



GRAFT is an architectural firm located in Los Angeles, Berlin, and Beijing. Their collective professional experience encompasses a wide array of building types including Fine Arts, Educational, Institutional, Commercial and Residential facilities. The firm has won numerous awards in Europe as well as in the United States. GRAFT was established in 1998 in Los Angeles by Lars Krückeberg, Wolfram Putz and Thomas Willemeit and opened an office in Berlin in 2001. In 2003 GRAFT opened an office in Beijing with Gregor Hoheisel as partner for the asian market. In 2007 Alejandra Lillo became Partner for the office in Los Angeles. GRAFT was conceived as a 'Label' for Architecture, Urban Planning, Design, Music, and the "pursuit of happiness". Since

GRAFT

Los Angeles, Berlin, Beijing

the firm was established, it has been commissioned to design and manage a wide range of projects in multiple disciplines and locations. With the core of the firm's enterprises gravitating around the field of architecture and the built environment, GRAFT has always maintained an interest in crossing the boundaries between disciplines and "grafting" the creative potentials and methodologies of different realities. This is reflected in the firm's expansion into the fields of exhibition design and product design, art installations, academic projects and "events" as well as in the variety of project locations in Germany, China, UAE, Russia, Georgia, in the U.S. and Mexico, to name a few.

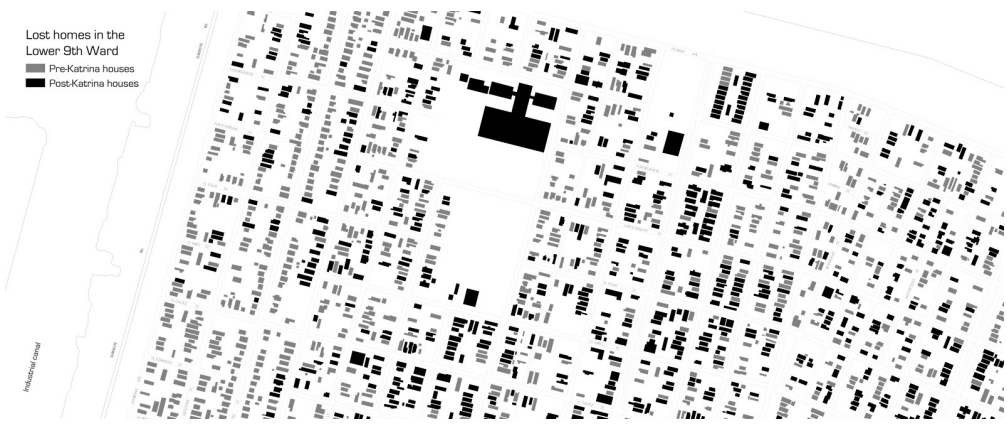
ARCHITECTURE IN TIMES OF NEED

The humanitarian challenges we currently face as a global community are vast in quantity, geographic scope, and in regard to their respective complexities. Pollution and global warming, the spread of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, the lack of potable water, adequate nutritional supplies, proper sanitation, and shelter in many parts of the world compose the most readily noticeable issues. There are also the matters of armed conflict and the lack of education, both of which often exacerbate existing problems. The daunting task of determining which issues to focus upon and how to provide solutions leaves many nonplussed. Ultimately, neglecting any of these issues will compromise the stability of human life on this planet. It is up to each one of us to contribute to the eradication of the great dangers that are present within so many people's lives and to come to the aid of those in harm's way when catastrophe occurs.

The Make It Right project sought to identify a center of attention and action, a pressure point within the urban fabric of New Orleans, which will trigger the redevelopment of larger areas within the city, and potentially identify techniques for providing shelter to those in need around the globe. The Lower Ninth Ward was chosen as the epicenter for this change. The most devastated neighborhood in New Orleans, the Lower Ninth Ward is predominantly occupied by low-income families, whose available monetary means for rebuilding are limited, if not nonexistent. However, this neighborhood composes one of the richest cultural communities in the country and was, until Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, a comprehensive vibrant crossroad of families, music, and social interaction in New Orleans.

