SEE IT THROUGH BUFFALO

Time Space Existence

Palazzo Bembo
Venice 2018

University at Buffalo
School of Architecture and Planning

SEE IT THROUGH BUFFALO

A documentary short produced by Paget Films in association with the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning, and debuted at *Time Space Existence*, an exhibition organized by the Global Art Affairs Foundation and hosted by the European Cultural Centre in the context of the Venice Architecture Biennale.

May 24 – November 25, 2018

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FOREWORD

For 50 years, the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning has pushed the boundaries of architectural education. Originally founded as the School of Architecture and Environmental Design, the faculty actively questioned the role of architecture amidst rapid technological and social change—pondering both the expansion of the discipline and its extinction. In 1968, John Eberhard, the school's first dean, radically declared, "Architecture is obsolete."

Today, we are far from obsolete. Architecture has discovered its broad relevance to international challenges—social equity, cultural preservation, and creative production. Architecture in our school asserts its importance in addressing the challenges of industrial and population decline. We promote a post-industrial regeneration, contest prior assumptions about cheap energy, and explore how to assure food security, clean water, and a net-zero-energy footprint in an era of significant climate change. We do all this interdependent with urban and regional planning, as well as the many disciplines with which the school shares a common mission to improve individual and social wellbeing. We have moved from Robert Venturi's proclamation in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), where he "had no wish to make of architecture a more human social art," to our shouting that wish with no apology and to fulfilling its promise.

The future of architecture education will, of course, embrace the traditions of architecture as well as the full richness of the complexity and contradiction revealed in Venturi's classic text. We can and will embrace the potential of our work to build culture through generous and inspiring places for all people to live life well.

This film and exhibition is an effort to ground this future of architectural education and its global reach in the communities that host the educational enterprise. Buffalo has been our living laboratory and we have been its muse. Each of us is better for the presence and engagement of the other. We learn from our city and region every day and they learn from us. Together we reach for the global impacts that rebuild our cultures, sustain our planet, and substantiate the relevance of architecture and planning in the twenty-first century.

Robert G. Shibley FAIA, FAICP

Professor and Dean, School of Architecture and Planning
University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

SEE IT THROUGH BUFFALO

Driven by commerce and industry, by 1900, Buffalo, New York, was home to more millionaires per capita than any city in the United States. Industry, innovation, and idealism stimulated large investments in the built environment, giving rise to some of the country's most influential works: the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed park system (1868–1898), Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building (1893–1896), and Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin D. Martin House (1902–1905) and Larkin Administration Building (1902–1906). In 1931, Buffalo built its commanding City Hall, and, in 1940, opened the doors to Eliel and Eero Saarinen's Kleinhans Music Hall—enduring symbols of a time when Buffalo dreamed big and built boldly.

During this ascension, and amidst the onset of World War I, the city mobilized around a slogan to imbue pride and confidence in its citizens. While coined to garner support for the war effort, the motto—*Buffalo Will See It Through*—was prophetic, a prescient sentiment for the second half of the twentieth century, when the city was beset by a dire loss of industry and the departure of more than half its population.

In the throes of the city's decline, the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo was founded. And from its early years, marked by the teaching and research of Reyner Banham, to today, the city has maintained a commanding position in the ethos of the school. It is the full arc of Buffalo's history—rise and ruin, rust and revival—that underscores the school's temperament and drive.

Comprised of more than 650 students, the school offers bachelor, master, and doctoral programs across the fields of architecture, environmental design, real estate development, and urban and regional planning. These programs reside within the most comprehensive public research university in the northeastern United States. While many of its students come from Buffalo and its surrounding cities and towns, nearly forty percent come from greater New York City, and a sizable percentage are international. Faculty represent an equally diverse geography and an even broader range of expertise.

Students, faculty, and staff engage global issues, from economic inequality and refugee resettlement, to food security and climate-change resilience. But the school plays an especially transformative role in the city, propelling Buffalo's resurgence through economic development initiatives, urban design, community organizing, partnerships with industry, and full-scale construction—planning and building neighborhoods, homes, playgrounds, gardens, and the systems that interconnect them. Members of the academy are participants in the life of the city, while simultaneously helping to shape the policies, plans, buildings, and spaces that construct its identity.

The work of the school draws on the optimism and vision of when, in 1901, Buffalo hosted the Pan-American Exposition. The six-month world's fair showcased numerous innovations—most notably the exuberant lighting of the grounds powered by hydroelectricity from nearby Niagara Falls, earning Buffalo the moniker "city of light."

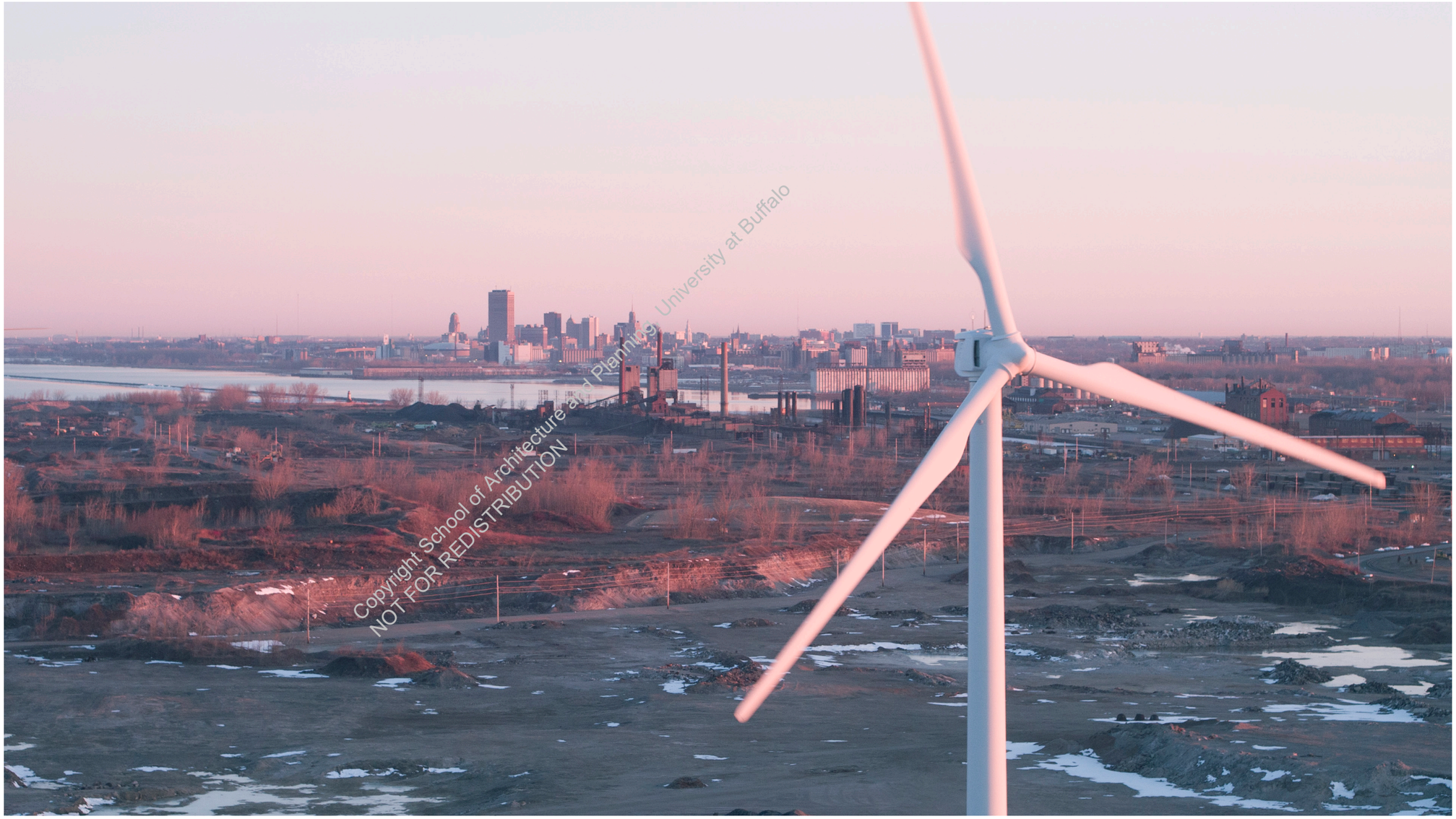
At the same time, the work of the school is grounded in the complex history and contemporary challenges of the city. Buffalo is home to the country's first registered woman architect and a global model for refugee resettlement, yet it remains America's seventh most racially segregated city. Buffalo and the Great Lakes Region are celebrated for their scenic landscapes and vital ecosystems, even as they bear the scars of industrial development. And, despite its legacy as one of the most significant intermodal transshipment hubs in the Americas—among the world's largest ports for grain, lumber, steel, and numerous other commodities—the city is now more "spoke" than "hub." These contrasts mark the city as an especially compelling context in which to study and practice globally significant issues.

