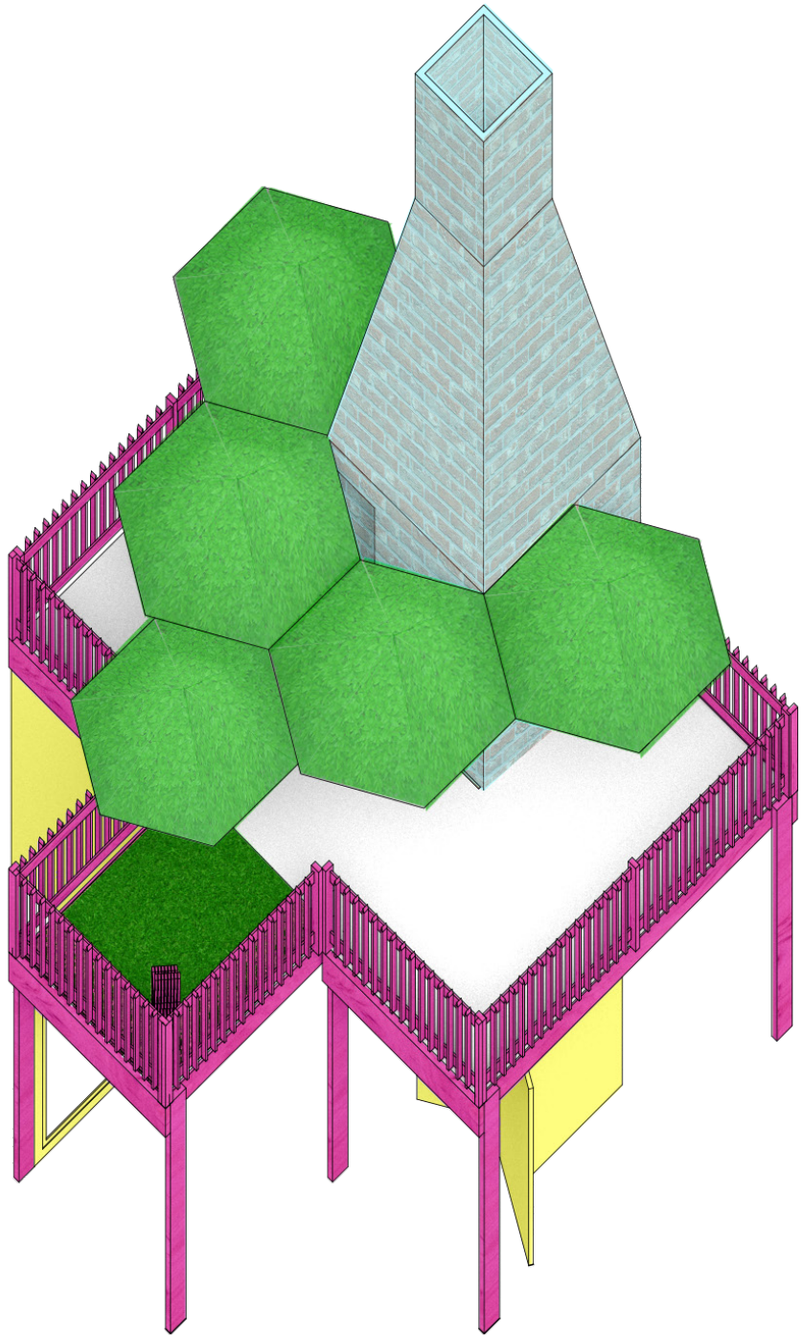
VOID



Change of Plans:
The Subversive Kit in the Planned Community

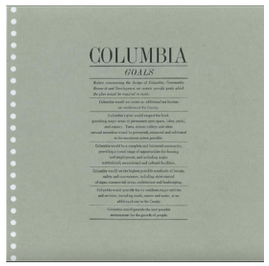
Hugo Caldwell
Primary Advisor: Amy Kulper
Secondary Advisor: Carl Lostritto

My thesis seeks to investigate the relationship between the prescriptive forces of urban planning with architecture. Through extracting elements and characteristics from an existing context, I implement a subversive system/kit of parts that work together to challenge the ideas behind top-down planning while painting a new picture of Columbia, MD, and planned communities as a whole

Contents

Introduction	1-4
Index: The Kit	5-6
Transformation Begins	7-24
The Parallel: Back into the Domestic	25-28
Appendix of Process	29-34
Index: The Vocabulary	35-36

Rouse immortalized by statue in Columbia



List of Goals that Rouse put out for the initial development of the community

New apartment development next to the shopping mall

Rendering for New Cultural Center/Housing Facility

Plans for Symphony Woods

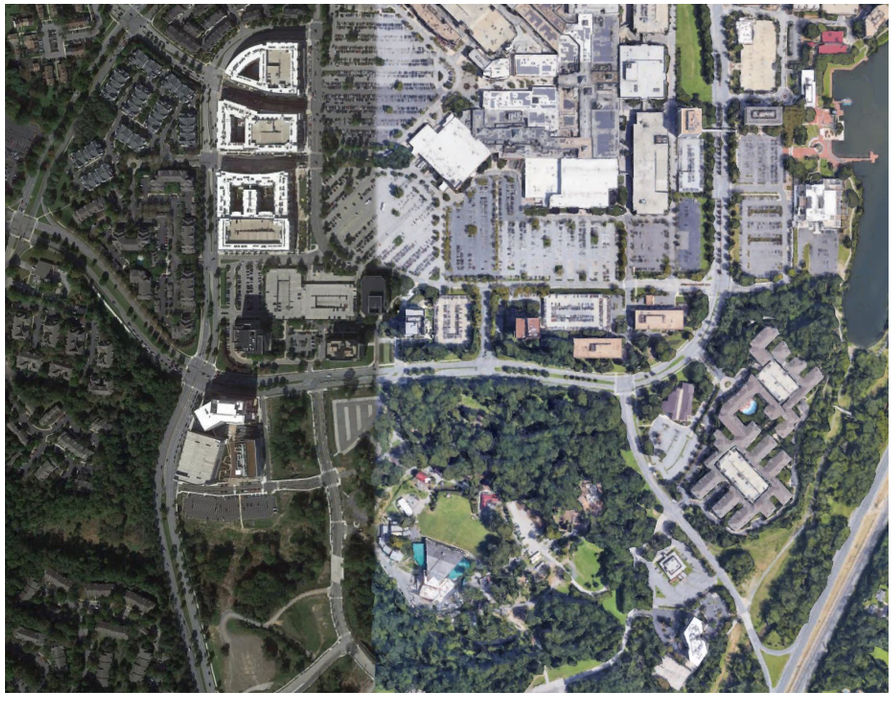
Introduction

I have been highly interested in the intersection between architecture and urban planning. It is apparent that there exists a disconnect between the goals of the two, yet they live so closely together. Urban planning seeks to codify the built environment, using buildings as plug-ins of program, while architecture focuses more on the intimate scale of the group/individual. While the aims of urban planning may have good intentions, its top-down forces strive to program people while alienating those without that same mindedness. Planned communities are a prime example of this, as the entirety of life is shrunk down to a singular environment that is insular and isolated from the outside.