With any given challenge, developing a robust solution requires proper identification of all of the factors in play, all the needs that could be met. The more

Lost homes in the
Lower 9th Ward
■ Pre-Katrina houses
■ Post-Katrina houses

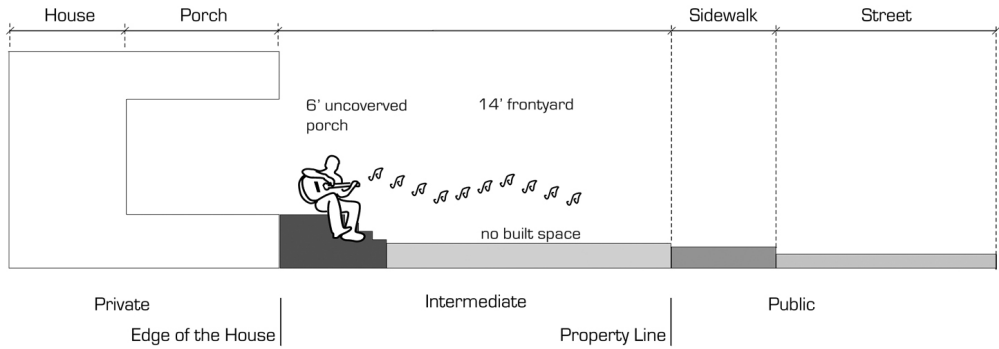


comprehensive and specifically those factors are defined and the more accurately they are evaluated insofar as to how one factor relates to another, the more likely an ideal solution becomes. Within the discipline of architecture, the base necessities that a building must service have historically been too thin. Due to the knowledge accumulated over the hundreds of years of design and the increasingly effective and powerful technologies, buildings can now do more for less. Providing built solutions that account solely for proper sanitation and shelter from adverse environmental conditions stands as merely adequate.

We must acknowledge the immense value of retaining cultural capital and preserving the world's ethnosphere as well as its biosphere. We must remember that built architecture ideally serves entities other than itself, that buildings are to be used as tools not only for survival but also for harnessing the vast imaginative and creative energies so unique to our species.

As Albert Einstein so astutely stated, "Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted." And so it is that all of which was lost to the Lower Ninth Ward's residents cannot be summed up through the enumeration of physical requirements. Many of the complex needs left in the wake of Katrina are difficult to define in a positivist manner, yet these needs are so powerful that they become tangible. The majority of the homes were passed down through the decades, holding the memories of many generations, as well as providing families with grounding and identity. These homes formed a cornerstone of the once vibrant New Orleans community.

Cultural considerations for rebuilding this community are every bit as crucial as finding proper resolution for the functional, safety, and sustainability needs. As a culture rich in history, music, as well as community interaction, the uniqueness of the Lower Ninth Ward can be reinvigorated, cherished, understood, and physically expressed as such. The psychological resonance the building has with its occupant, the sense of well-being it provides, and the ability to create a platform from which the residents can meaningfully and creatively interact with the world around themselves is fundamentally the heart of design.

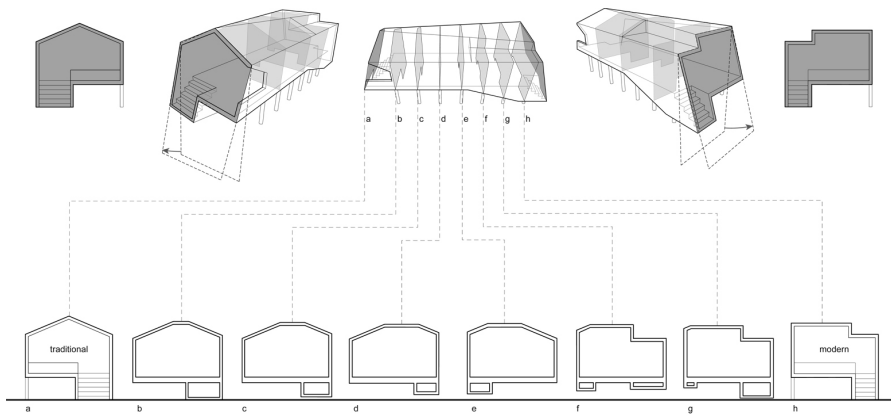


When faced with the vast undertaking of rebuilding the Lower Ninth Ward, the sense of urgency becomes almost overwhelming, calling for an immediate solution: Shelter for those who have lost their homes, provided without hesitation as efficiently and affordably as possible. However, it is at this moment when, as architects and planners, it is most critical to comprehend the distinction between providing shelter and providing a home.