See It Through Buffalo reveals this history and how the university is engaging Buffalo's contemporary challenges, working to advance prospects for the city's future. The film, a documentary collaboration between Paget Films and the School of Architecture and Planning, presents the varied urban landscapes of Buffalo and the educational spaces of the school. Scenes reveal the deep and lasting impacts of university-city partnerships, as well as the importance of seeing through the challenges and initiatives of the city, towards a more resounding future.

Gregory Delaney and Korydon Smith

WATER, WIND, AND STEEL

Exemplary of Buffalo's intrepid industrial past, the former site of Bethlehem Steel on the shores of Lake Erie was once the largest steel mill in the world, employing over 20,000 people. Once among the region's largest energy consumers, the former contaminated ("Superfund") site now adjoins a nature preserve and produces 35 megawatts of power per year through 14 state-of-the-art wind turbines.

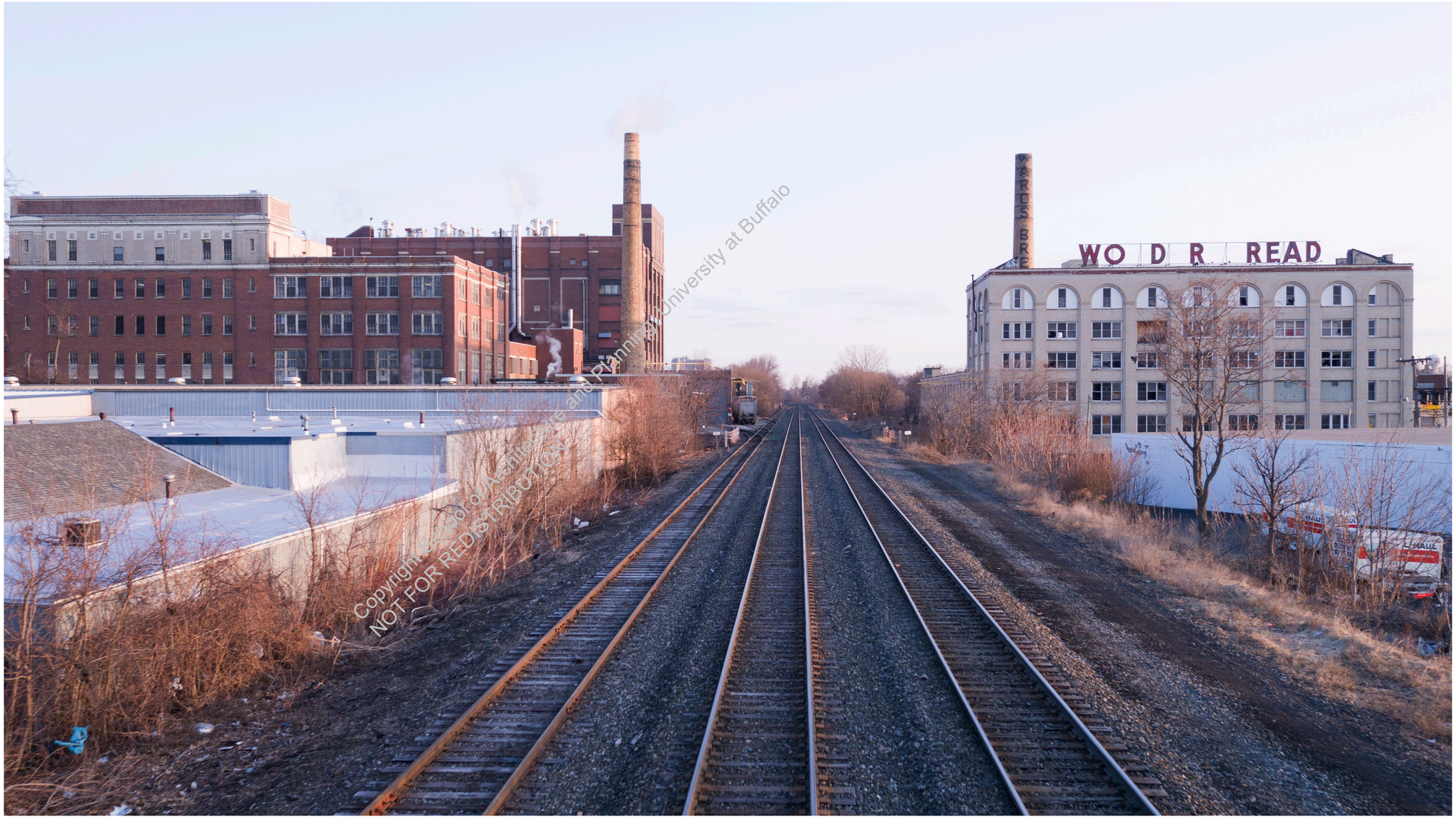


CITY OF TREES

When brought to Buffalo in 1868 to survey potential sites for a park in the city, Frederick Law Olmsted envisioned something bolder—a city in a park. In lieu of setting aside grounds for a single, central park, Olmsted's plan for Buffalo evolved into the firm's first proposal for a system of interconnected parks and parkways woven throughout the city's fabric. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city-in-a-park notion continued to characterize Buffalo's attitude towards the urban landscape, as the city grew its forestry division and planted over 300,000 street and park trees.

