

HOUSE OPERA | OPERA HOUSE

Mitch McEwen

Assistant Professor of Architecture, Taubman College of
Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, Detroit, USA

Marcelo López-Dinardi

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Barnard+Columbia
Architecture School, Columbia University, New York, USA

An Office
Detroit, Estados Unidos
2015



What value can architecture generate when there's no longer market value? After the 2008 crisis had caused the prices of homes in Detroit to drop to unusual levels, this project transforms a vacant house into a cultural infrastructure for the community. Understood as an opera, the house not only becomes a piece in itself, but also an urban strategy for the reconsideration of what we usually understand as the drama of deterioration and blight.

KEYWORDS · demolition, blight, vacancy, performance, drama

The House Opera | Opera House project seeks, through architectural innovation, to propose a fertile alternative to the binary of blight and demolition. Implications of the project at the urban planning level include: how can residential vacancy be converted into an opportunity to support local cultural assets? What are the zoning, planning and building code changes that make this possible? The project addresses these questions through a suite of spatial and material tactics to facilitate exploration of performance, community, and form. The experimental aspects architecturally include strategies of subtraction, programmatic collaboration, and expanded territories of adaptive re-use. The project seeks to explore what might occur when the borders of a house open up to annihilate the borders between art and community, makers and receivers of art, museums and home.

Inspired by the flexibility of uses for houses in Detroit, this project stages an opera as a house, the house and its dramas of occupancy and vacancy, demolition, and re-purposing, as an opera. As indicated in the title –House Opera | Opera House– the project pursues multiple relationships of physical structure to performance. Instigated by architectural designers working with a network of artists and curators, the House Opera | Opera House project situates built form in active relationship with choreography, costume, music, language, and drama. The doubling of the project's title warns that opera will be explored and mined as an art form as much as the house as a typology of building and program.

As a long-term project of architectural experimentation, House Opera | Opera House actively explores dynamics of public and

Arquitectos / Architects

A(n) Office (anoffice.us)

Arquitectos asociados / Associated architects

McEwen Studio

Colaboradores / Collaborators

Tyrene Calvesbert, Rebecca Curtis, Ye Fu, Juan Martínez, Salam Rida

Ubicación / Location

1620 Morrell St, Detroit, MI, USA

Cliente / Client

AFROTOPIA

Ingeniería estructural / Structural engineering

Sarah Millsaps Towles

Contratista de obras / Building contractor

Lands Friend Builders

Materiales / Materials

Madera, madera recuperada / Wood, reclaimed wood

Terminaciones interiores y exteriores /

Interior and exterior finishing materials

Envoltura Tyvek, madera recuperada, cobertura plástica Heat Shrink /
Tyvek wrapping, reclaimed wood, Heat Shrink construction Film

Presupuesto / Cost

USD \$30,000

Superficie construida / Built area

185,8 m² / 2,000 ft²

Superficie terreno / Site area

464,5 m² / 5,000 ft²

Año de Proyecto / Project year

2014 - 2015

Año de construcción / Construction year

2015

Maquetas / Models

A(n) Office



Condiciones previas, vista desde la calle / Previous conditions,
view from the street © Marcelo López-Dinardi



Vista exterior / Exterior view © Marcelo López-Dinardi



cultural engagement at the scale of the single family home. The title alludes as well to the “*opera publica*” of Rome, literally public works, which defined the state of the art of physical infrastructure roughly two millennia ago. House Opera | Opera House aims to open and produce new possibilities of public engagement for architecture as a discipline and for houses as a built typology, investigating the means by which a formerly vacant house may serve as a node of cultural infrastructure. As historian Reinhold Martin argues, infrastructure (financial, political or social) is what is reproduced and repeated. The House Opera | Opera House produces –and is product of– communal infrastructures.

The House Opera opened temporarily to the public on July 24-25 with SigiFest, an arts, music and performance festival organized by AFROTOPIA, directed by Detroit curator Ingrid Lafleur.

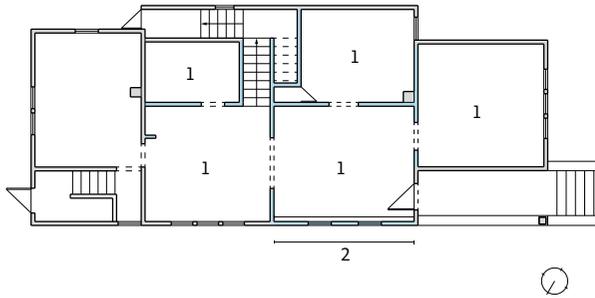
The House Opera | Opera House was originated by Mitch McEwen when McEwen Studio bought the house and received funding by grants from the Knight Foundation, Graham Foundation, University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The first phase of design-subtraction-build was achieved with support from individual donors through a crowdsourcing campaign with funds matched by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. **ARQ**

www.houseopera.us

Planta original primer piso /

Existing first floor plan

E./ S. 1: 250



- Muro a mantener / Wall to remain
- Muro, ventana, puerta o piso a remover / Wall, window, door or floor to be removed

LEYENDA / LEGEND

- 1. Cielo y estructura de segundo piso removida / Removed ceiling and second floor structure
- 2. Muro removido desde el primer piso al techo / Removed wall from first floor to roof

