, and I think it ties into larger forces connected with design. The honeymoon with the purely digital is over. There is a workflow and continuity between the physical and the digital.
- Bradley Samuels, Situ Studio

Obviously sustainability is the major driver in design today. I think where that meshes with our design approach is when accountability is brought into the picture. It involves hard questions that we all have to consider; the simplest being, is it appropriate in a given situation to build or not, or should we even as a firm get involved. To me there needs to be more of an acceptance that construction is a destructive and resource-intensive undertaking and with that acceptance should come the



The fact that the Buckhead community business district has shown major support for the PATH400 project is telling; even in the most challenging places, Atlanta is focused on developing in a new way.

Perhaps the most challenging location of all is Underground Atlanta in the south end of Downtown. With lower-level storefronts that used to be at the main street level in the earliest days of Atlanta, before the viaducts were built over them (hence “underground”), this is the historic birthplace of the city that eventually morphed into a financially troubled mall.

Even the presence of a MARTA rail station next door has not been able to draw enough foot traffic to make the mall profitable. One probable culprit is geography: It is disconnected from the popular neighborhoods of the city by crisscrossing highways, a railroad gulch, and a series of enormous events facilities and their adjacent parking structures.

The city decided in 2014 to end its ownership of Underground Atlanta. Making the sole bid for purchase, developer WRS Inc. has submitted concepts that would transform it into 12 acres of mixed uses, including a grocery store, additional retail, and residential development. Instead of only trying to draw in visitors from other neighborhoods in the city, this new plan for the space could end up some day serving as the centerpiece for the South Downtown neighborhood.

Atlanta Daily World Building: big gains from small packages

This is a modest building, physically, by any standard. Comprising 4,756 square feet of space on 0.11 acres of land, this simple two-story structure built in 1930 is not visually striking. But true to its placement on Auburn Avenue, which served as the epicenter of African American commercial and cultural life for several decades in the early-to-mid 20th century, it has a prominent place in the city's history.

It served as the headquarters for its namesake publication for many years, which was the nation's first successful black-owned daily newspaper. Threatened with demolition after being damaged by a 2008 tornado that hit Downtown Atlanta, it was spared thanks to the voices of local preservationists. A real estate professional purchased it and has carefully renovated the building for apartments on top and two retail spaces below.

Small projects like this tend to slide under the radar, missing out on the coverage afforded to mega developments. But these

COURTESY: JAMESTOWN PROPERTIES

desire to treat the process with respect, great care, and responsibility.
- Craig Steely, Craig Steely Architecture

There are forces that push “object” buildings, there is a commercial architecture fueled by developers and financial gain, and there is a growing interest in what is being called architecture of resilience. Our practice has believed in work that, in many ways, is in opposition to the first two forces. Although we do not articulate our work as being “green” this is an underlying principle of all we do.
- Billie Tsien, Tod Williams Billie Tsien

Is technology shaping your practice in significant new ways?

Yes, the technologies that we have in the office are really influencing how we design and how we visualize our work. Then there are the tools—3D printers, MakerBots, etc.—all have allowed us to explore design more deeply earlier in the process. We’ve been doing Revit for more than a decade now. What’s been interesting is that some of the younger employees have brought Grasshopper and Rhino into the office. Those have allowed us to explore and visualize and express the building and look at the data of the building in different ways.
- Scott Kelsey, CO Architects

We’re friendly to new technology but find that it’s important to try design with the most basic attitude towards technical innovation. For example, most of the issues

of sustainable construction can be solved with proper orientation, ventilation, and insulation. We prefer to open a window than to turn on the air conditioner. We do try to anticipate technologies that will become practical as their costs come down. PV’s will surely become part of the standard repertoire of construction. So will green roofs and extensive planting. Likewise, rainwater capture. None of this requires great technical sophistication, but it does demand a shift in attitude.
- Michael Sorkin, Michael Sorkin Studio

We thrive on new technologies that are opening up every day. We are really excited right this moment about a new chip that [has been designed for LED lighting that can make a regular interior light fixture shift

color subtly through the day to match the color shift in the sun’s light. This color shift is important to set the body’s Circadian rhythms and to trigger production of melatonin late in the day so we sleep well. We are planning to use these lights in a medical school facility we are working on currently. Architecture can be such an important contributor to health through some of these new technologies.
- Lawrence W. Speck, Page

What role does hand drawing play in your design process? Are you seeing a resurgence of interest in hand drawing among recent graduates?