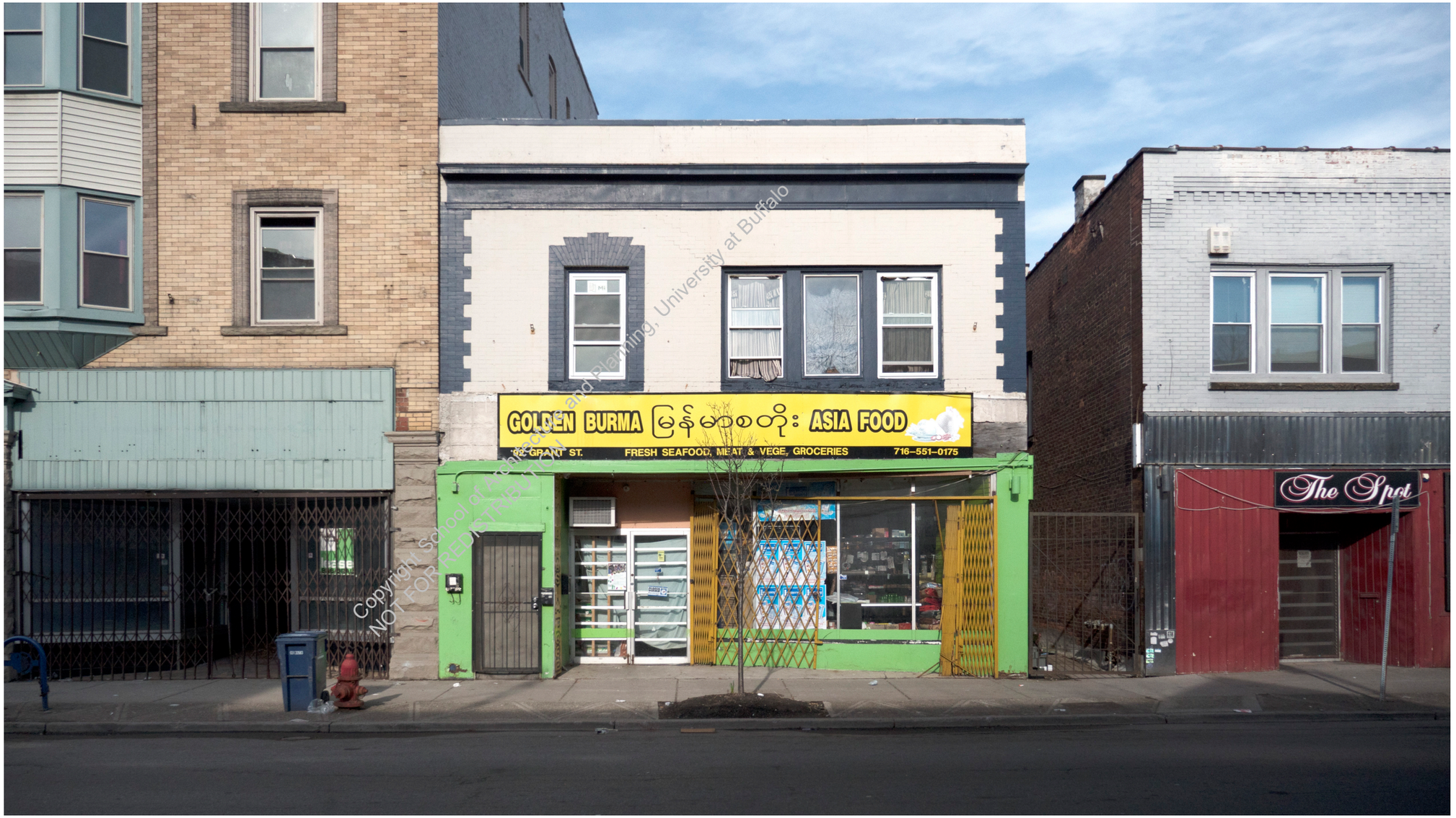
ACTIVE CONNECTIONS

Completed in 1882, the New York Central Belt Line formed a 15-mile loop around the core of the city, connecting Buffalo's major industrial sites and neighborhoods for the carriage of freight and passengers. While no longer serving local commuters through its 19 passenger stations, the tracks remain active for the few remaining industries scattered along the corridor, connecting Buffalo to nearby Niagara Falls and to cities across the border in Canada. On the west side of the tracks, the former National Biscuit Company (Nabisco) plant, now operated by Milk Bone, continues production, as it has since 1922. To the east, the abandoned Wonder Bread factory lies in wait.



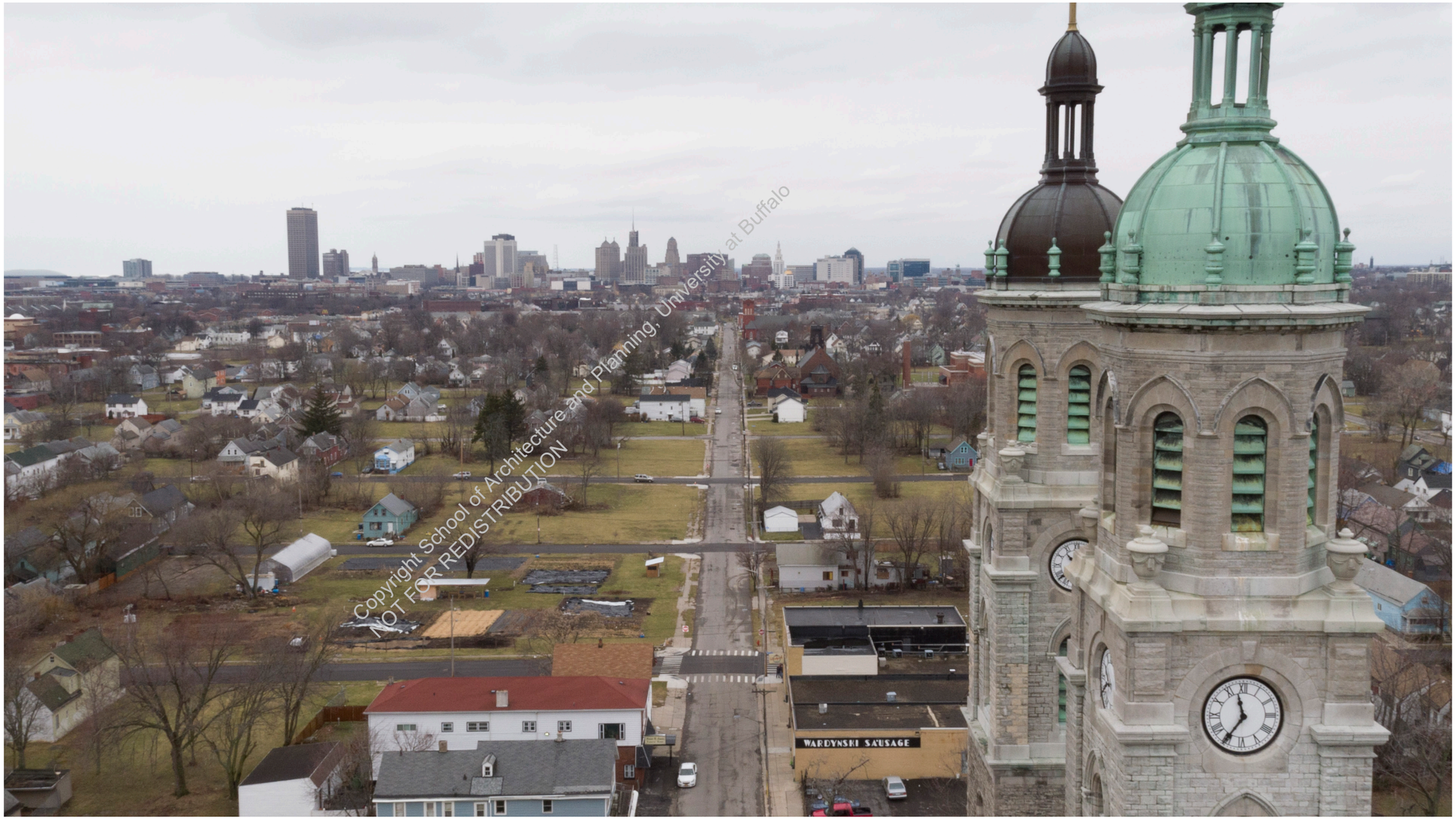
CITY OF GOOD NEIGHBORS

Known as "the city of good neighbors," Buffalo has a history of welcoming immigrant and migrant communities—from Europeans in the 1800s, to African Americans from the southern United States in the 1900s, to Latin American and Caribbean populations in the latter twentieth century. This history has evolved with the resettlement of more than 14,000 refugees since 2000. Resettled refugees bring cultural, spiritual, and intellectual diversity to Buffalo's neighborhoods. Vital participants in community life and development, these new Americans shape education, healthcare, and food systems, as well as houses, recreation spaces, and storefronts.