This notion reintroduced me to a community that I have been apart of for the majority of my life: Columbia MD. Columbia is a planned community between Baltimore, MD and Washington D.C. of the late 1960s and early 1970s under the development of James Rouse and the Rouse Company. James Rouse was known for developing shopping malls early on in his career, but shifted focus to planned communities after he gained status. The city of Columbia served as an adventure, or experiment, to embody his ideals into a completely new city that sought to tackle issues that suburbs of the times faced.

This idealism instilled upon the community has received its fair share of praise, as well as criticism. It allowed for a diverse population that wasn't seen before and provided a higher standard of life to inhabitants. On the other-hand, life was highly standardized and homogenized. Buildings such as the interfaith centers and the shopping mall in the center of the town forced people into close proximity to each other, rather than allowing for people to create their own chance encounters. Streets still faced issues as people found it hard to navigate around the city if they were visiting. As Columbia has passed it 50th anniversary, it still faces issues of top down planning that spurred the project. Developments are seen as "holistic" projects that create a finished idea of place, rather than following a more ad hoc process. Revitalizing the town center is the primary focus as of now, and development of large scale luxury condominiums has started. Columbia continues to try to sell itself to many people, rather that have design speak for itself. Ideas require people to bring them into effect, and yet there is more focus on commercializing life.

Columbia Town Center circa. 1974. Designing the town center was of primary focus in the beginning phases of creating the community, as it served as a focal point and attraction for those interested in buying into the community



Columbia Town Center circa. 2019. This highlights the extended development of the town center that has taken place over the years. including new housing, expansion of the mall, and renovation of some facilities.

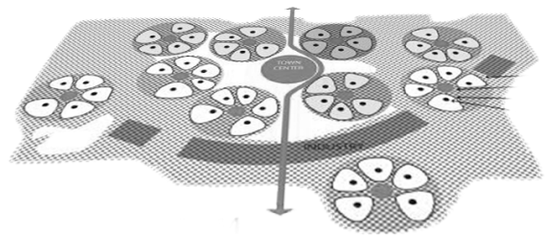
In this analysis of the homogenizing and commercial forces behind top-down planning, a new face arrives, one that isn't recognizable at first glance. This is Frank Gehry, or rather, the architecture that Frank Gehry completed in the city of Columbia.

Gehry revisiting Merriweather Post Pavilion later on in his career. This design was one of the more popular he produce due to its wide spread audience.

Meeting between Gehry and Rouse. This captures the essence of top-down planning between architect and developer.

Gehry revisiting Rouse Headquarters later on in his career. Another well received work, as it was awarded for its design.

Before he went on to produce his more iconic work, Gehry was commissioned by Rouse to design several buildings (of which 4 were completed) for the new community. These included a reception center, a fire station, a concert venue, and a headquarters building for the company. While other buildings I have previously mentioned fully emphasize current narratives of planned communities, these 4 buildings anchor the thesis between the initial interest of architecture vs planning, allowing me to enter and question the role of the architect in a planned community. The buildings also allow for the thesis to open a conversation between the commercial, pop aspect of architecture with the high-style "starchitecture", expanding for a richer criticism of what I am exploring.

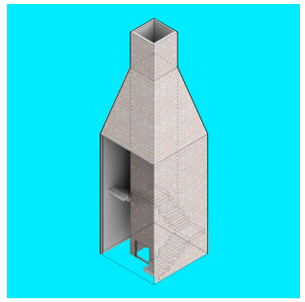


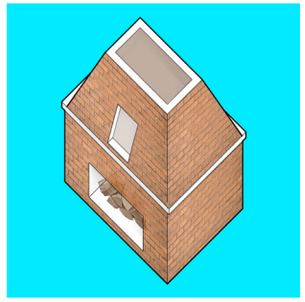
Gehry jumping into a diagram of Columbia, MD. Rouse brought this "California Cool" and deployed him to help make his dream happen.

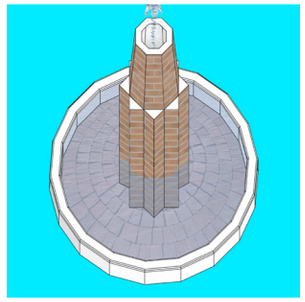
Index: The Kit

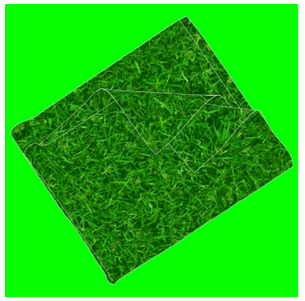
The buildings that Gehry designed may not seem significant for their architecture, which is true. These designs are much more modest compared to the “starchitecture” that we know Gehry for today. However, these buildings still provide much insight on planned communities, high architecture culture, and consumerism. Attempting to redesign or adapt the originals so that they address issues of the area, designing from scratch or using tactics of adaptive reuse fails to acknowledge the buildings as they currently stand. Rather, a kit of elements that is derived from the originals acts as a form of tactical urbanism, transcending former scale and function. By implementing objects and elements of architecture rather than architecture itself, The parts seek to create dialogue between the existing built environment that stemmed from top-down planning with a more bottom-up idea, in which people have more ownership of the place they inhabit. In this way, the relationship between the high architecture and commercial ideology remains intact and becomes a focal point of the criticism, not to be overshadowed by new formal moves.

In each of the derivations, at least 3 pieces emerge, each with a consistent theme. Like the buildings, they may not seem interesting at first glance, but by having the capacity to be referential, the kit keeps true to the original intent of the criticism. They are perversions of the existing that begin to populate perspectival views and vivify the distilled, monochromatic environment. In order to understand these extractions, a detailed understanding of each of the buildings is required. In the following section, I will provide a breakdown of each of the buildings, as well as their representational transformation from the mundane to the cartoon dream that I have engaged for the thesis.