I was trained in hand drawing. It’s central to all my work. The recent graduates I hire



Facing page: Ponce City Market is an adaptive-reuse project that is turning a 1925 Sears, Roebuck & Company distribution center into a mixed-use destination with commercial, retail, and residential space.

This page: KDC Real Estate is developing a 2.2 million-square-foot building, designed by Cooper Carry & Associates, which will connect to MARTA's Dunwoody Station.

are the ones that make neighborhoods feel authentic. According to Kessler, this project is important because “it’s on the opposite end of the scale as Ponce City Market. Much of what has stifled development in Atlanta’s urban core is that developers can’t get the property assemblages together to make a project big enough for the pro forma to work. This building was a goner, but the project proves that a small developer can make the numbers work. Hopefully this is a model that can be repeated throughout downtown and the rest of the city.”

Challenges for furthering Atlanta’s good urbanism

Urbanists have much to celebrate in the strides Atlanta has taken toward building places that are more walkable and that echo some of the best practice of good urban form. Though the city government has supported efforts at reshaping the city for the better, it has not always taken the reigns when it comes to leading those efforts and fostering a cohesive vision. Matthew Garbett, a community leader who is currently working with the city on a tactical urbanism project, said, “I think urbanists share a vision for the city, but I don’t think we’re effectively sharing that vision in a way that is shaping the city. We lack an advocate at the city-wide level who really has the people and the press’s attention, someone willing to speak about the bad and the real, sometimes difficult measures that need to be taken to improve.”

And even with the addition of planned public spaces such as the BeltLine, the market economy still has the biggest say in what gets developed. As Kessler noted: “Yes, architects are taking part in the vision, but I wouldn’t say we’re leading the vision. As has been proven with the new Falcons stadium, Civic Center, Turner Field, Underground Atlanta, etc., the vision has been put forward by a developer who’s worked with a particular architect, but architects serving as design advocates have not been out in front of the process.”

“There have been calls in the media and from new organizations such as the Architecture & Design Center to raise the level of discourse regarding architecture, but I think Atlanta needs more architects advocating for better design and not just allowing developers, bankers, and other participants that don’t have an obligation to serve the public to dictate what gets built.”

DARIN GIVENS IS A WEB PROFESSIONAL AND FREELANCE WRITER. HE LIVES IN DOWNTOWN ATLANTA WITH HIS FAMILY AND BLOGS AS ATL URBANIST.

may be able to draw by hand but it is never their first recourse, even when a hand sketch is clearly more efficient. This is most apparent in CD and CA. The clarification detail I can rip out in 15 minutes—and they could too—takes them an hour or two (often more) in AutoCAD. I think a couple of things are at work in their young minds. First is a funny, almost moral idea about the inherent superiority of the accuracy of digital drawings: for them N.T.S.— that hallmark of the field sketch—is just wrong. Second—and I come across this a lot, but it may be endemic to my school—is the notion that in digital work you are primarily building an electronic version of the building—that is the effort—for which the drawings are just sloughed off by-products. That is quite different from making a set of

drawings, which, because they are already twice removed, have to be thought about with primary regard for how and what they communicate. The hand drawing remains a brutally efficient way to communicate ideas; it is the need to communicate that is today I think less well understood.

- David Heymann, University of Texas, Austin

Should the licensing process be streamlined? If so, how? If not, why?

Like by getting licensed from school? It’s a terrible idea. It’s a great way to justify these programs that are providing five-year masters degrees, but it’s a bit of a scam: Let’s conflate and compress education and professional licensure and act like nothing’s given up in the process. I’m not buying

it. You know the way there’s a separation between church and state? There’s a reason we have a separation between the academy and the profession. Now, once you get out of school, I think you should be able to take the licensing exam as soon as you want, all at once if you wanted. But I still believe the internship is important to be in the culture of a firm, which is very different from the culture of a school.

- Marlon Blackwell, Marlon Blackwell Architects

A national license would be nice and would save money for both the states and architects. It seems other countries manage this one.

- Carol Ross Barney, Ross Barney Architects

Yes. I could go on and on here since I

chaired a task force for Texas Society of Architects that looked into this. What is disturbing to me about NCARB’s current direction is that they seem to be reducing the duration of internships but still keeping all the intricate rules and bureaucracy. I think we should do the opposite—keep high standards in terms of duration, but allow more flexibility and less bean counting and box checking.