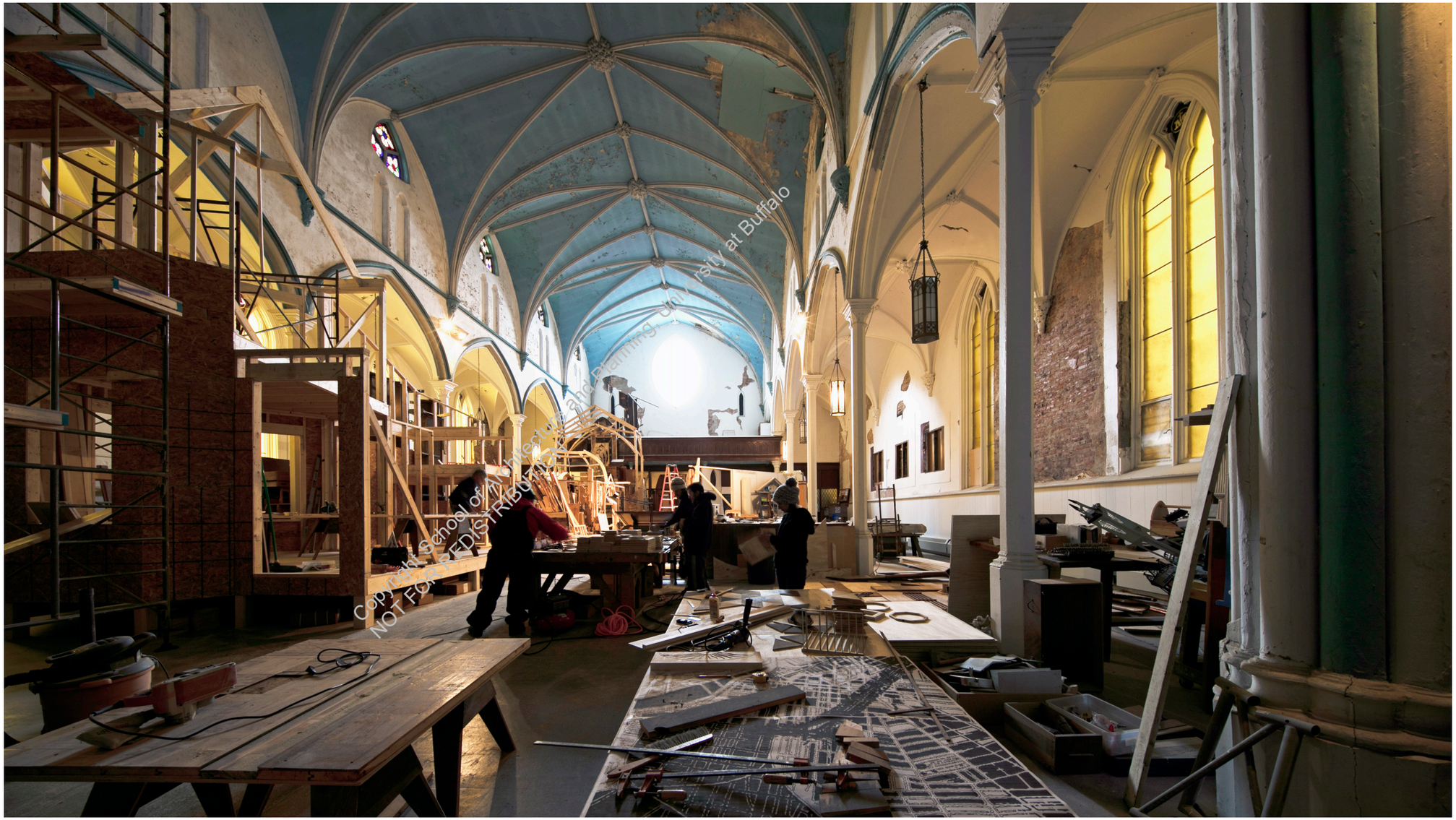
EAST-WEST DIVIDES

While ethnic and neighborhood patterns continue to evolve, Main Street still strikes a dividing line through Buffalo. On the West Side, a recent influx of refugees from Asian and African nations is transforming the demographic, cultural, and spatial composition of neighborhoods once comprised of European and Latin American immigrants. On the East Side, home primarily to African American residents, entrenched poverty and land vacancy remain major concerns. The leadership of religious institutions and community organizations to improve quality of life in both areas reflects the collaborative perseverance of Buffalo's residents.