Chimney/Fireplace

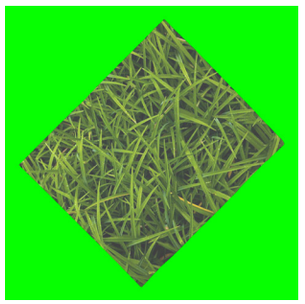

Outdoor Brick Oven

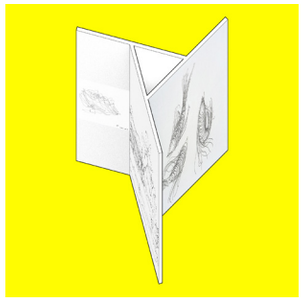

Fountain

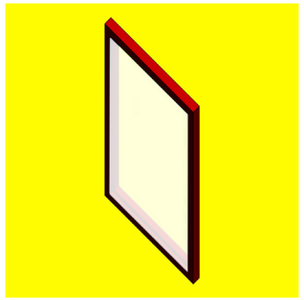

Beach Towel

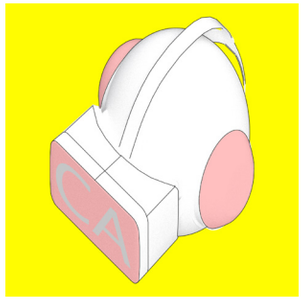
Picnic Table

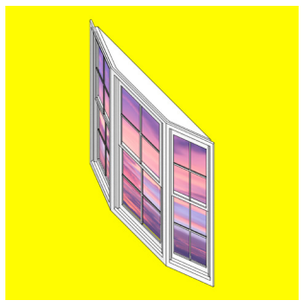
Replica Tree

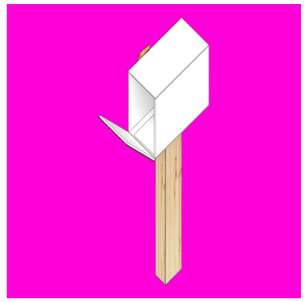

Carpet

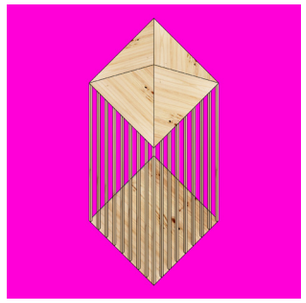

Display Boards


Digital Screen

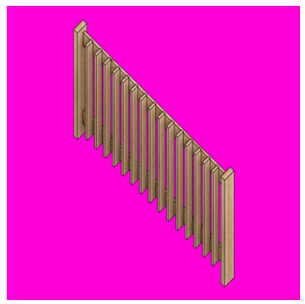

VR Headset

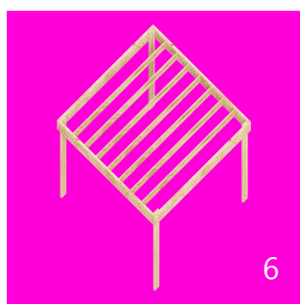

Picture Window

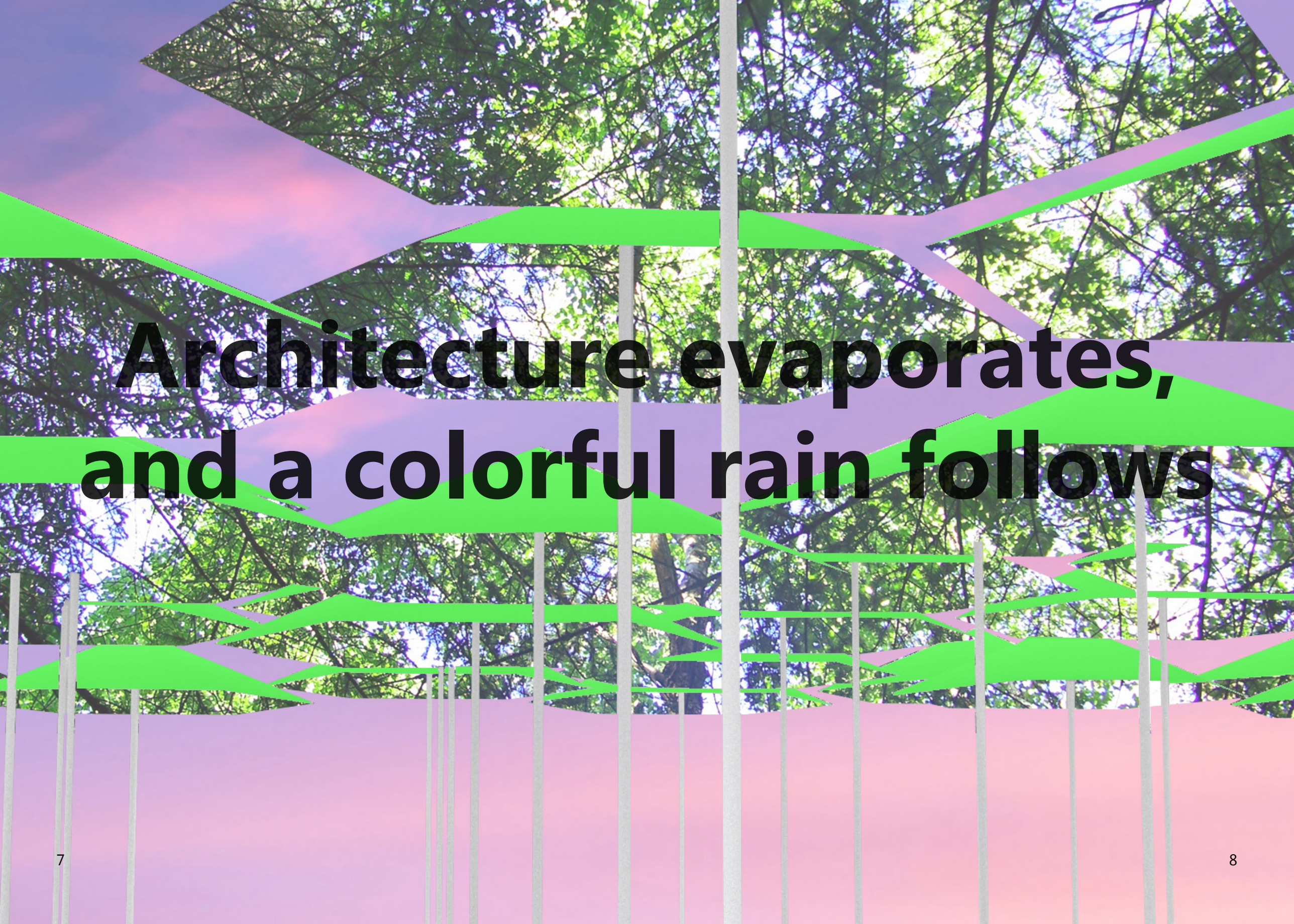

Mailbox


Birdcage

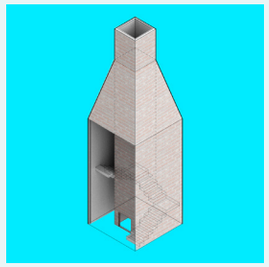
Chair

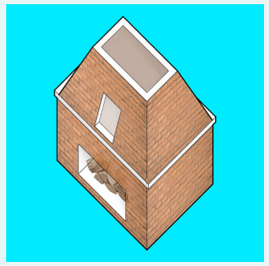

Picket Fence

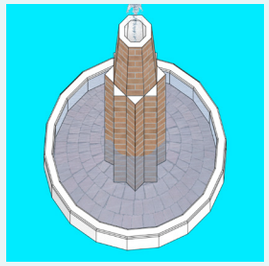

Coffee/End Table


Architecture evaporates,
and a colorful rain follows

Perspective view from street of the Banneker Firehouse







Banneker Firehouse

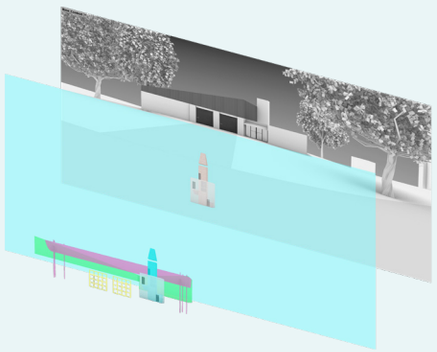
The first of the buildings that I will introduce to you is the Banneker Firestation. It is the simplest of buildings that Gehry designed for Columbia, most likely due to the fact that it has specific utilitarian program and had the smallest budget. The building is distinguishable from others in its immediate vicinity due to its small stature, presence at an intersection residing on the outskirts of the town center, and its formal moves with its geometric roof and firehose tower.