- Lawrence W. Speck, Page

What can be done to improve the racial and sexual diversity of the profession?

I am so disappointed with the hollow gestures I see from our professions. The only way to attract minorities is to glorify what we do so they can see how it touches their lives,

and show them how much money they can make to support their families. We are too invisible. We were taught to be a quiet gentlemen's profession, but by being that, we are invisible to the general population. We need to go populist to really achieve diversity.

- Thomas Balsley, Thomas Balsley Associates

I know with women, this is such a complex problem. One of the big reasons is just babies. We are working through the challenges of that now. You have to be flexible. If you have a new mom and expect them to get back six weeks after having a baby, good luck. I know I couldn't. They [David Baker Architects] gave me a good maternity leave for five months, and then another month where they let me transition in. I don't think only women should get that privilege. Firms should support equality of life and work balance. People are happier and more productive then.

- Amanda Loper, David Baker Architects

Alas, racism and sexism are endemic to our society—just look at Ferguson. It's still urgent that we all work actively to overcome this legacy. The schools seem to be doing pretty well in admissions and faculty diversity—a slower process—is catching up. But, as long as wealth and power are disproportionately in the hands of white men, things will never be as they should. The fight continues!

- Michael Sorkin, Michael Sorkin Studio

The greatest difficulty in increasing diversity is the perception that architecture is not a secure profession. And unfortunately that perception is based on truth. Women might stay in the profession if there was a more accepting attitude in offices and if the government was more supportive of child-care. While we cannot control government practices we can control what happens in our offices. We need to be parent friendly. Childcare issues last a relatively short time, architecture as a profession lasts much longer.

- Billie Tsien, Tod Williams Billie Tsien

What is an architect's civic responsibility and how involved are you in your local community?

You have to get involved. We belong to the boards of several local organizations. One opportunity is to get involved in kids schools and activities. That allows you to be involved with family and community simultaneously. Lending your expertise and services to the communities that you are part of and that interest you is what we suggest. Everybody needs the architect's ability to solve problems even if they are not specifically architectural.

- Byron Kuth, Elizabeth Ranieri, Kuth Ranieri Architects

Every building regardless of scale, use, and type should have a civic responsibility. We define "client" very broadly: There is the specific client with whom we have a contractual relationship and there is the larger public with whom we have an ethical relationship.

In this era of global responsibility, we are reminded that architecture is a social art. As

the public realm is increasingly eroded, we must work of necessity in hybrid terrains, no longer just adding the new and "novel," but transforming sites at every scale to recast the terms of what serves the individual and the collective, and what is natural and what is public.

- Michael Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi

As a critic, I write extensively about local issues. As a teacher, my students and I engage city sites and issues that are in play. As a "theorist" I strongly advocate for the idea of the local as both a source of architectural particularity and as a medium of democratic practice. As researchers, we are directly engaged in seeking forms that support and encourage local autonomy. As a political person, I am active in local disputes and initiatives. As stewards of the environment, architects have a special role in ameliorating the places they live and practice. As citizens, architects have duties they share with others but which they must interpret through the medium of their special skills and practice. I am disgusted, for example, that the AIA cannot bring itself to urge its members to withhold their services from the purveyors of torture and execution. These are not architectural questions but we have some special leverage to resist this barbarism.

- Michael Sorkin, Michael Sorkin Studio

Does your firm regularly enter competitions?

No. We're too busy trying to make payroll. Are we suckers for them sometimes? Yes. There's a book of suckers around here someplace. I mean, the pay is nothing and you do tons of work. I think they can be useful, if they're run properly; if there's more of a procedural and objective approach to how work is decided upon. If you could win a project based on ideas rather than what your RFQ looks like, that would be invigorating.

- Marlon Blackwell, Marlon Blackwell Architects

Yes, I believe in anonymous competitions, and we do at least one per year. If New York City followed Spain's successful competition structure we would build all public projects this way and create opportunities for talented architects, young or not.

- Carlos Brillembourg, Carlos Brillembourg Architects

We sometimes enter competitions, although we do not believe they are the best way to select an architect. They are like "picture" brides—getting married based on an image. The image is hardly ever realized and the image is never really the right answer. We prefer a process-based and collaborative approach to find the solution.

- Billie Tsien, Tod Williams Billie Tsien

Has your firm worked in emerging markets in Asia, the Middle East, or elsewhere? If so, what lessons have you learned or challenges have you faced in these markets?

