

# The Reynoldstown Project

## Wheelbarrow Summer Theater

### Atlanta, Georgia

*1998 ACSA Collaborative Practice Award*

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This portable theater project was designed and constructed for a gospel and neighborhood inner city festival. The project was completed (designed and built) under the supervision of two registered architects by students and community members as a collaborative effort. Over twenty thousand dollars in funds were raised completely by the students and donated to the theater. The entire project was erected on site in two weeks and dismantled in one day for use the next year. The planning process took over four months and included several full scale mock ups to test connections and materials.

Reynoldstown is a small community close to downtown Atlanta, it is one of the oldest African American neighborhoods and was established by former slaves. It faces the normal challenges of inner cities, decay, urban flight, poverty, drugs and crime. Somehow this area of the city has risen above it's problems- the Theater is one way they have done this. The site is on the covered basketball court of an abandoned school which was donated to the neighborhood group.

The concept driving this project centers on the making of an architectural quilt. In this neighborhood, Quiltmaking is a popular communal act with ideas constantly emerging during the act of making. Here the neighborhood was the quilt. The elements were designed to tie the project into the neighborhood.

**A Gateway:** The gateway adjoins the small pedestrian scale of the neighborhood and act as a signal of the theater. It's symbolic white sheets move with the breezes and become a threshold for the procession to the theater. It was constructed by local young architects and donated to the community for a cost of \$300.00

**A tower:** The entry tower acts as a landmark for the neighborhood- it is made of wooden members in a truss like form. The open frame echoes the factory towers and steel trestles of local rail yards. Two steel rings form a vertical shaft of space within which the Reynoldstown "On the Rise" flag is raised and lowered through. At the base is the ticket counter and three benches for use after shows and during the year as a communal space. The floor of this area is made of scrap pieces of end grain lumber.

**Wall of Doors:** The door wall is the quilt. The wall is made from over one hundred doors which were donated to the project. It measures fourteen feet high and over seventy feet long. Each door is symbolically different in color texture and construction. Like the members of the neighborhood- each is different. They express the ad hoc found art quality present in the neighborhood- where the Shotgun shack and Dog Trot house coexist with the loud Coca Cola billboard hovering above- or where a street facing porch becomes a theater at night- It's slow moving inhabitants slowly rocking back and forth.

The doors were mounted within a wooden frame which allowed for variation in width and height but maintained an entry cadence. The wall was painted by local children and it's components were stored after the show. It acts as a greeter, a threshold to the theater and a backdrop against which all of the activity takes place. Lighting was designed within the wall to allow it to glow at night.

**The Stage:** The stage was designed to be flexible and allow for the components to be stored easily and with the most ease of construction. The platforms fold to allow for storage. On opening night 100 gospel singers performed on the platforms. The proscenium was made from a local quilters group and by a local artisan.

#### Type of Construction

The construction was of wooden framing members with metal fasteners. The entire theater was dismantled and stored in a large bomb resistant trailer we purchased from a local Air Force surplus yard.

Budget: \$9,500

#### PHASE II THE MARKETPLACE

Size: 4 portable units at 144 square feet

After the success of the first production the Reynoldstown Revitalization Corporation decided to commission our class to design and construct four pavilions for the sale of neighborhood produced goods. The proceeds from this show go towards renovating houses in the neighborhood and towards

AIDS awareness programs for Reynoldstown. The program included four sales pavilions for the sale of artwork made by residents of the neighborhood.

## SOLUTION

The design team first raised the funds necessary to complete the project by getting grants and through area material donations. The master planning idea was based on creating a small village of diverse and festive buildings each expressive of elements of the context. The project was then built by the design team and several community members.

**Pavilion 1:** This project was constructed from galvanized electrical conduit and its roof and walls were made from a Virginia Slims Canvas Billboard. Its central idea was to provide a place where two vendors could have equal exposure from foot traffic. The project also included a permanent circular medallion which is expressive of the town logo- a sunburst and a memorial to the festival founder.

*Construction System:* Galvanized steel tubing, wood frame interior wall and canvas walls and roof.

*Construction time:* 50 minutes

**Pavilion 2:** This pavilion is based on the idea of flexibility through the movement of wall and roof planes. The project can be tuned and adjusted to conform to many uses. Its Trellis above defines the central information space for the theater and provides cover in the rain.

*Construction System:* Wood cruciform columns and trellis. Fabric and metal panel roof and walls.

*Construction Time:* 20 minutes

**Pavilion 3:** This building is based on the path. Each vendor gets an equal amount of exposure while maintaining a human scale through its delicate wood panel and column detailing. Built in fold down shelving allow for flexible use by the vendors. A PVC framed arc shaped roof defines each side.

*Construction system:* Wood panels with PVC and canvas roof. Custom steel footings.

*Construction time:* 35 minutes

**Pavilion 4:** This project was about the opposition of elements. The hard exterior shell is expressive of the industrial building surrounding the neighborhood. The interior expresses the warmth of a residential interior through walls painted by the area children and built in shelving. Above a PVC framed oval roof hovers and glows during the evening hours.

*Construction system:* Wood and metal panels with PVC and canvas roofs.

*Construction time:* 55 minutes

**Kiosk:** This information kiosk contains events of the festival and a seat. It is based on the idea of a house of cards and is made of aniline stained plywood on a metal frame.

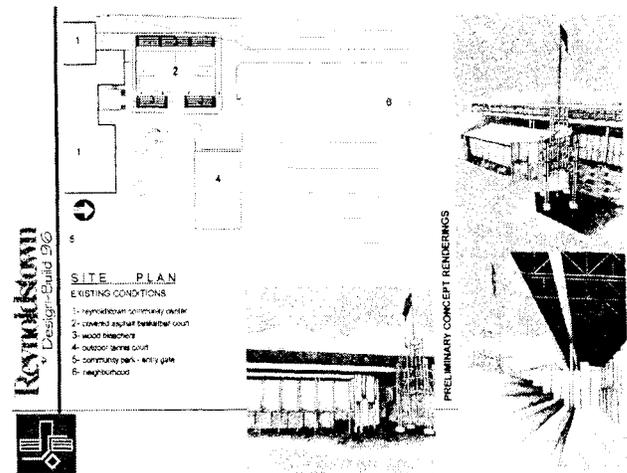


Fig. 1. Site plan.

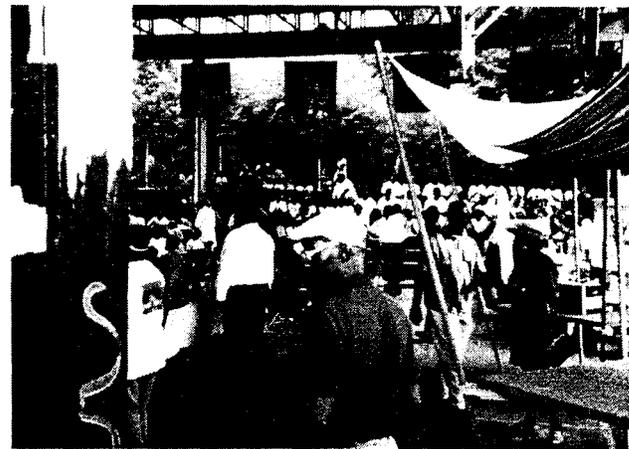


Fig. 2. The public during performance day.



Fig. 3. Children painting a mural for pavilion four.

*This project is a way to give back to the neighborhood while helping to express its unique character. The design team worked closely with the neighbors to design and build the project. The Theater and Market raised enough funds to renovate one existing house and put roofs on two other houses this year.*