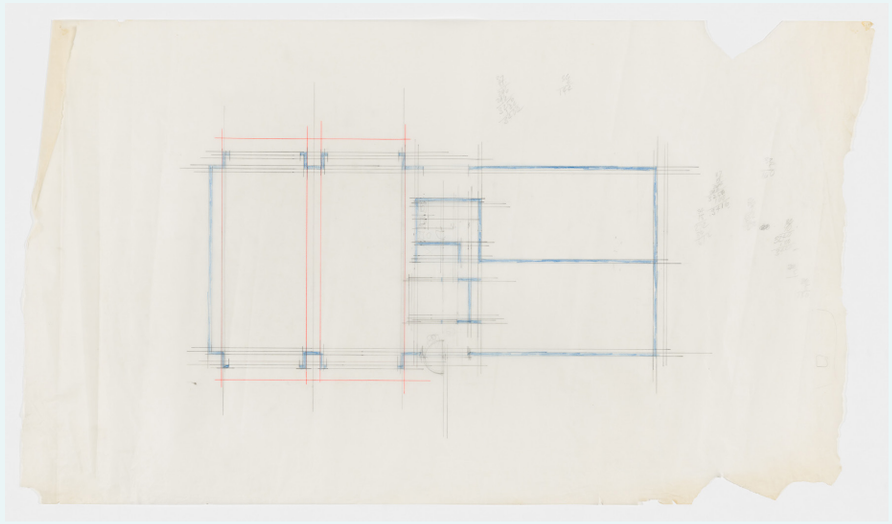
In its translation to the kit of parts, utilitarian pieces that pertained to heat and water seemed to follow its original theme, but also opened up various uses around the community. The tower offered an opportunity to be altered within the Firehouse itself, focusing the circulation around the architectural element, now having more functional use outside of just for drying hoses. Its adaptation into houses remained similar, as it doubled as a stairwell/fireplace. This piece now serves as the staple to the main living area, an homes in general throughout the community.

The next piece continued the notion of fire and further domesticated it with the creation of an outdoor brick oven. This gesture shrinks the element to a more human scale, and gives those who you it more control of the object.

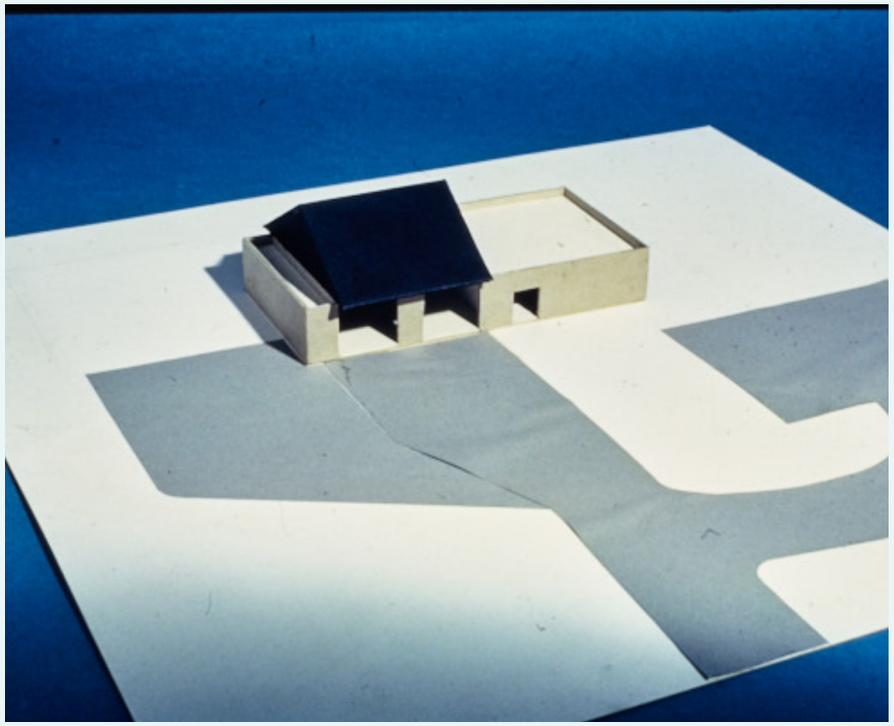
The last extraction countered fire, in that it focuses on water. As water balances fire in its ability to diminish it, the designed fountain provides more of a monumental artifact, one that celebrates space rather than having a specific functional purpose.

In all of these elements, the use of brick provides more of a domesticated presence than that of the original tower, built out of concrete. They extend the home environment outward. twisting the subverting the programmatic stickering that top down planning has created.





Early sketch of the Banneker Firehouse by Gehry. These sketches offer insight to how Gehry designed buildings for the fabric of Columbia, MD.



Model iteration of the Banneker Firehouse. There is no site context outside of the paving for the firetrucks and parking. Shows more 3 dimensionally the separation of the roof form from the base structure. No firetower is shown.

So as we transition from a distilled, monochrome environment that resulted from planning, we find ourselves in a new vision, a technicolor dream in which people now engage in a more bottom-up process. The Firehouse's new tower now serves as a backdrop to the front yard activated by the umbrella canopy and defining picket fence.

