



URBANbuild allows Tulane University students to design and construct affordable housing for damaged New Orleans neighborhoods.



THOSE WHO FEAR THAT THE CURRENT STATE OF disaster-relief architecture in the U.S. is well represented by the Katrina Cottage and her unfortunate New Urbanist ilk will be heartened by what's happening today in the profession's training grounds. Architecture schools are adapting to and designing for crises with more sophistication and wit than their embedded colleagues. It would appear that the most devastating storm to visit the U.S. in recent years has helped architectural education to evolve. [Here are three examples of how that's happening.](#)

# PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE

ACCOMPLISHING GOOD HAS  
BECOME A MEASURE OF GOOD DESIGN

by Julie Sinclair Eakin



University of Texas instructor Sergio Palleroni's student team at work in New Orleans.



This church pew prototype is made of cypress collected in the ruins left by Hurricane Katrina.

## Katrina Furniture Project

Some 15,000 buildings are still scheduled for demolition around New Orleans, and dumping their remains is a toxic business. "A thousand churches alone were ruined by Katrina, and it's the only institution that works there," says Sergio Palleroni, an architecture professor at the University of Texas at Austin who leads the Katrina Furniture Project. His collaborative initiative reclaims damaged but valuable lumber from demolition zones for use in making well-designed furniture. "The basic idea is

to rethink our relationship with waste," he explains. Last summer, during a six-week workshop, Palleroni partnered with the Green Project, a New Orleans-based deconstruction and salvage business, and students from UT, Art Center of Pasadena, California, and Tulane University to design and manufacture furniture prototypes as well as plan an on-site workshop measuring 3,000 square feet and accommodating 15 workers. In addition to helping restore the community's sense of purpose, one church

pew at a time (he estimates 60,000 are needed), an ultimate goal is training residents to produce the designs to promote their own economic independence.

"Furniture is a great value: One dollar of material yields one hundred dollars in sales," says Palleroni. KFP's initial efforts were exhibited at the Smithsonian, the Venice Biennale, and Milan's Salon de Mobile. Design Within Reach plans to market one of the company's stepstools.

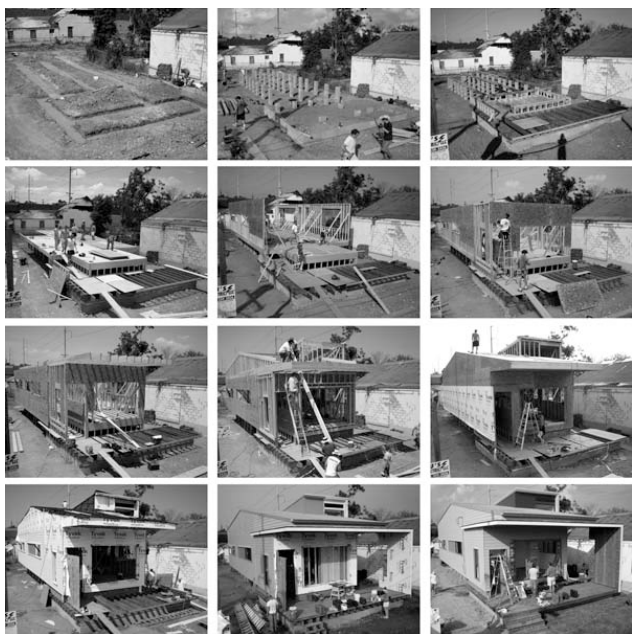
# Coastal Entanglements

Cathlyn Newell won the coveted SOM Prize and Traveling Fellowship after graduating from Rice University's School of Architecture last year, and she's currently in Scandinavia researching building techniques for severe weather conditions. Her thesis project, "Coastal Entanglements," is based on the notion that disastrous storms can be tapped for their productive energy potential. Newell calls her method "site amplification," suggesting an expansion of the definition of site by designers to also include transient aspects such as weather and natural phenomena.

Using Grand Isle, Louisiana, as a case study, Newell sought to return something to the community following its losses in Katrina. Her version of sustainability envisions a net made up of fiberglass segments that lies on the waves just beyond the shore. During storms, the net capitalizes on shifting water levels and intense wave action to collect energy via magnetic induction, storing and then later distributing electricity when it's needed. Fiberglass was the material selected because it's lightweight for easy transport, resistant to damage, and familiar to local boaters. Newell is currently seeking a backer to extend her research.



A fiberglass net constellation collects wave energy and stores it for later use.



This modified wood-frame shotgun shack is the third in a series of four prototype houses.

## URBANbuild

Undergraduate and graduate architecture students at Tulane University have been helping to revitalize their city as part of Tulane City Center's URBANbuild project. "We feel there's a special urgency and poignancy to what we do now," says Emilie Taylor, a recent graduate. "Hurricane Katrina was a galvanizing event that helped give direction to the

architecture school."

Taylor was project manager for an updated version of the vernacular shotgun shack completed in the Treme neighborhood in late 2006. The house is

respectful of a modest budget and the local historical context while accommodating modern-day needs. (Residents need no longer troop through one another's quarters, for example, but can rely instead on an interior corridor that runs along the length of the house.) Using the common lot dimension of 30 by 90 feet, its plans are flexible enough to finesse a duplex or multigenerational home as well as a single-family dwelling. In order to satisfy its HUD grant, URBANbuild will complete four houses in as many sections of town in a two-year period.

URBANbuild partners with neighborhood non-profits specializing in low-cost housing and is part of CITYbuild, a consortium of universities with architecture, landscape, and planning programs contributing to the rebuilding of New Orleans. ●