Although globalization has led to new and sweeping opportunities, it has also brought about the endangerment of diversity, “the erosion of humanity’s cultural and intellectual legacy.” Public housing projects, while rapidly providing affordable shelter solutions, imperil diversity, suppress the human spirit, and obfuscate the means to establishing dynamic communities. Projects have never existed within the Lower Ninth Ward, which is not hard to believe upon realizing that the area has an exceptionally high percentage of owner-occupied housing. The suburban project, although markedly more generous of an environment than public housing, typically provides little variation and often neglects to incorporate local cultural conditions.

Ideally, architecture reinforces the capabilities, drives, and ambitions of each individual, as well as the local, regional, and global communities within which each individual belongs. The more positive reinforcement architecture provides, the more a house becomes a home, subsequently espousing uniqueness, the empowerment of individuals, families, and communities. As architects and planners we must foment the opportunities for maintaining or potentially even increasing positive diversity as a core pursuit. In order to understand and contextualize the spirit of the problems needing resolution in New Orleans more intimately, MIR collaborates with a large group of local associations throughout the rebuilding initiative. The Lower Ninth Ward Stakeholders Coalition is an active part of the Make it Right Project, working on site to develop the housing initiative in cooperation with the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward from the onset of the process.

The residents have been generous with their time, participating in lengthy and candid discussions regarding their lifestyles, fears, the values they hold dear, the



beautiful and profound meaning of community specific to the Lower Ninth Ward, the optimism and belief in the revitalization of New Orleans, and the heartfelt hope to finally come home. Landownership is a fundamental core belief that forms part of the American Dream; it is the belief in this dream, the belief in their family and extended family of community that fuels what could best be described as a grassroots movement, MIR. These dialogues have provided remarkable insights to a dignified people whose perseverance is exemplary.

Helplessness echoes vehemently as an underlying sentiment of the victims of Katrina: initiated during the storm, carried into the subsequent diaspora, and reinforced by ineffectual government assistance. Community residents had no other choice than to abandon their homes, their lives, and seek shelter across the country. One of the strongest countermeasures that can be provided to the individual is the power of choice. The process of selecting their house design provides an outlet for control to be returned to the landowner; it offers the expression of individuality, pride, and difference. Empowerment of the individual provides a platform for personal and family growth, from which a powerful sense of community can emerge.

Despite recent efforts to provide affordable modular housing to an ever-depleting middle class, the outcomes ultimately fail to hit a middle-income target audience. Architecture over the last fifty years has increasingly become a discipline which services the upper and upper-middle class, generating the perception that it is an elitist pursuit. Ideally, however, architecture can and should provide solutions for all social strata. The ultimate goal for architecture is to better the quality of life for mankind. Design is a necessary tool to change surroundings, to create a sense of well-being. A product and vehicle for progress, design is capable of improving living conditions at all scales of civilization. Architecture lays a groundwork onto which community can be created. Primarily a product of technological advancement and experience gained from our collective history, mankind's ability to communicate is progressively becoming more intricate in range, specificity, and means. As communication directly folds into community forma-



tion and evolution, we have found ourselves as members of communities that are wider in geographic scope, more robust in content, and intertwined through more infrastructural systems. Additionally, as inter-community communication has grown so have interdependence and the formation of the world as an ever-tightening, increasingly detailed web of information and influence. Identified as a pressure point within present-day civilization, the community of the Lower Ninth Ward, through its rebuilding and the sharing of the rebuilding process, is capable of positively affecting the condition of the communities of designers, donors, New Orleans, the United States, and the remainder of the world. It is about the positive growth of our species and consequently cannot be exclusive to certain social classes. We are a single community, a community that must take the time to rebuild trust and to bolster the growth of one another.