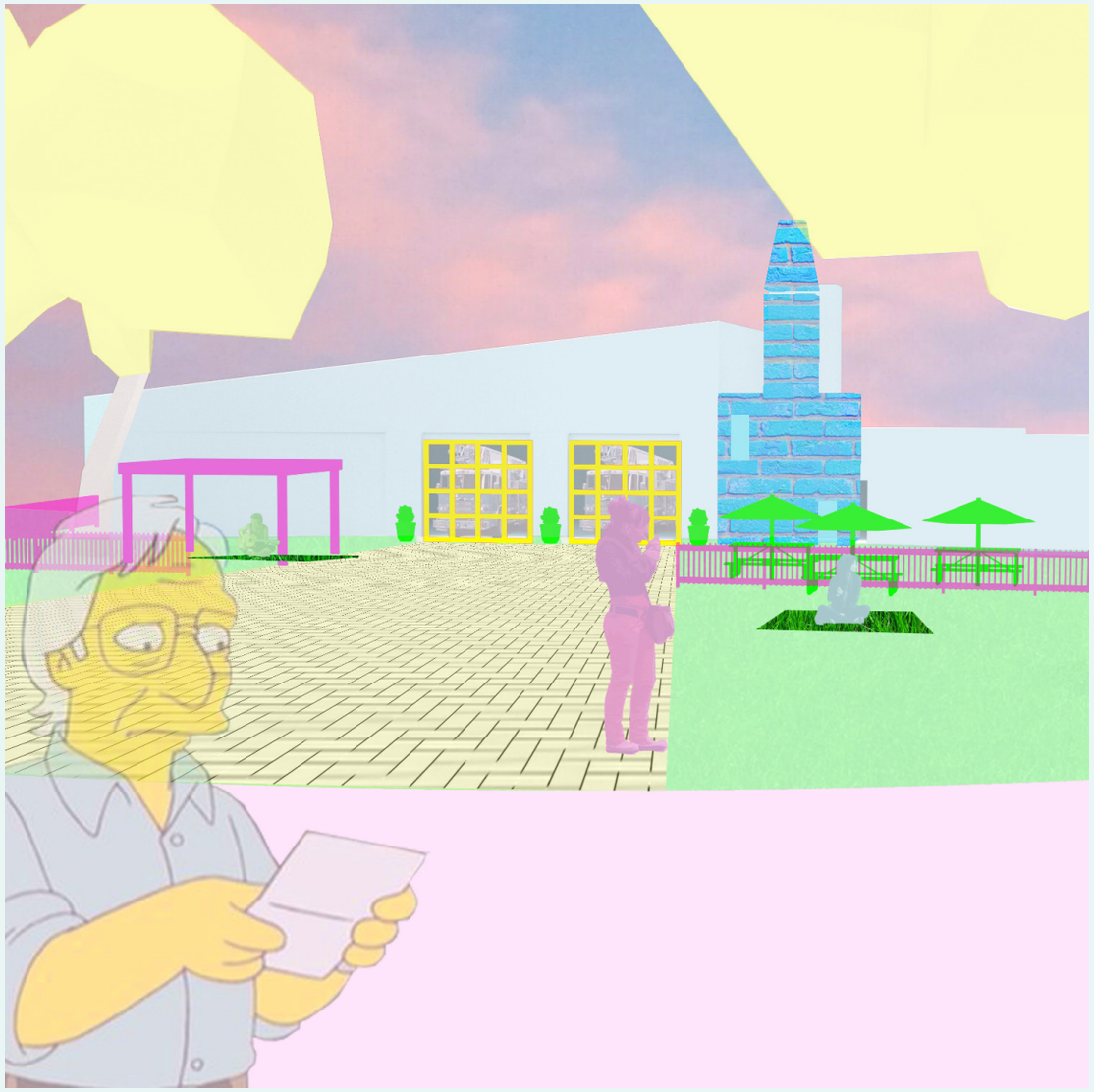
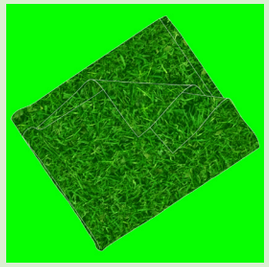
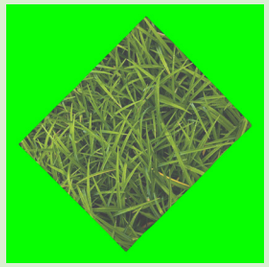


Photo of Merriweather from the side





Merriweather Post Pavilion

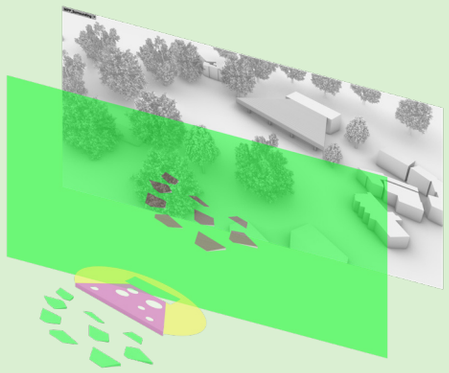
The concert venue, formally known as Merriweather Post Pavilion, is the highest regarded out of the 4 buildings because of its popularity of Columbia. It sits south of the mall, removed from the surrounding context by isolating within the woods. Gehry was able to create an acoustically impressive design with a limited budget and materials. The building has undergone many renovations to keep it competitive with other concert venues along the east coast, and the roof structure actually collapsed and needed rebuilding during a recent development. The woods surrounding the structure are gradually diminishing, as plans to build next to the space and adapt the woods to open more as a park are underway.

The nature of the park was focal to its creation of the kit, as all of the elements are referential to the site. The first piece shown refers to the lawn of Merriweather that people would occupy. Now at the venue, stages arise out of the ground creating boundaries of grass. The beach towel takes the texture of the grass and harnesses it into a possible form. People can take a piece of Merriweather's lawn anywhere and use it for picnics.

The next extends the picnic idea to the trees of Merriweather, using an umbrella with a tree canopy texture on the underside. This allows for people to get the sense of sitting under Merriweather's trees without actually having to be directly in the vicinity.

The next two objects push further this notion of domestication. A replica tree scales down the architecture and landscape to an item, one people can furnish their dwellings with.