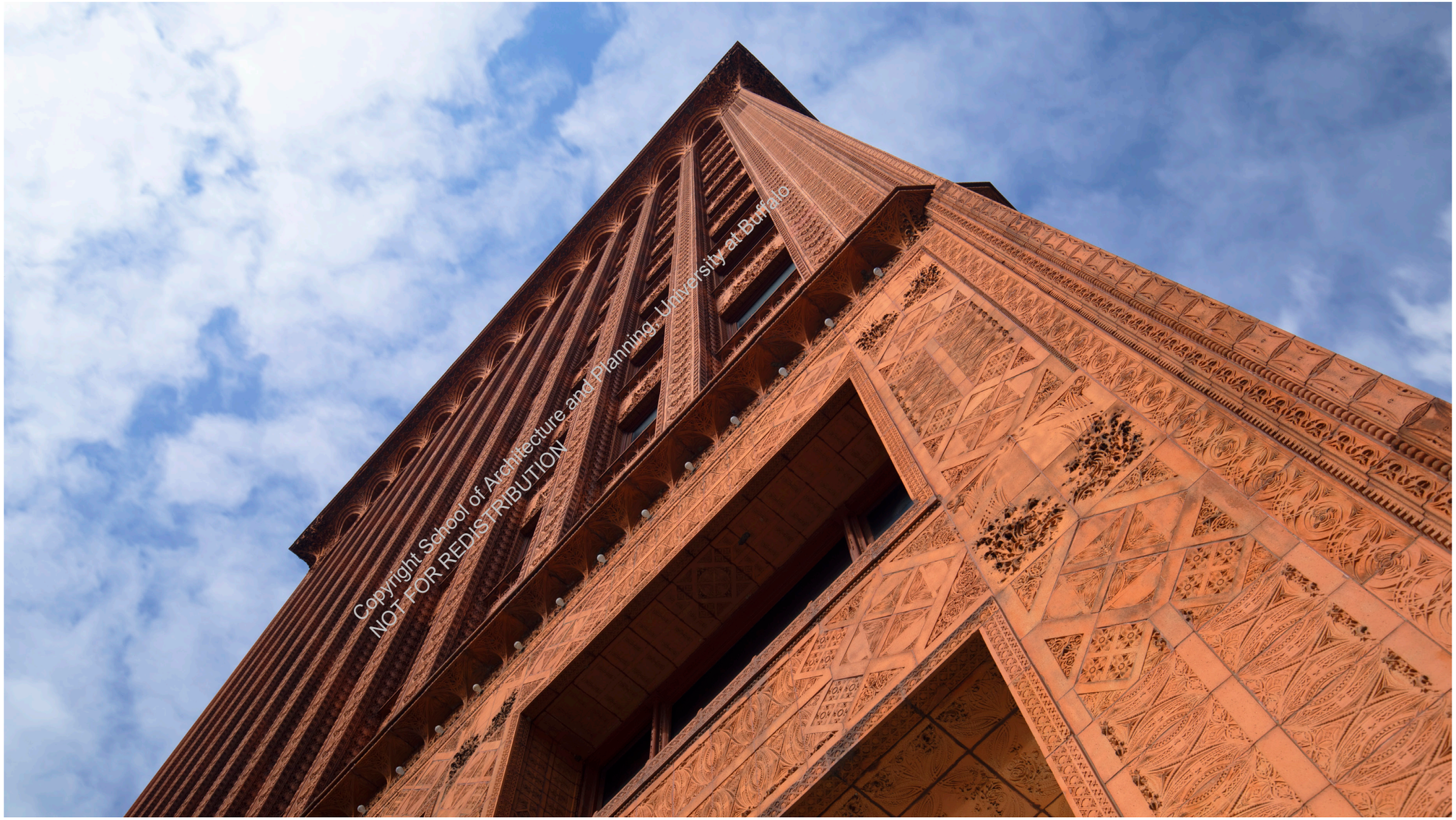
RELIGIOUS RECONSTRUCTION

More than 4,000 churches close their doors in the United States every year. For Buffalo, severe population loss has compounded an ever-increasing number of vacant churches—buildings that, while highly regarded in the urban fabric, are notoriously difficult to repurpose. The former Immaculate Conception Church demonstrates an attitude towards adaptive reuse that counters traditional notions of preservation and restoration, treating the building as a site for exploration and transformation. Now home to the Society for the Advancement of Construction Related Arts (SACRA), its interior houses an imaginative workforce training program that partners with social services to offer workshops that bolster creative thinking and technical skills in carpentry and woodworking.



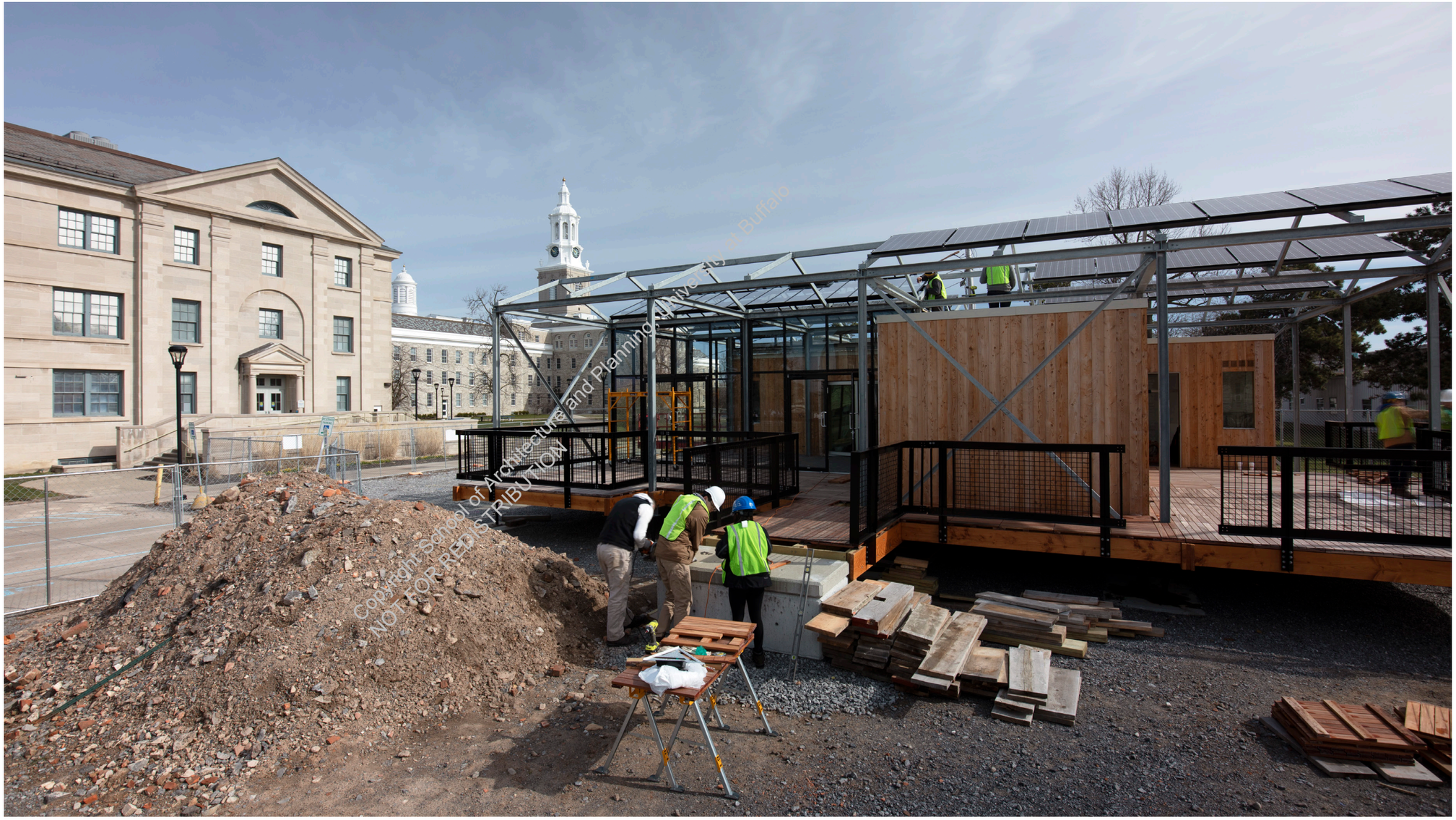
INDUSTRY AND INNOVATION

Boston Valley Terra Cotta, one of the leading ceramic façade manufacturers in the world, began operations in 1889 making bricks and clay pots. In 1981, the company shifted their focus to architectural ceramics. Their first project was the complete façade restoration of Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building, an exemplar in ornamental terra cotta. Beginning in 2011, the School of Architecture and Planning has partnered with the company to propel ceramics-based research and implement new technologies in digital fabrication. The work maintains the value of handcrafts at the industry's core, while transforming the potentialities of ceramic production and use.



