PROPOSAL FOR COLLECTIVE LIVING II
(Homage to Sir John Soane)

ANDREW KOVACS
Lecturer, Department of Architecture and Urban Design, UCLA, USA

Keywords
Model
Artifacts
Toys
Assemblage
Chicago Architecture Biennial

Starting with John Soane’s house – a collection of objects that completely transforms the space of the house – this proposal reconceptualizes the value of accumulation. Turning the interior into an exterior and replacing Soane’s museum-valued objects with cheap artifacts purchased in stores, the collection is transformed into an assembly where the whole worths more than the sum of its parts.

10 Locations to select artifacts
Artifacts are great to produce architectural models. Artifacts can be thought of as the material to be altered, adjusted, and assembled in the construction of an architectural model. Artifacts are sourced from various locations over various times. Because of this, artifacts might be selected and acquired only to remain in storage for a period of time. The best way to understand artifacts and how they are used in the production of architecture models is to examine the location where artifacts are acquired. Location is crucial to determining what types of artifacts are necessary in the production of architecture models. Do we need texture? Do we need unique 3-d objects? Do we need foamcore? Do we need spray paint? This questions could also be answered by asking: what does the office need to stock up on? What is running low in our arsenal of artifacts used in the service of assembling architecture models? The following 10 locations are a rudimentary guide to selecting, picking and choosing artifacts.
1) The Thrift Store (USD $ 2-25 per trip)
The thrift store is where the extraordinary can be discovered in the ordinary. At this location there is a large quantity of discarded unique 3-d objects. Mostly labeled knickknacks, bric-a-brac, and so on; the selection of these artifacts should be the result of paying close attention to the artifacts qualities. Important factors in selecting unique 3-d objects from the Thrift Store is the artifacts form and what material it has been made out of (like is it fragile or brittle). Weight and size of artifacts from this location are also important concerns. In selecting artifacts at this location consider how the artifacts might be used later, the surface of the artifact and how the artifact might be able to join other artifacts in a contiguous composition.

2) The 99¢ Store (USD $ 1-20 per trip)
Seemingly on every corner, the 99¢ store is great place to acquire artifacts such as beach toys and commercial toys. While the selection may be limited, the best thing about this location for artifacts is the price point.

3) The Hobby Store (USD $ 10-50 per trip)
The hobby store is an excellent location for artifacts that can aide in the specifics for model making. Here one may acquire detailed pieces such as furniture, figures or accessories. A bit overpriced, but the quality of the artifacts acquired at this location make up for it.

La propuesta para la Bienal de Arquitectura de Chicago consistió en repensar la emblemática sección de la casa-museo de Sir John Soane en Londres como propuesta de vivienda colectiva para el siglo xxi. Siguiendo su impulso de hacer arquitectura a partir de arquitectura, el proyecto entiende la casa de Soane como una ciudad, transformando la colección de objetos expuestos en objetos habitables.

The proposal for the Chicago Architecture Biennial was to rethink Sir John Soane’s iconic section of his London home and museum as a proposal for collective living for the twenty-first century. Following his impulse of making architecture from architecture, the project recontextualizes Soane’s home as a city by reimagining his collection from objects meant to be viewed to objects meant to be inhabited.
4) The Paper Store (USD $12 per trip)
The paper store is a true hidden gem. Paper is great artifact to layer onto other artifacts – adding a new color and texture. At the Paper Store there are boxes of scraps of beautiful paper from all around the world. The owner of the store sells the scraps for 10¢, 15¢, and 25¢. All of the artifacts here are excellent and high quality – even exotic at times – despite being scraps. Unbeatable quality for such a low price. The size of these scraps of paper will generally be < 8.5” x 11”. This is important factor to keep in mind, since the coverage of the scraps of paper purchased here will have a slight limitation in terms of size.
5) The Craft Superstore (USD$ 25-50 per trip)
This is the mecca of corporate craft stores. Here artifacts that can be discovered are landscapes, readymade craft pieces, toy sets, wedding decorations and so on. The craft superstore is very reliable for certain types of artifacts in very large quantities. For example, there is a limitless supply of plastic Greek columns, normally used in the production of wedding cakes. Although there are seemingly endless quantities of useful artifacts at the craft superstore it is important to select in moderation – partly to avoid using artifacts from just a single location and to allow for a high degree of difference in the production of architectural models.
6) The Street Market (USD $1-10 per trip)
The street market is where excitement reigns in the process of selecting artifacts. Due to its high unpredictability and volatility the street market is and ideal location when seeking out a surprise in the selection of artifacts. Every now and then the street market reveals useless things that can be useful for a model. One-of-a-kind commercial toys are usually found at the street market. Here one can also bargain for artifacts, unlike other locations where prices are fixed. Just remember when you look like you really want or need an artifact, you have to pay more for it.