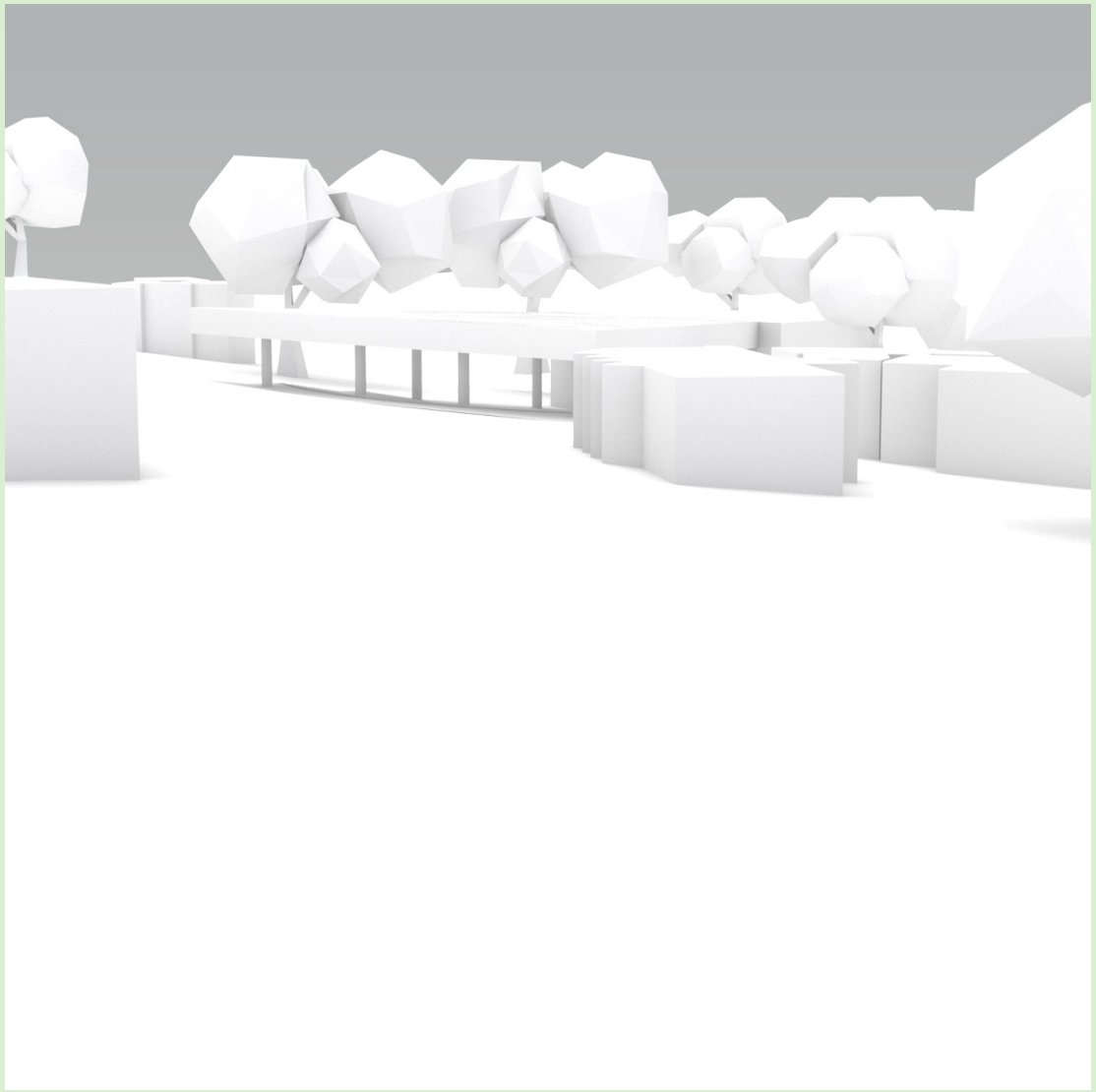
Like the beach towel, the carpet carries the grass, but more directly into the household. This piece of the kit really accents a room, and works well with the new fireplace to create a cozy living room.



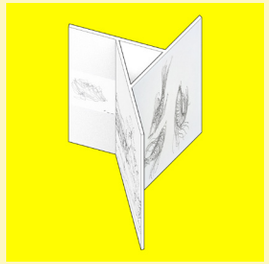
Site plan drawing of Merriweather Post Pavilion. Details how trees populate the site and mask the venue structure in the woods. Early idea of water feature (pond) shown between the pavilion and parking.

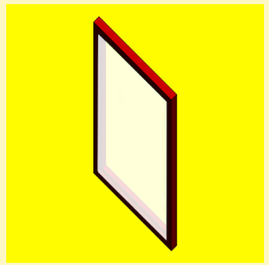
Perspective drawing of Merriweather Post Pavilion. Emphasizes the use of the lawn as well as seating in the distance. Idealized trees canopy the area.

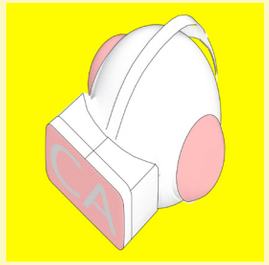
Merriweather, initially isolated in the woods, begins to blur the lines of its boundaries. Stages scatter across the lawn and trees planted inside the pavilion bring back nature into the architecture, and the kit scatters across creating a more colorful environment.

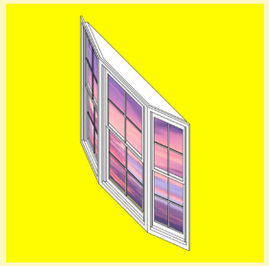


Exhibition Center early aerial view









Exhibition Center

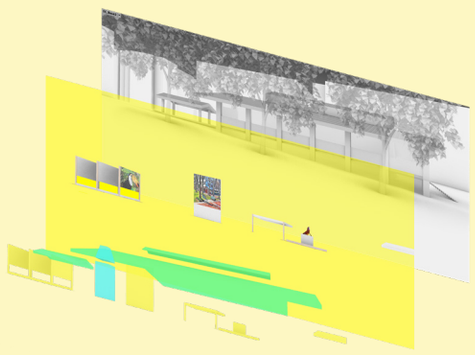
The Exhibition Center, also known as the Reception Center, was the first building that Gehry design and had built in Columbia. It was used to display the ideals of Columbia to future buyers. Funny enough, it didn't exhibit too much art; I recall having art exhibits in the mall as a kid rather than having them at an art center. After it passed its original purpose, the building got adapted to fit restaurants and businesses. It now faces plans to completely get rid of the structure and make way for a new building that is more "up to the times".

To explore the split between the terms exhibition and exhibit, pieces that focus on images/imaging were developed. Radial display boards have the capacity to showcase art of the area, and extend display outside of the building. The dynamic form encourages movement around an through public displays of art.

The next element derived came from an idea of changing narratives/ images, and an operable screen resulted. Now, art can be digitally displayed and advertised, not being confined to a singular piece and space. This is not limited to the program of art, as it can also serve as a television, touch screen terminal, etc.

Similar is the VR headset, which allows for escapism and ownership of experience. As physical space is restricted to itself, the headset allows for people to move outside the realm they exist in and into a new perspective. Your possibilities are endless!

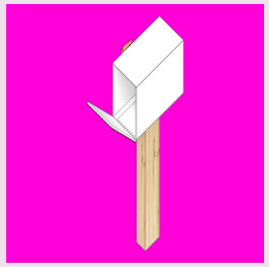
The last element is a direct domestication with the picture window. For homes and buildings that may not provide the best views outward, this opens up the opportunity for those to get a sense of the beauty that Columbia has to offer.

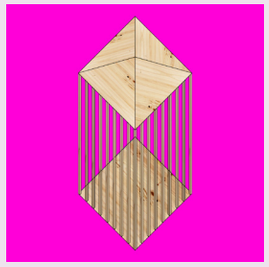


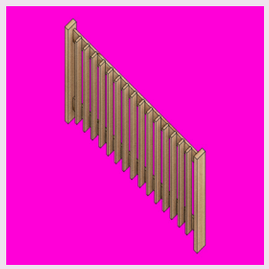
Perspective drawing of the Exhibition Center, view from the side approach next to the lake front. Envisions active walkway towards the building, yet building itself serves more as a backdrop to the scene

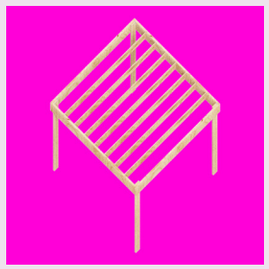
Photo of the Exhibition Center during construction, showing primary use of steel and concrete. Major feature of tilted red roofs with space in between.