Elevación poniente original /

Existing west elevation

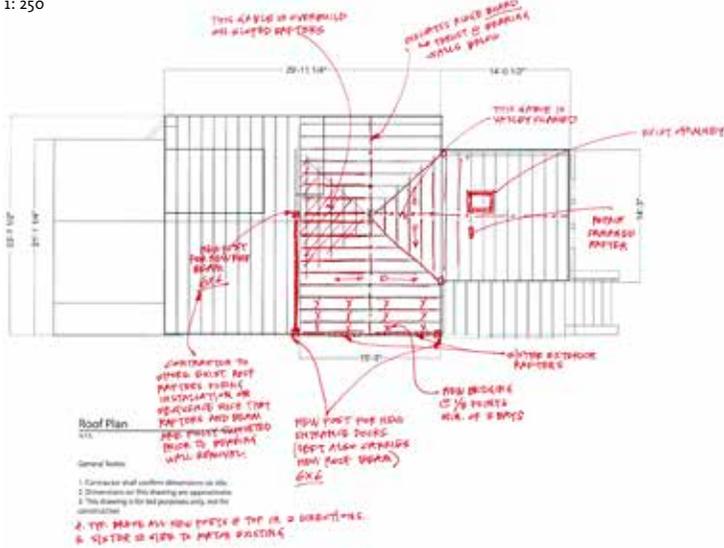
E./ S. 1: 250



- Revestimiento Tyvek / Tyvek surface

Planta de techos / Roof plan

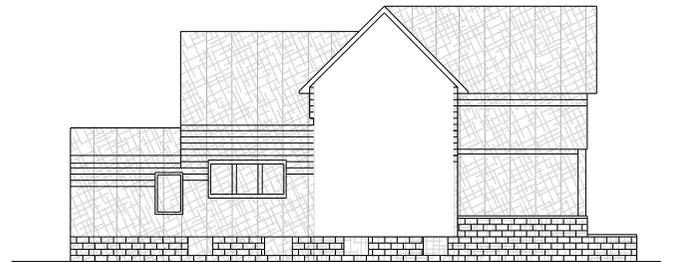
E./ S. 1: 250



Elevación poniente propuesta /

Proposed west elevation

E./ S. 1: 250



Axonométrica / Axonometric

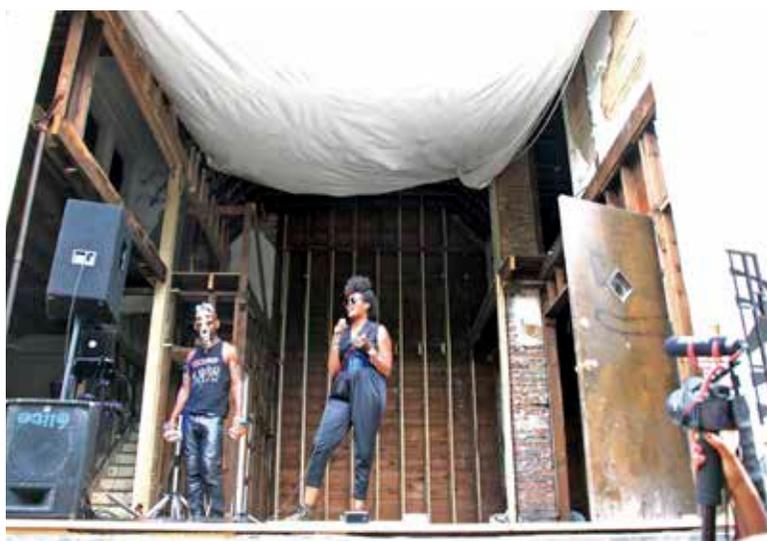
S. e. / N. s.



Nuevo marco 6 x 8" (madera, madera laminada, acero)
New 6"x8" beam (timber, laminated wood, steel)



Samuel R. Delany Book Club © Marcelo López-Dinardi



Ingrid Lafleur en el escenario abierto / *Ingrid Lafleur at the open stage* © Marcelo López-Dinardi



Público en el escenario / *Audience on the stage* © Marcelo López-Dinardi



Cortina desplegándose hacia el exterior / *Curtain folded-out to the exterior* © Marcelo López-Dinardi



MITCH MCEWEN

<mitch@anoffice.us>

M.Arch. Master of Architecture, Columbia University GSAPP (USA, 2006). BA in Social Studies / Economics, Harvard College (USA, 2000). She works in architecture and urban design, focused particularly on the intersection of urban culture and global forces. Awarded numerous grants, including Graham Foundation (2014), Knight Foundation award (2015) and New York State Council on the Arts (2011). Selected to the USA Pavilion for the Venice Architecture Biennale (2016), Methexis, Residency exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD). Is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at University of Michigan, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

MARCELO LÓPEZ-DINARDI

<marcelo@anoffice.us>

Architect, Master in Critical, Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture, Columbia University GSAPP (USA, 2013). Bachelor in Architecture from the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, 2004, *cum laude*. He was researcher and production coordinator of *House Housing: An Untimely History of Architecture and Real Estate*, for the Buell Center of Columbia University exhibited in Venice in 2014, co-edited the book *Promiscuous Encounters* for GSAPP Books, founding editor of *Polimorfo* and director of CIUDADLAB, and has been selected to represent the USA Pavilion in the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016. He is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Barnard+Columbia Architecture, Columbia University, and Faculty at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Presentación de Monstah Black/
Monstah Black performance
© Marcelo López-Dinardi



Escenario interior / *Interior stage* © Marcelo López-Dinardi