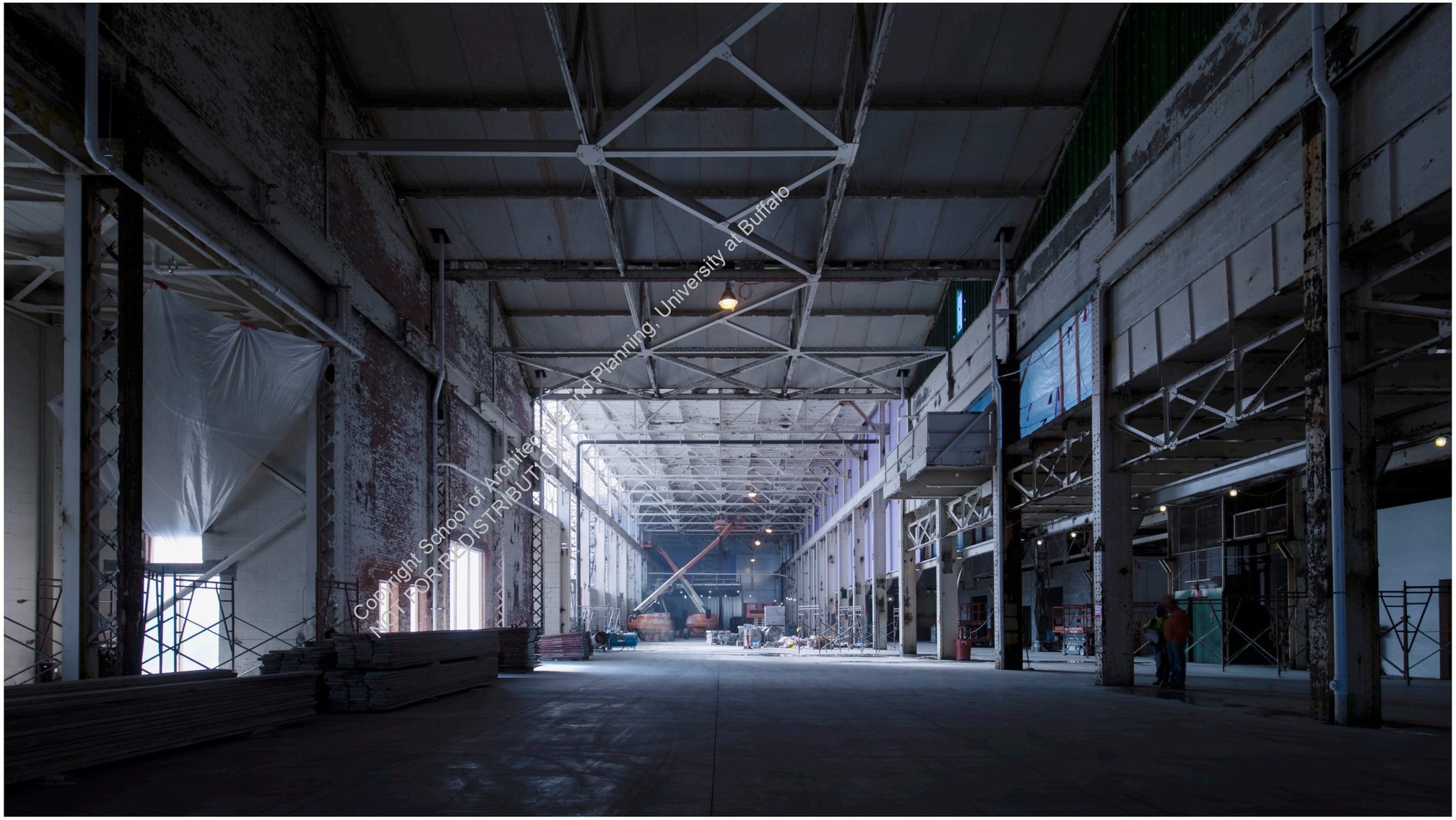
FOOD, ENERGY, SHELTER

The house of the future will likely take many forms. New materials, construction techniques, and in-home technologies will give new shape to the spaces and ways in which people live. One form this might take is a radical pairing of high-tech, energy-efficient design with a return to low-tech, at-home food production. To explore this concept, more than 450 students, faculty, staff, and partners came together for the design and construction of the Garden, Relax, or Work (GRoW) Home, which finished second in the international 2015 Solar Decathlon, hosted by the U.S. Department of Energy. The GRoW Home broadens the view of what Buffalo's next generation of housing might be.



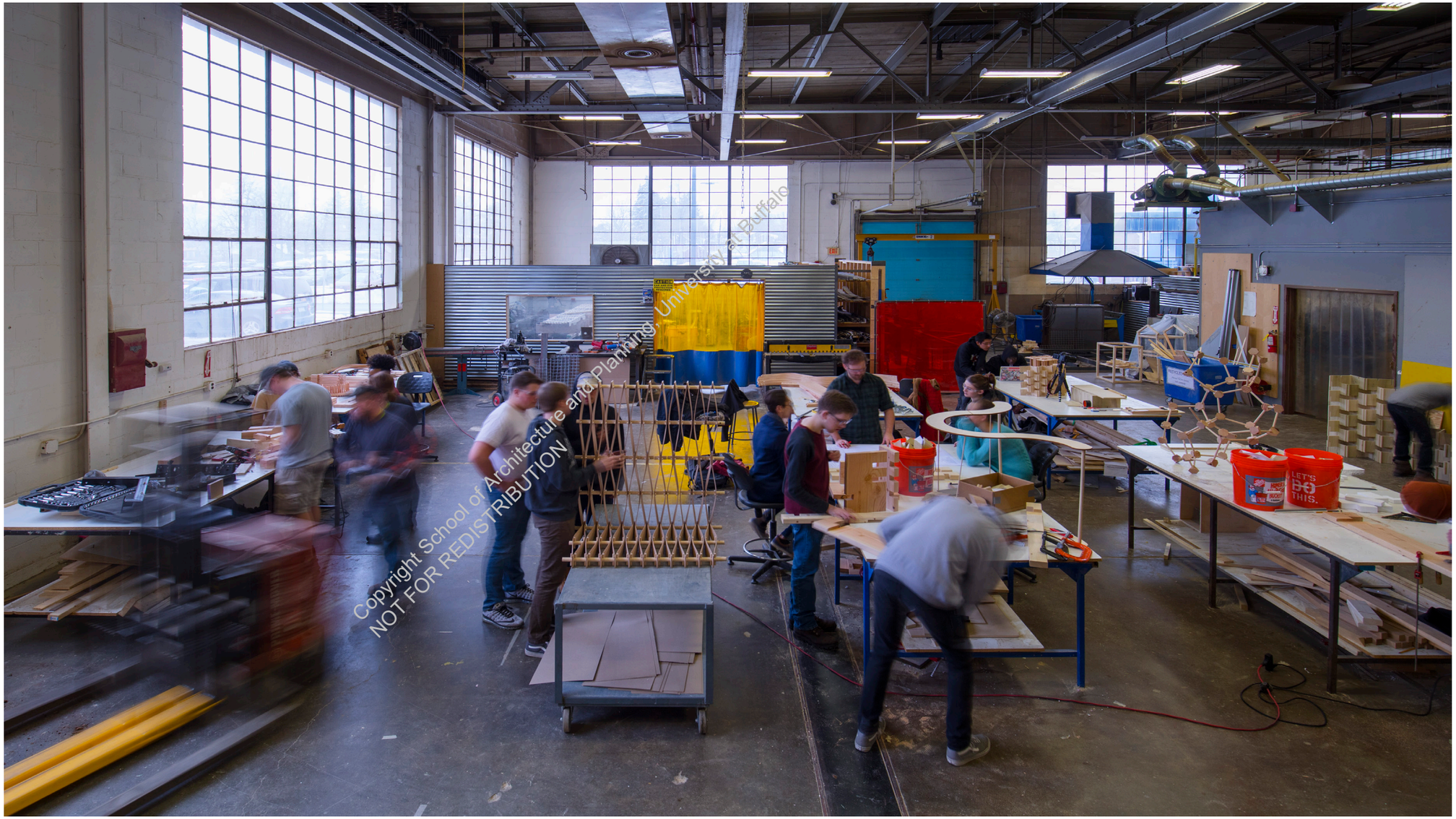
UPTURNED SOIL

While a great number of Buffalo's vacant industrial buildings still languish in stagnation, a recent economic upturn and the enactment of historic preservation tax credits have given rise to reuse. Vacant for the last 20 years, the 240,000-square-foot (22,000-square-meter) complex of the former Niagara Machine and Tool Works will see new life as a site for advanced manufacturing and workforce training, serving the surrounding community of the East Side.