For 16 years I also had an office in Caracas, Venezuela, that gave me a different perspective on the role of architecture in a society that is in the process of formation. Your building can have a very large impact

for society at large in a developing country.

- Carlos Brillembourg, Carlos Brillembourg Architects

We practice in many of these markets when invited to do so. Genuine cultural respect and understanding is critical, as is understanding the basics of the physical environment—the ways of means of construction—and seeking out the best in local collaborators.

- Craig Hartman, SOM

I think the most important lesson is to get paid up front. Get a very large retainer that enables you to produce the first two submissions without losing money. Because they will always pay to get you started, then you may struggle to get paid after that. The other lesson is knowing that everything is going to be taken over by somebody else. You have to define the rules for the design. They need to understand the rules and the intentions, so they will change according to those rules rather than just changing.

- Alvin Huang, Synthesis Design + Architecture

What is the future of the American city?

Generally the future looks good to us because people want to be around other people and not spend time commuting. Here on the West Coast and in Northern California specifically, we are enjoying a technology boom. The future of the city will be shaped by this growing population that embraces change.

- Byron Kuth, Elizabeth Ranieri, Kuth Ranieri Architects

I think the future of the American city should lie in the belief that it has the potential to be "its own best city." In other words, it is critical that (smaller) American cities grow and develop in a manner that embraces the notion that they are necessarily the best of their type through local and cultural idiosyncrasies—qualities that should be celebrated, strengthened, and hyperbolized. In my own particular city, it becomes disheartening when we internally base qualitative comparisons to other cities like New York City. New York City can never be Louisville.

- Roberto De Leon, De Leon + Primmer Architecture Workshop

Cities are America's and the planet's sustainable future. Future cities will be denser and more efficient. I am a Rust Belter and our cities are relatively dense, but our infrastructure is desperately in need of renewal and can be infinitely more efficient.

- Carol Ross Barney, Ross Barney Architects

We just finished a project about the future of New York, and I think one of the things that was quite clear is the future is unequal. Inequality is greater than it has ever been in cities—this is as true in New York as anywhere in the country, if not more so.

- Bradley Samuels, Situ Studio

We must also question the idea of density as unmitigated good.

- Michael Sorkin, Michael Sorkin Studio

I think the future of Sun Belt cities is very bright indeed. The best of them have

bought into the idea of making themselves more compact, increasing density at the core, embracing mixed uses and pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit oriented transportation. Many have even started looking at rehabilitating the suburbs and changing their out-of-date building types and patterns of settlement in substantial and creative ways.

-Lawrence W. Speck, Page

What are architecture students not being taught that they need to be successful practitioners?

I get back to fundamentals. This sounds stupid, but scale, proportion, insistence on mastering the language of the discipline, and understanding the canonical aspects of architecture and their relevance to today. I'm just dismayed at the level of talent that comes out of schools and runs through the profession. I've never had a client come to me and say, "what I want is an ill-proportioned, unresolved, expediently delivered project that underperforms, and I'll pay you for that." I've never had anybody say that. I would doubt that most people cranking out this shit have either. What are we doing in schools that permits that?

- Marlon Blackwell, Marlon Blackwell Architects

One thing that I think is becoming a problem is the issue of understanding scale. That is a digital problem, and it comes from looking at things on the screen. So the translation of what's on screen to physical dimensions and physical scales is often a big struggle. That's why a lot of projects are being assessed as objects or images, because that's the way they're being designed. Ninety percent of the views you have when you are navigating a 3D model are from a helicopter.

- Alvin Huang, Synthesis Design + Architecture

Architecture students need to be taught about the importance of interiors. After drawing in "scale-less" space on computer screens, students need to better understand human scale. They spend too much time on the outside and need to understand we all live our lives on the inside.

- Billie Tsien, Tod Williams Billie Tsien

Are you satisfied with the AIA as your professional association?

The AIA I think would gain value if it fought for protection of intellectual property of architects. Architects should get the same amount of credit for the work as their photographer does. That's one example where the AIA is way behind the curve.

- Craig Hodgetts, Hodgetts + Fung

For me it's doing a pretty good job, what I don't know is if the AIA is meaningful to the next generation thinking about whether they want to go through the process and get something from it. I don't know if the AIA is doing that as aggressively as it could. Maybe that's contributing to the reduction of people going through licensure. Maybe the AIA needs to spend more time on how to advocate on behalf of people who have not registered yet.

- Scott Kelsey, CO Architects