The exhibit center, once introverted to its interior, now extends its display to the outside and celebrates the space around it. It now serves a place that invites people to engage with the artistic practices of others.









Rouse Company Headquarters

And last but not least, the Rouse Company Headquarters. The most expensive of the buildings, this features new tectonics that aren't present elsewhere in the community, specifically the wood trellis. Gehry was tasked to design this for Rouse as their relationship solidified and as Rouse wanted to move the company to his prized possession. When the Rouse Company faded, the building remained vacant for a while, and questions of its existence arose. Instead of it being torn down, Whole Foods came in and occupied the building. Another grocery store in the area.

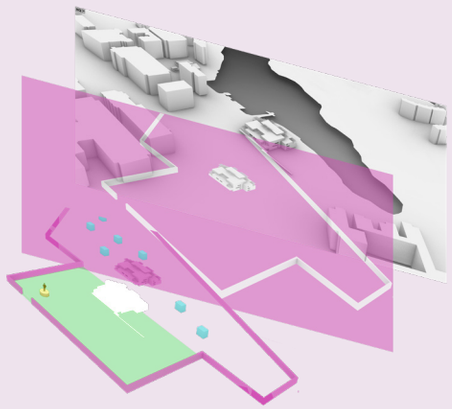
It's clear that the initial intent for the building was to serve as a gateway and monument to the community, and the kit highlight this aspect. All keep consistent with the materials and tectonics of the building. The mailbox mimics a unit in the building, and marks the entrances to all buildings of the community.

The birdcage pushes gateway towards understanding gates. People can now house their bird friends in style.

A variation of Gehry's wiggle chair also arose. This piece blends the consumer culture with high art, and places the icon's work back into the context of the site.

Along with the birdcage, the picket fence serves as a boundary for all homes and most buildings. This enables those to define the space they inhabit.

The last element of this portion ,and the kit entirely, is the coffee/end table. This stays strict to the form of the trellis and scales it down to an object. The repetitive tectonics allow for complete adaptability, and it is available in various sizes to fit perfectly in any room. It really compliments the wiggle chair!



Color photograph of Rouse Headquarters model. Scale figures display an active environment, with occupiable balconies that are shaded by the wood trellises and plant life.

Black and white photograph of the Rouse Headquarters. The tectonics are consistent from the back to all facades.

Front elevation of the Rouse Headquarters converted into a Whole Foods. Little has changed except for minor adjustments to the entrance glazing.

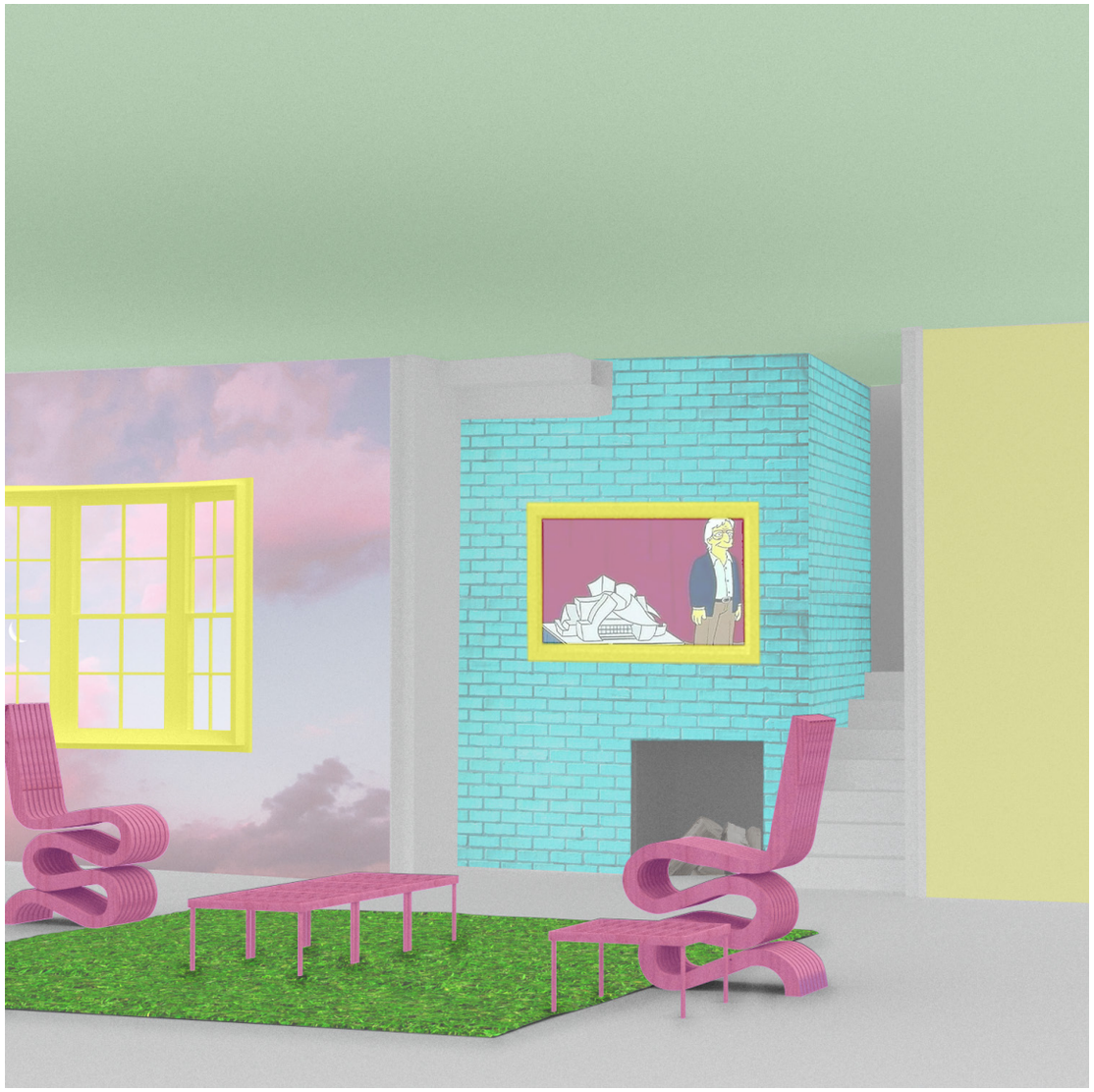
The Headquarters comes to life. It’s isolation from its surrounding buildings has been adapted to allow for a momentous fountain, marking the entrance. Canopies flank the gate and disperse creating an immersive promenade to the building.