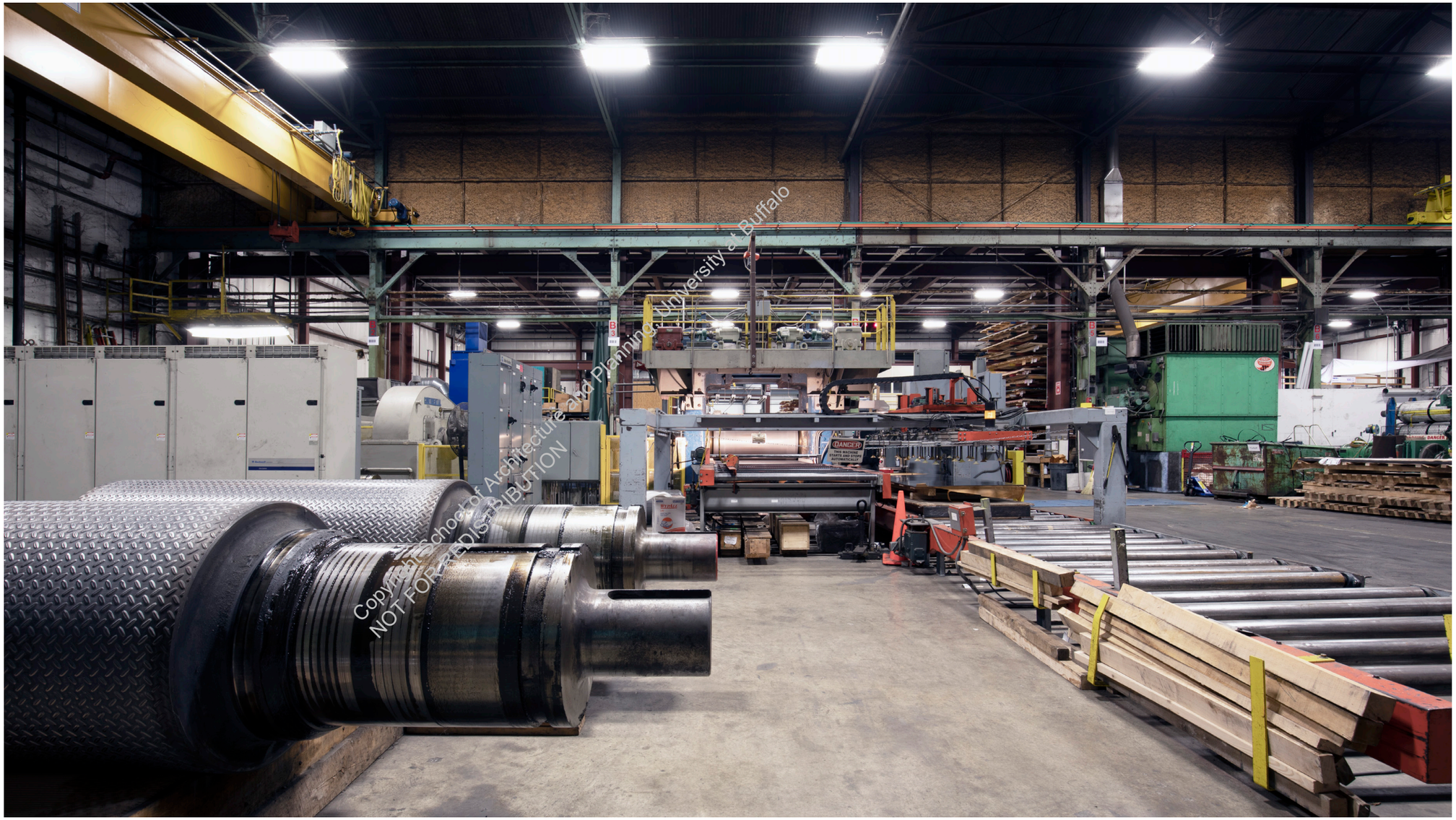
CONCEPTUAL AND MATERIAL LIMITS

It is imperative that architects and planners not only gain explicit knowledge but build tacit knowledge through hands-on trial and error. Propelling the work of the school are spaces of exploration and inspiration: a materials and methods shop for working with wood, metals, and ceramics; a digital fabrication lab for laser cutting, 3D printing, and CNC milling; and a cutting-edge Sustainable Manufacturing and Advanced Robotic Technologies (SMART) factory for large-scale simulation and construction. These facilities enable faculty and students to test the limits of both materials and ideas.



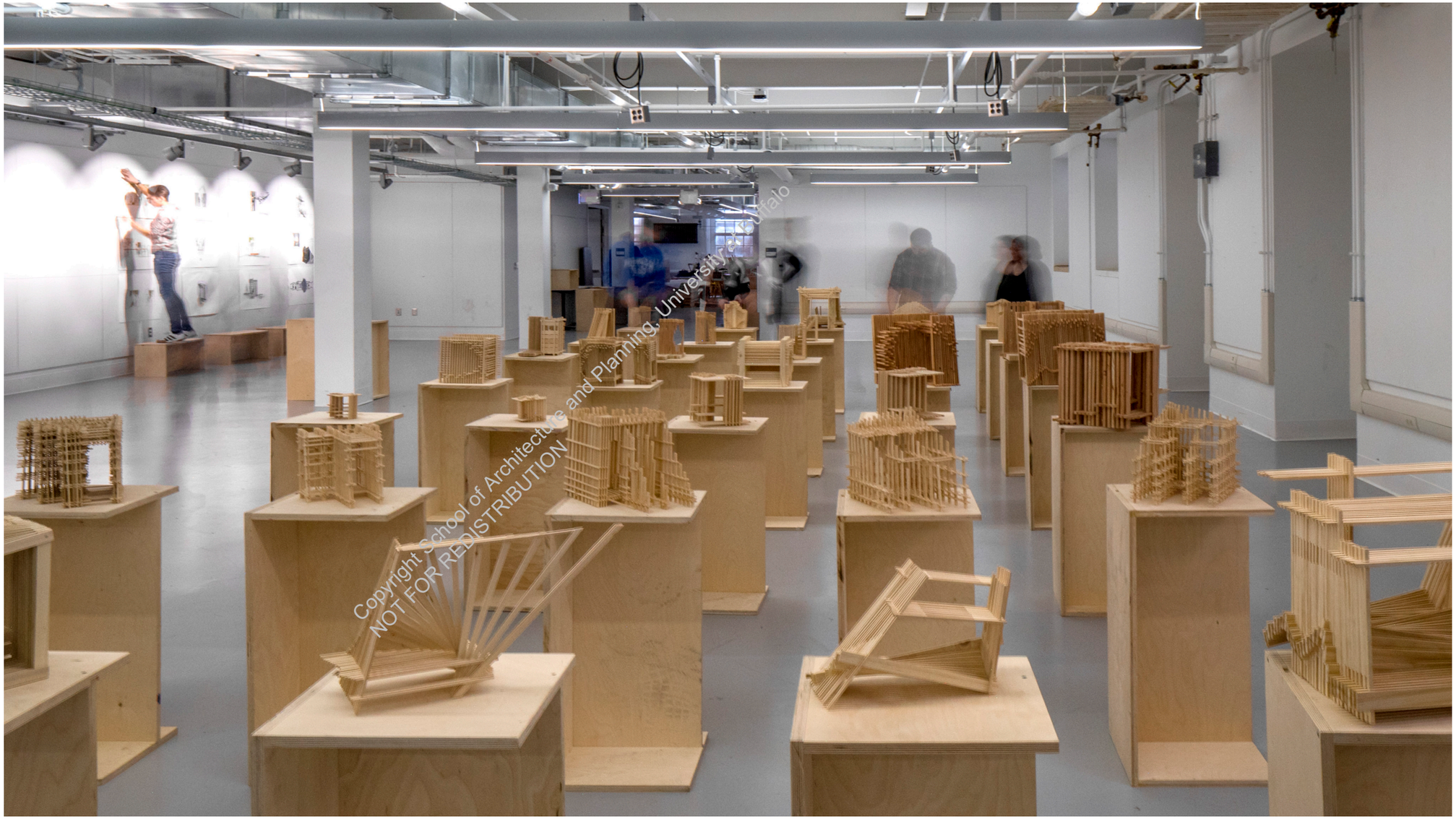
FROM SURFACE TO STRUCTURE

Buffalo is a city of tenacity, grit, invention, and reinvention. Rigidized Metals, a family-run company spanning over 75 years and three generations, illustrates this legacy. A global leader in the production and distribution of textured metals for architectural interiors, the corporation is partnering with faculty and students to reimagine uses of thin-gauge, textured metals for structural and other experimental purposes. This will enable new forms of architectural expression while significantly reducing the amount of material needed in construction.



