



Studio Gang Architects (in collaboration with University of Illinois at Chicago, Rafi Segal Architecture Urbanism, University of Chicago, SCAPE, and Greg Lindsay); proposal for Garden in the Machine, Cicero, Chicago, 2012. Poplars, willows, and other phytoaccumulators cleanse the soil around the former factory in as little as four to five years.

In the global work of architecture, there is no lack of urgent problems to solve. Each new disaster of climate or human conflict seems more critical than the last, and today's media makes the plight of faraway places immediate to empathetic designers. Our studio's North American base, paired with a healthy skepticism about how effective we can be at a distance, has driven us to become increasingly focused on making an impact in local contexts. As architects, but also as citizens, we have the specific knowledge and the responsibility to conjure architecture's restorative function in the cities where we live.

Identifying local needs and pondering their solutions is the lifeblood of our studio, often leading us to explore some unglamorous locations, be it a foul urban waterway, a contaminated parking lot, a crumbling factory, or a neighborhood full of flooded basements. The signs of decrepitude and dysfunction are everywhere in the postindustrial city. But knowing a place well gives one the confidence to identify what is needed and to take action effectively.

Having explored the Chicago region's inner-ring suburbs as part of a 2010 research project on the geography of immigration, recently we focused more closely on Cicero, Illinois, a former railroad town on Chicago's outskirts. It was originally a city of immigrants (initially Poles, Czechs, and Lithuanians), a city of churches and bungalows, and a city of industry that had come to occupy more than a third of its land. In the 1980s, factories began vacating, along with their employees, leaving a frequently toxic postindustrial landscape behind—and subsequent room for a wave of new arrivals. The New Cicero, as the city calls itself today,

is largely Mexican, with nearly half of its Hispanic population foreign-born.

Simultaneous factory and housing foreclosures have created a twofold challenge: to remediate former industrial sites and to imagine a housing typology that creates access to opportunity for current residents, and accommodates their varied household structures. Many residents pursue skilled craft, construction, and service economy jobs but must travel to far-reaching parts of the county for employment. In our plan, local industry is reintroduced, albeit on a smaller scale, leveraging both the workforce and the existing rail infrastructure to encourage light manufacturing and entrepreneurial cottage industries. We propose a progressive transformation of contaminated lands, with trees and plants initiating the soil cleansing process. While phytoremediation does its work, clean sites and available structures are reconfigured to create a new combined living and working network.

Rather than the "machine in the garden," Leo Marx's metaphor for the startling contrast between our American pastoral ideal and our industrial ambition, our project is about mining its inverse: the "garden in the machine." The factory, when disassembled and reconfigured, interweaves rail, cargo, living, working, and networks, all animated by productive and functional garden spaces. The former division between leafy, green neighborhoods and enormous swaths of giant assembly plants and active rail lines becomes blurred and nuanced as the garden heals the machine.

*Jeanne Gang* is the founding principal of Studio Gang Architects, Chicago and New York. Through projects ranging in scale from community anchors and cultural institutions to tall buildings and urban plans, Gang explores the role of design in revitalizing cities. She is currently engaged in projects throughout the United States, including the expansion of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.