The Parallel: Back into the Domestic

As mentioned consistently, the role of the kit isn't just to populate the buildings they were derived from, rather, they find their way across the entire community. By imagining scenarios of the pieces in the domestic space, the blur of high architecture and consumerism takes full effect. These elements become multi-scalar, and nod to the everyday being subversive as people have more possession/command over the kit.

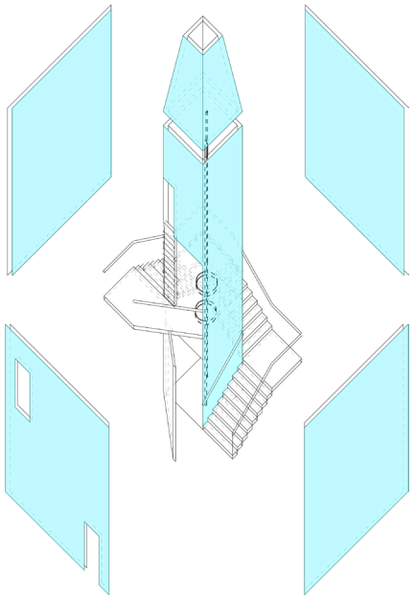
Houses engage the yards and street, providing a display of objects before one enters a house. This configuration is completely up to the owner, giving them full authority of how they envision their house to be. Lines of houses can follow similar scheme, or be completely unique to the individual building.

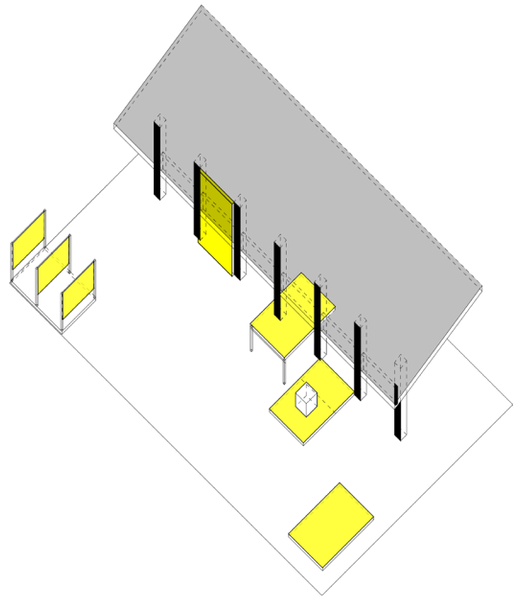
Interiors become blends of colorful combinations and collages. You can kick back and relax by the cozy fireplace on your wiggle chair while catching a view of a beautiful sky image, all as you run your toes through the grass carpet.

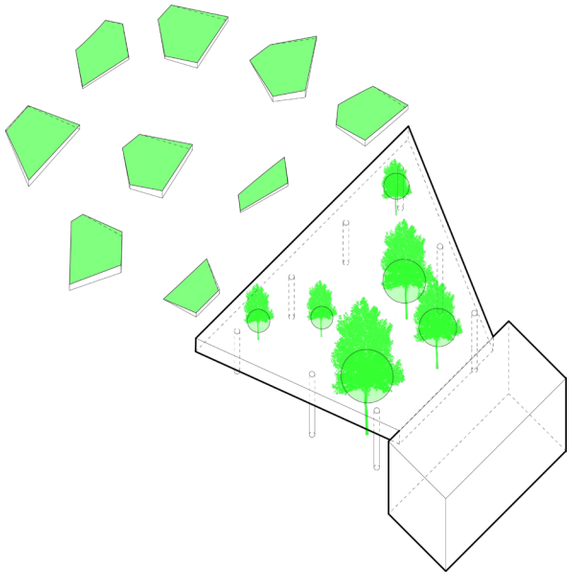


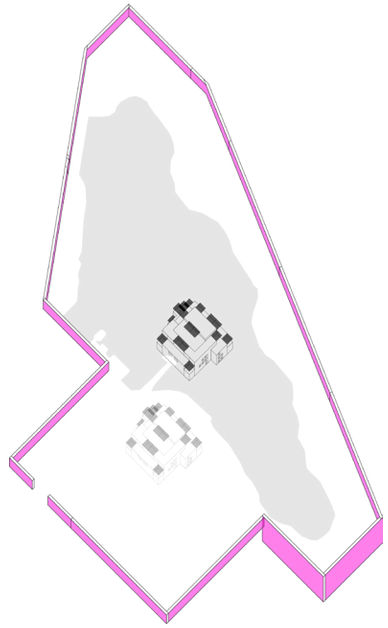
In this game-like re-imagination, all the pieces have a specific role and contribute to the fabric of community, with endless possibilities of formation and recombination. **How will you play?**

Appendix of Process



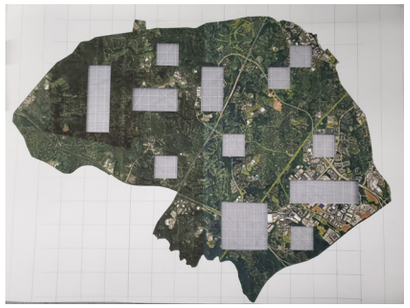






The initial approach to the project was more strictly focused on adapting the existing buildings. While most of whats present in these approaches still exist in the project, the kit functioned to extend the kit outside of the original and feed back into the entirety of the community

Appendix of Process



Early exploration included breaking down the boundaries of Columbia to allow for a different idea of how development could happen. Investigating a grid was a precursory concept that challenged planned communities from a planning standpoint while not addressing the architecture.

Appendix of Process

From probe, I sought to question how homogenizing programs began to bleed into their surround context. This didn't directly address and issues and served more as a representation of it. This began to fall off after I shifted my focus towards the specific buildings Gehry designed.

Index: The Vocabulary

Planned Community

community highly schemed and regulated in its preconception and its maintenance

top-down

process in which higher authority plans for those below them

homogeneous

group of parts that has no identity outside their collective formation

flatness

action to make a group of people or objects similar or completely the same

monochrome environment

view of an area that is weighted the same, producing a flattened perspectival image

photo idealism

unrealistic expectation of renderings that codifies the outcome of users

static

no movement or thought after initial implementation of a built form

isolated

present relative to proximity, distant relative to purpose and function

Firehouse

utilitarian building that serves a strict functional role and not much else

Concert Venue

community focal point that promotes gathering and community engagement

Exhibition Center

advertisement of community that has the capacity to celebrate those within

Headquarters

icon and gateway of a planned community

engaged

present in close proximity, present in purpose, present in function, always active

collage

fluidity in piecewise composition, implying change of a static image

cartoon imagination

humorous outlook of the struggles that photo idealism does not address

technicolor dream

vivid vision seeing all components of an image for their individualism and composition in the whole

subversive

to go against the grain, challenge preconceived notions and give authority to individuals

Kit of Parts

individual parts that serve a purpose on their own, and function together

bottom-up

process in which individuals create plans and operate for themselves

Columbia

a planned community with so much potential...