BUILDING MINDS

The locus of architecture and planning education—the studio—encourages playful learning, creative problem solving, and engaged collaboration, preparing students for the global challenges that lay ahead. Alongside motivated faculty, Buffalo's students work in newly renovated historic buildings, including Crosby, Hayes, and Parker Halls. Hayes Hall in particular serves as a metaphor for learning—embracing both tradition and innovation, while integrating knowledge, skills, and methods from a variety of domains.

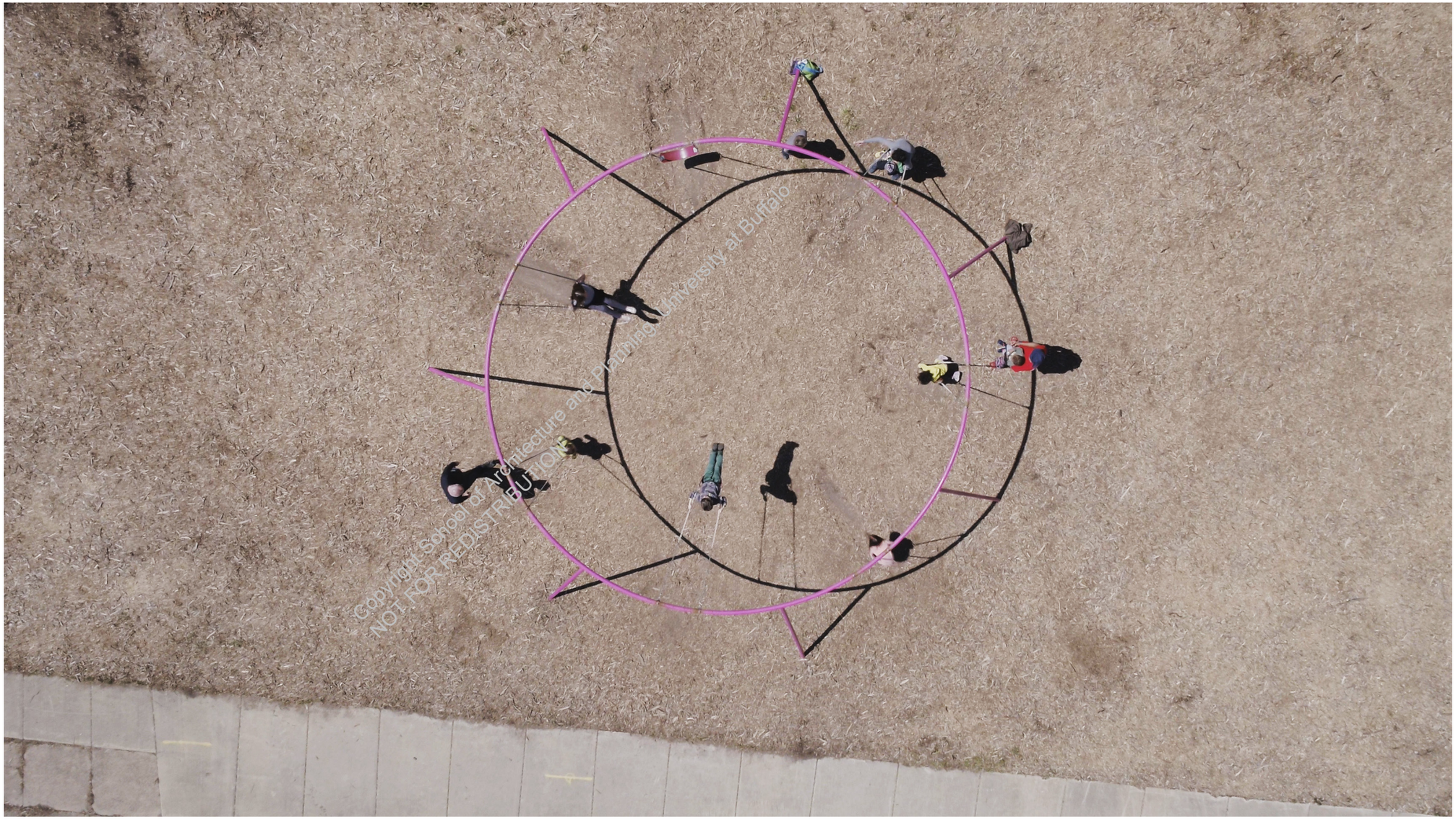


SILOED DREAMS

The 1825 opening of the Erie Canal established Buffalo as the central point of connection between the developed ports and population centers of the Northeast and the newly-seeded fields and towns of the Midwest. Industries flourished around the transshipment of grain, and, in 1842, the first steam-powered grain elevator in the world was constructed on the bank of the Buffalo River. The city's concrete grain silos and daylight factories gave argument for the rise of modernism in Europe; photographs of Buffalo's grain elevators appeared in the seminal texts of Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, and Le Corbusier. While changes in transportation patterns in the mid-twentieth century led to the gradual abandonment of the silos, they live on as monuments of American ingenuity.

CREATIVE ADAPTATION

Unlike other industrial or more densely populated cities, Buffalo residents have exemplary access to parks and recreation areas. This includes both historic green spaces and emergent landscapes of play. On one hand, property vacancies degrade neighborhood quality and hinder community development; on the other, these spaces provide opportunities for re-appropriation and creative adaptation, such as play for all ages.



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Daniel Hess, Chair of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning
Omar Khan, Chair of the Department of Architecture

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CONTRIBUTORS

Support for the School of Architecture and Planning and *See It Through Buffalo* is made possible by donations from nearly 100 individuals and organizations. In addition, the school has received considerable support from the University at Buffalo.

We thank the following individuals and companies for their support with gifts of $1,000 or more, as of May 1, 2018:

Mr. Robert Skerker
Rigidized Metals Corporation
Boston Valley Terra Cotta
Mr. Peter Houlihan
CannonDesign
Professor and Dean Robert Shibley and Professor Emeritus Lynda H. Schneekloth

We also thank those who have provided gifts of $100 or more to support the involvement of our students:

Father Pat Keleher
Mr. Anthony Dong
Dr. Stephen Dunnett
Dr. Bradshaw Hovey
Mr. Arthur Russ, Jr.
Mr. Philip Henry
Ms. Stephanie Marcus
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Mr. Alfred D. Price and The Very Reverend Canon Barbara Price
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Dr. Despina M. Stratigakos
Mr. Subbiah Mantharam and Mrs. Marybeth Mantharam
Vermont Structural Slate Company
Dr. Korydon H. Smith and Ms. Julie A. Haase-Smith
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