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**ISSUE 10.03**  
**DESIGN + EXPRESSION**  
AIA ILLINOIS REGION

YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM

# CONNECTION

## JUNE 2012

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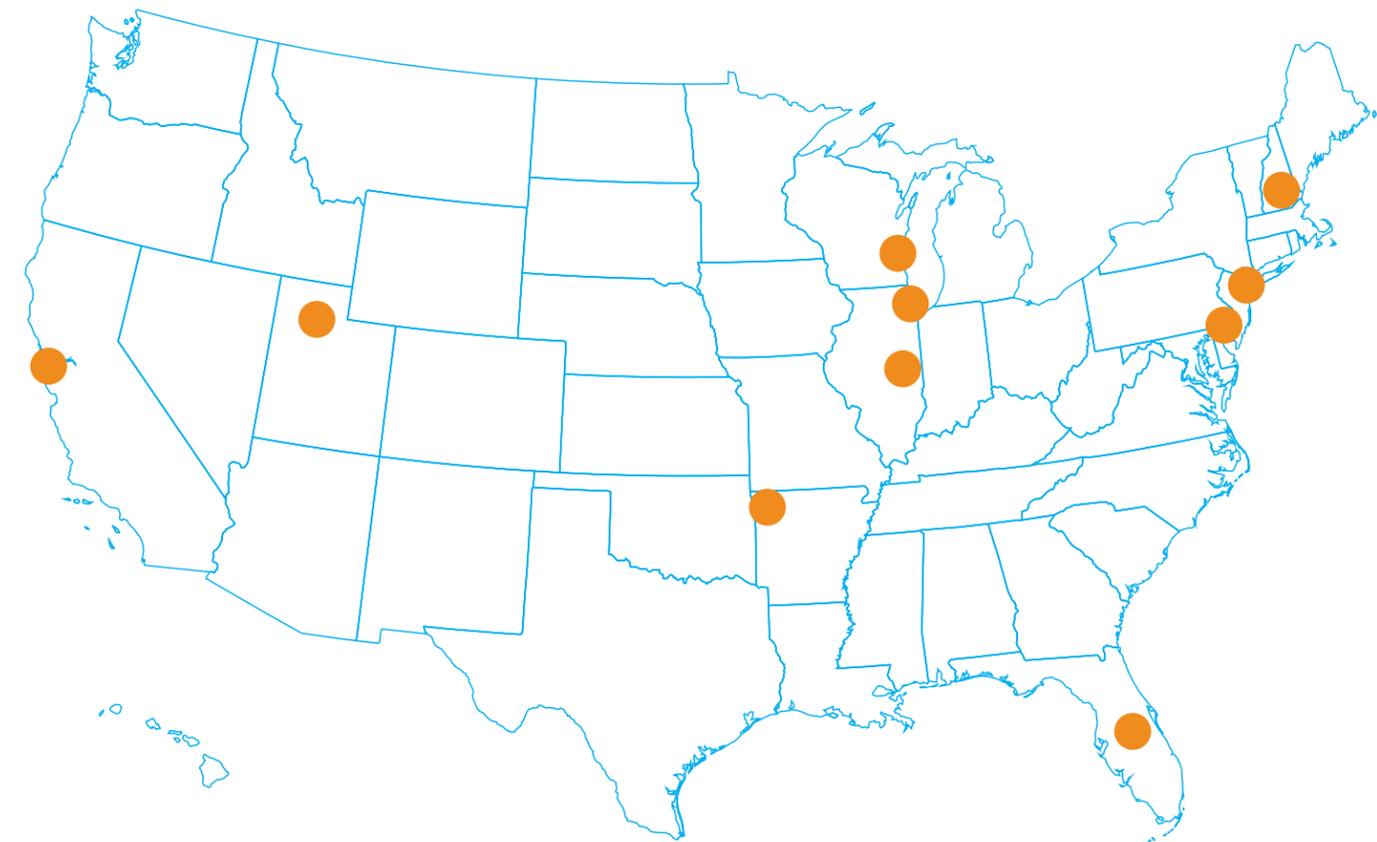


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# Design EVOLUTION OF AN IDE...

