**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

**CONTEXT**
Artists were the first pioneers to rent and occupy the vacant warehouses and factories of Milwaukee's historic Third Ward, developing a community of artists and galleries that became attractive to the general public and brought more people to see the district. Over time this brought about the resurgence of the whole district and the preservation and/or adaptive reuse of nearly every historic structure, and the construction of many new buildings on vacant sites in the district. But with this resurgence has come a vast increase in property values that have displaced nearly every artist's loft, studio space, and small artist-run gallery, forcing them out to distant low-rent districts or other cities entirely.

The intention of this project is to stop and reverse that outflow of artistic talent, and to develop an affordable "Artists Community" in the Third Ward where they can afford to live, work, play and prosper in the company of other artists such as painters, sculptors, printmakers, digital artists, dancers, and musicians.

In this conjectural scenario, an artist/developer has assembled a patchwork parcel of land. She wants to build new structures for artist's housing and studios. She also wants to build and/or renovate spaces for artist's working studios and a gallery and café where their work can be exhibited and directly sold to the well-heeled public. The developer and the board of directors that live there drive the formal and visual design. The Conduit maximizes the oddly shaped parcel of land to achieve "community" by providing clear inside-outside relationships and exciting public spaces. Not only did I intend to meet the project intent of creating a self-sufficient community of artists whereby they can work, live, play and prosper within a single complex, but I aimed to create a development integrated into the neighborhood. I felt a visual and contextual bond should exist between the architecture and its site context, adding meaningfully to the identity of the historic Third Ward. Such a design necessitates public space likened to a park, an ering place to go for a stroll, a place to relax, reflect, or just be with friends or family. These exterior spaces should be strengthened and activated by the interior programming—exhibits, a café, and a maker’s space; yet, they should be exclusive such that they work in the absence of events and gallery nights affected by the program.

**SYSTEMS**
This project will investigate the constructive potential of materiality for its poetic possibilities. A further goal would be to avoid the use of fossil fuels like natural gas, for example in the heating of the facilities and rely upon mechanical systems that can be powered by electricity, the medium of almost all renewable energy sources like wind, geothermal or photovoltaic solar. The clients have also read extensively about wood being the only material for building a structure that captures and holds carbon, rather than releasing large amounts of it to the atmosphere as steel and concrete structures do as these materials are produced. They have asked the architects for a wood structure building.

**COST CONSTRAINTS**
The hard construction budget for the the Artists’ Community is modest in scope and will exert powerful control over design solutions: $29,000,000, exclusive of utility and landscape (which includes paving) costs, which will be paid for by a donor. The client will maintain a separate budget for all soft costs, including a 10% contingency. The architect must choose to work within one of the three conceptual cost categories: low, medium, or high (each category proposes a given set of material, construction, and mechanical limitations). Succinctly put: higher cost categories equals opportunity for higher quality materials, efficient mechanical systems and structural opportunities. (My design fell within budget using a medium-high cost category).

**PROGRAMMING (Simplified)**

| 60 Apartments | Entrance & Orientation |
| 10 Townhomes  | Changing Exhibition Gallery |
| 7 Artist Studios | Artist's Café |
| 15 Loft Studios  | Café Back of House |
| Makers Space | Apartment Lobby |
| Library | Administrative Suite |
| Event Space | Mechanical |

**DESIGN CONCEPT**
My desire to create a communal development where outsiders felt as much a part of the live-work complex as those who live there drove the formal and visual design. The Conduit maximizes the oddly shaped parcel of land to achieve “community” by providing clear inside-outside relationships and exciting public spaces. Not only did I intend to meet the project intent of creating a self-sufficient community of artists whereby they can work, live, play and prosper within a single complex, but I aimed to create a development integrated into the neighborhood. I felt a visual and contextual bond should exist between the architecture and its site context, adding meaningfully to the identity of the historic Third Ward. Such a design necessitates public space likened to a park, an ering place to go for a stroll, a place to relax, reflect, or just be with friends or family. These exterior spaces should be strengthened and activated by the interior programming—exhibits, a café, and a maker’s space; yet, they should be exclusive such that they work in the absence of events and gallery nights affected by the program.

Beginning with a bar scheme that divides the site into a North and South side, the development was then programmed to cluster living spaces, display spaces, and community spaces on the North, and then to place auxiliary and work functions to the South. The ground level houses all the non-dwelling program, while artists and their families enjoy the south-facing views from the next 5 storeys of apartments.

The entire site is connected with a pedestrian/bike path that slices through the new construction and terminates with a grove of poplar trees (a native tree to the site). This path is designed in relation to an existing park across the street—the park and my site exists atop what was once a railyard. As such, they are visual nods to the train tracks that run through the sites. The path is then articulated as a material change on my building, adding a visual cue to the history of the site, as well as designating an important junction in the development: the Artist's Square, which provides the critical space that welcomes people into the community, where they are attracted by the paintings, sculptures and other creations that are publicly showcased outdoors. As this is a significant means for artists to sell their work and make a name for themselves, I endeavored to enrich the space with a monumental stair whereby people can access the roof terrace, or lounge on the integrated benches; furthermore, I surround the Square with the café, a maker’s space, and indoor gallery such that spectators have multiple points of interest to flow between. A flowing exchange of interest is the most desirable outcome.
Located in the Historic Third Ward, this mixed-use building takes control of a prominent corner and connects the community with exciting indoor and outdoor public spaces.
The site selected for this project is a strangely-shaped parcel North of Summerfest Way (East Polk) in Milwaukee’s Historic 3rd Ward. To the SE of the site is the new “Trestle Park”, where a new bike and pedestrian crossing involving the existing historic Swing Bridge is envisioned.

Previously a railway yard for the Chicago and Northwestern Rail, the site is known to have badly contaminated soil, presumably from leaking tanker cars and/or “Midnight Dumping” of industrial chemicals, and/or contaminated fills. The typical recommended treatment by the Wisconsin DNR is to maintain all contaminated soil on site and install a cap consisting of a membrane and clay to prevent human interaction with the contaminants. No basements are envisioned with the contaminated fills and high-water table as hindrances. The soils under the polluted fills are silts of very poor structural capacity and will probably require deep steel piles driven down to stone bedrock to support any new buildings.

For this project, we were to select and develop either the historically designated existing building or our new construction apartments. I chose the new construction on the south side of the parcel.
Trestle Park (foreground), was designed using the historic train yard as inspiration. A city plan to reactive a turnbridge in middle of the river (behind) suggests a future path that could cut through my site. I propose an extension of Trestle Park, manipulating the design intent by providing artist walls and pedestals for art displays, and further articulating the path as a material change in the cladding.
City plans to reactivate the turnbridge in the river will connect this path to the opposite side.
Black locust wood decking folds off the ground in conversation with the folded copper cladding. Art installations establish nodes periodically along the terrace with no shortage of places to sit. Sedum mats roll up select folds, creating a connection to nature.
A small construction set of 12 details coupled with major drawings ensures feasibility of construction, entering the realm of plausible and leaving behind the skeptical concept. Further investigation into material selection and existing products ensures the design meets the expected aesthetic within the given budget.
As a long bar scheme, the varying density of copper folds provides a gradating effect and visual intrigue with shadows and light that changes as the Sun moves throughout the day. Tall fenestration and two double-height sections communicate with the vertical panel system, and strengthens the aesthetic hierarchy.
ARTISTS' SQUARE
Two arms open towards Trestle Park across the street welcoming passers-by. This plaza hosts space for resident artists to showcase their creations. Plenty of seating in this cozy setting helps attract people to stick around, and a cafe provides options for food and drink.