

# The emerging architect

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## design

### Rodriguez Studio

Designing the lines, then coloring within them

Carlos Rodriguez's life promised to settle down when, after a peripatetic youth latched to his father's Air Force service, he entered Cornell's five-year undergraduate architecture program. But as it turned out, his first foray into architecture proved more confounding than a childhood spent skipping from Puerto Rico to Wichita to Madrid and back. "There were no right answers, and I felt frustrated," Rodriguez remembers, and in his fourth semester he switched to accounting.

Rodriguez later reentered architecture, graduating from Cornell with his B.Arch. in 1998. Since then, he has pursued a practice not as strictly regulated as ledgers and tax law, but one in which an array of design directions is held in check by series of parameters.

That would explain why Rodriguez mastered lobbies. Working at both the Washington, D.C., branch of Gensler as well as Kohn Pedersen Fox's New York office between 1999 and 2004, he was consistently tapped to design entryways from Beijing to the Big Apple. "It's a complex program in a small space," Rodriguez says. "There are numerous considerations that other spaces don't have to take into account, such as security checkpoints."

While working in New York, a classmate of Rodriguez's then-girlfriend (today the pair is married) hired the young architect to renovate a 3,200-square-foot loft in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood. What started as a fun sideline with a licensed-architect friend ultimately inspired Rodriguez to found his eponymous studio in 2004. "I really enjoyed being at KPF, but there's something about the gargantuan scale of the projects that wears you down."

In that project, called W/G Loft, Rodriguez highlighted the original features of the second-story apartment, leaving a brick wall and old ceiling timber exposed and inserting modest additions like a low dining-room storage partition, as well as transforming a roof setback into a terrace. For the

**Reservoir Viewfinder House, Westchester County, New York, 2011**  
Magnificent views and a wooded site guided the design of this remodel of a 4,400-square-foot residence on a hill facing the Croton Reservoir.



**Casa Dos Caras, Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2009**  
An 18th-century building kept its historic face, but the interior was transformed into an open, Modern dwelling, complete with skylights to bring sunlight into the inner core of the space.

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1,100-square-foot Z Loft, a second home renovation not far from W/G, Rodriguez went further, taming a labyrinthine plan without covering original brick walls or removing pressed-tin ceilings.

These commissions also inaugurated what Rodriguez calls a "material-driven phase" in his studio's development. It is another take on parametric design. "Rather than introducing something new to make a space special," he says, "we strip things back. We see how that archaeology can play into a design, not hide it or impose something on it." Rodriguez has applied that perspective to Cream, an Upper East Side women's clothing boutique in which a faceted storefront window looks into more exposed brick and a row of rafters. And whereas historic preservation regulations require that Rodriguez's forthcoming expansion of his parents' home, Casa Dos Caras, in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, retain all traces of the original building, a new skin and sectional incisions for a home in Croton, New York, will make it seem entirely transformed even though the plan remains largely unchanged. "There's always some sort of exuberance and subversion of the expected," he says of his approach, "but it's certainly not formal manipulation for formal manipulation's sake." *David Sokol*

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## work

### The University of Washington

Landscape architecture design/build

The University of Washington's landscape architecture students are putting their studies into practice with a number of nonprofit projects as a part of its design-build program. The program, which was born as a summer class in 1995 by Professor Daniel Winterbottom, is now a requirement for third-year students. During the 10-week class, 12 to 14 landscape architecture students work together to design, plan, and construct a project within an underserved community. The idea of the program is to combine theory with practice.

"The intention was to bring together design and construction," says Winterbottom. "We are constantly evaluating design and how it comes to function in the built world."

One ongoing project the students are working on is a play garden with some built spaces in Guatemala City. The goal of this effort, a collaboration with social services nonprofit Safe Passage, is to transform part of a garbage dump into a garden and park for children in Zone 3 of the city – a neighborhood without access to public services. Many of the residents are displaced civil war refugees from other parts of the country, who now live on what they can scavenge and sell from the dump.

"These kids have almost no access to nature or education," said Winterbottom. "We want to create a safe environment where these kids can be kids and also learn. The goal was to turn garbage to garden."

The master plan for this effort has four phases that support two existing K-12 and administrative buildings by Safe Passage. Three of the phases have been completed. Phase one, which included an entry courtyard, won an ASLA Student Award in 2006. Since the garden was first planted, it has bloomed into a jungle, returning in some ways to its native state. Phase two, completed in December 2007, involves a play garden and structure, which students spent three weeks designing and six weeks building. The third phase, an outdoor classroom, was designed and built by students in the winter 2009 session. "The outdoor classroom at the main building will be a space used by three of Safe Passage's programs. It will also be a retreat and a place the children can socialize and study in a quiet green space," says Winterbottom. Finally, phase four will be a community garden with outdoor lockers.

Other design-build projects on the boards include work in Mexico, Bosnia, and Japan. But not all are so far from home. Many of the projects are right in the university's backyard. Students in the landscape-architecture program recently completed a garden at Fircrest School just north of Seattle, a school for developmentally disabled children. The program has also worked on various parks projects in Kings County in Seattle, in partnership with Starbucks.

"We partner with the community as we work on the design to create a therapeutic environment for the people that live there," says Winterbottom. *Dianna Dilworth*



The students turned part of this Guatemala City dump into a play garden for children (above). The raised play structure weaves through a grove of eucalyptus trees, and includes slides and bridgeways that lead to a series of play spaces.



Over 20-weeks, University of Washington students created a therapeutic garden for the Fircrest School, a residential habilitation center north of Seattle. The garden includes activity zones with playgrounds, plantings, and shade, storage, and seating structures.