7) The Internet (USD $10-150 per trip)
Today we can search for anything. The best types of artifacts to be purchased at this location are ‘lots’ of HO scale building parts, HO scale buildings, incomplete HO scale building sets, and so on. The Internet’s auction sites are great to purchase bulk parts when needed or specific parts
on demand. While the Internet effectively offers everything one may desire it is important to keep in mind that in order to find something one didn't know one was looking for requires a different attitude toward searching.

8) The Street (USD$ 0 per trip)
The street is the location of serendipity. Sometimes artifacts are found and other times artifacts find you. Keep an eye out for appealing artifacts when simply walking the street. The vicinity of dumpsters and construction sites often have freshly discarded debris that may contain artifacts useful for the construction of architectural models. The street is not a reliable location to select artifacts if time is pressing in the production of an architectural model. The tradeoff is that all artifacts acquired on the street are effectively free. It is absolutely important that any artifacts collected on the street should be cleaned before any additional use.
9) The Home Improvement Store  
(USD$ 10-100 per trip)  
Perfect for oversized functional objects. The best artifacts here are pipes, vents, bricks, and so on. The home improvement store is a great location to purchase larger artifacts, for example the base of a model. Since everything in this location is intended for very functional purposes, be sure to fully comprehend the size and scale shift when selecting pieces for a model.

10) The Architecture Model Store  
(USD$ 15-75 per trip)  
For all your architecture model needs. This is the location that sells the tools to aide in the altering, adjusting and assembling of the artifacts that have been purchased from the above locations. Foam core! Basswood! Rulers! Knives! Blades! Spray Paint! Cutting Mats! Glue! ARQ

---

PROPIETARIO PARA LA VIDA COLECTIVA II (HOMENAJE A SIR JOHN SOANE)  
PROPOSAL FOR COLLECTIVE LIVING II (HOMAGE TO SIR JOHN SOANE)

Arquitecto / Architect: Andrew Kovacs,  
Ubicación / Location: Chicago Architecture Biennial.  
Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL.  
Cliente / Client: Chicago Architecture Biennial  
Construcción / Construction: Office Kovacs  
Año de proyecto / Project year: 2017
Andrew Kovacs
<info@o-k-o-k.net>

Bachelor of Architecture, Syracuse University. Master of Architecture, Princeton University. Assistant Adjunct Professor at ucla, where he teaches design studios and seminars at both the undergraduate and graduate level. His work has been published in magazines including A+U, Pidgin, Project, Pool, Perspecta, Manifest, Metropolis, Clog, Domus y Fulcrum. Additionally, he is the creator and curator of Archive of Affinities, a website devoted to the collection and display of architectural b-sides. Kovacs’ design studio, Office Kovacs works on projects at all scales from books, exhibitions, temporary installations, interiors, homes, speculative architectural proposals and public architecture competitions. Recent design work includes a parks network in downtown Los Angeles and an honorable mention at MA Li design competition.
Andrew Kovacs and Cristóbal Amunátegui in conversation
Los Angeles, September 2017

CA: So Andrew, you took a van, put a big model in it – an homage to John Soane no less –, had your assistants jump in, and drove all the way to Chicago to install the work on the pedestal they assigned to you at the Biennial. This surely wasn’t only about transporting a model though. Do you care to share the details of the enterprise?