*The Birth of a Practice in Volatile Times*

Writers **Vladimir Radutny, AIA, LEED AP & Paul Tebben**

*Vladimir and Paul are partners and founders of Studio IDE...*

**Studio IDE... partners Paul Tebben & Vladimir Radutny, AIA, LEED AP in their design studio.**



ON THE HEELS of a small stroke of good fortune and with a collective leap of faith, we decided to jump. Our opportunity came in the form of an investor, a family member determined to pursue the Chicago real estate market.

At the time we were both situated comfortably, working at the Chicago practice of Krueck and Sexton, alongside a collection of people with inspiring talent. One of us manned the job site of the new Spertus Institute building while the other worked on a collection of exciting projects in the office.



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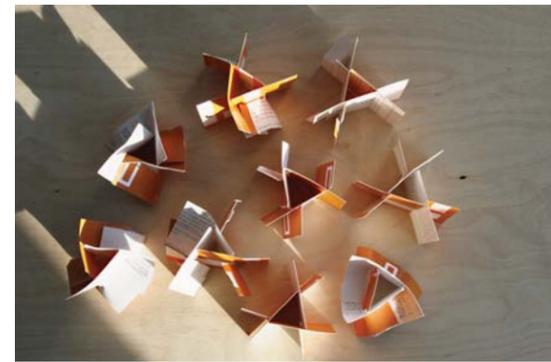
Our investor approached us with a small financial commitment that promised to fund our start-up, a design practice. In return, he hoped to find long-term benefit through the creation of a development arm of the company, one that would focus on the design, construction and sale of environmentally-responsible residential projects throughout the Chicago area. He would fund the operation and we would design and manage the construction.

We saw a window of opportunity and, after careful deliberation, we jumped through it head-first. The process unfolded and the brainstorming began. Where do we start? What should we do first? Who should we call for legal advice, accounting services, health insurance & IT? These were just a few of the hurdles standing between us and the pending decision we both had already made, to leave a good thing for the uncertain hope of something better.

In 2008, STUDIO IDE... was born, a company with a name reflective of our collective determination to Innovate, Design & Explore. We set out to find a way to practice architecture collaboratively, intertwining ourselves with people of various trades and disciplines to develop a product conceived and built by architects.

Several months passed as we reached out to people in the design industry, studied residential typologies & neighborhoods and created financial pro-formas. To minimize our risk, we agreed that our first projects should be single-family residences built in more established Chicago neighborhoods. We saw what was being built--the endless monotony of housing being offered--and were determined to find a better way. Our homes, we thought, should

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Exterior of Locomobile Lofts.

speak to lifestyles, context and the environment. These, we believed, would stand in stark contrast to the houses being built by developers which spoke only to the bottom line.

*The stage was set for an exciting whirlwind of design and construction. We were at once excited and terrified but marching forward all the while.*

Unfortunately, the months following the launch of IDE... paralleled the rapid decline in the U.S. economy. Lending practices previously sympathetic to the entrepreneurial spirit had quickly withered up, closing off many of the opportunities on which we had based our business model. And just like that, the well was dry. What now?

The options for IDE... were simple; fight or flight. Our first move was to switch gears. Although design development continued on three sustainable housing prototypes, immediate income-producing work was fundamental to our survival. Casting a wide net, we labored forward, taking on work without discrimination. The first stroke of fortune came with a call from a former colleague. A design studio she was teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) was in need of additional Instructors. Someone had dropped out at the last minute, opening the door for us to teach. We also

encountered an opportunity to create custom furniture. Our design for a desk was published, and we were able to sell a duplicate piece to a client. Its success gave us the motivation to create more.

Our greatest blessing, however, arose out of the goodwill of a close friend. He'd taken a job with a large property manager on the South Side and thoughtfully began passing along steady drafting, surveying and code research work.

These service-based jobs, along with a growing number of design-driven projects, have enabled us to move forward slowly. Our steady growth since 2008 has been the product of focused will, stubborn persistence and determination. We owe much of our good fortune to the talented and hardworking people with whom we've been so fortunate to work in our studio. Our team, now four members strong, brings a unique enthusiasm and energy that fuels our everyday explorations and drives us. Most of all, we can attribute our office's trajectory to an unspoken mantra that has accompanied us since day one – don't be afraid to fail.

We've been given a chance to live our dream, and we intend to live it passionately. ●

Interior views of Planted Environment project.



Interior of Locomobile Lofts.



All images courtesy of Studio IDE...