AK: It’s a good question. It is absolutely tempting to try and build up some kind of myth around why we decided to drive the model from LA to Chicago. In all honesty, I really just wanted to be absolutely sure that the model would arrive safely without any damage and, therefore, repair.

The model is somewhat fragile and it is composed of hundreds, maybe thousands of pieces, with many people working with extreme dedication, care and attention over a sustained period of time. Additionally, the model has many layers to it such that it creates deep spatial effects. I was concerned that if the model was not handled appropriately some of the pieces located deep in the model could become damaged which therefore would make it even more difficult to repair. I could not bear the thought of it not arriving safely so I decided to drive it myself to Chicago.

By choosing to do so, we had more time to work on the model, which was a total asset. Additionally, we were able to receive extra funding for this endeavor, and along the trip, we decided to stop at architectural highlights. We tried to turn the driving of the model into an enjoyable experience. It was not mandatory for the team to come along, they did so as their own personal choice.

CA: I see. Still, it’s a 30-hour drive, so you would agree it lends itself for some mystification. So the trip was more like your insurance, the cost you were willing to pay for the model to arrive safely. Which makes me think this is not a mere model. What would you call it? How would you value it if someone were to purchase it?

AK: It totally lends itself to mystification. But maybe it’s a mystification of the practical. And yes, driving it is certainly a type of insurance. It is absolutely an architecture model – it might be extreme or speculative or conceptual but it’s an architecture model. Here’s a joke: $50k for the model, $50m for the building – phase 1. I think that’s how I would value it. Of course, that value is only what someone will pay for.
CA: Glad that you mentioned the practical. You often talk about the stuff you do in extremely dry terms, almost as the minimalists did when talking about their own sculptures – you give your spectator a manual, not a theory. But of course, yours isn’t really a ‘minimalist’ project or approach, and you are an architect, not an artist. So here’s a provocation: do you care to explain why, rather than how, you do what you do? Where would you place the ‘value’ of what you do?

AK: I think the ‘why’ comes out of a love for architecture. I think we want to make things that we enjoy making and that are fun for us to do while at the same time start to imagine a different type of world through architecture. I had a wonderful time making this model. It’s a bit like playing – but playing in a disciplined kind of way. We collect things that exist in the world and alter them, rearrange them, combine them, demolish them, reconstruct them, etc. Maybe that’s the value – a value for the discipline of architecture. I hope our audience is both architects and non-architects and that the model can provoke some sort of engagement from both those audiences.

CA: This is something we have talked about before: the beauty in the ugly, the vulgar, the 99¢ trifle. Some friends and colleagues call the stuff you do postmodern (ironic, cynical, etc.), but I see more of the surrealists here (defamiliarization, a thing for the accidental), even back to the modern idea (read Baudelaire) that there is always some beauty to be extracted from the existent, no matter how messy or unstructured. I think these are two drastically different attitudes: the former would place you in a slightly nihilistic camp (a thankfully exhausted camp in my opinion), while the latter would have you insisting on a more productive approach to the world of material and social relations. Please comment.

AK: In some ways, the ugly, the vulgar, the 99¢ all come back to the practical. I would say a larger ambition of what we do is take what exists in the world and rearrange it towards new purposes. I would call this Making Architecture from Architecture. I love both the postmodern and surrealism. There are certainly aspects and themes of both of those approaches that find a way into the work we produce. There is a sort of architect as collector approach that I appreciate as well. One of the ways we work is to produce physical models. We collect things to produce those physical models – things from the street, things from the Internet, things from certain types of stores. That material is then altered in some way and usually combined and composed with other things in the collection as well.