
Reflecting at the end of 2020 on the year’s goals and priorities—set out before the world changed—might at first seem meaningless or lead to disappointment. However, this reflection in fact showed me that the forces of upheaval we have all been subject to did not create the big issues that our chapter is eager to tackle, nor did it deter us from doing so.

At the start of this year, AIA Austin was poised to initiate several strategic changes:

• We were inspired by colleagues at the national level to involve climate action decision making at all critical levels of the organization.
• We saw an opportunity to transform our summer conference into the Design Excellence Conference, drawing on a regional audience and utilizing the Design Excellence Framework to focus on the changes our industry needs in addressing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in our built environment—and especially in our profession.
• We sought to deepen the relationship with the policymakers of our city to guide and encourage improvements in our city and our members standing within it.

I am proud to look back and affirm that all of these efforts were achieved—thanks to the tireless participation of our active membership, our dedicated board and officers, and a staff for whom there are no sufficient superlatives.

Further, I am delighted that this organization has, in a time of unprecedented adversity, maintained its financial health while delivering the benefits to membership that we have all come to expect.

2021 will be a new year with new challenges, and I have every confidence that our organization will surpass them with thoughtfulness and determination.
Immediately following Design Talks, The Executive Committee visited New Orleans for the AIA Grassroots Conference.

Less than a month later, all in-person meetings were suspended and the Board met virtually for the first of many strategy sessions.

Our Advocacy group brought together many members for a transit advancement rally with Senator Kirk Watson, a 2020 AIA Austin Honor Award recipient, in February.

In mid-February, we held what would turn out to be our only in-person Design Talks event in this long-running series, featuring Sara Zewde. (We successfully held the remaining Talks online.)

The Board, Committee Chairs, and Staff held an in-depth retreat to kick off the year in January, culminating in the traditional picture of all board, committee chairs, and staff.
I’m incredibly proud of the leaders, committees, and staff of AIA Austin and the Austin Foundation for Architecture, and how we elevated our work to new levels this year. Our board and officers made decisions quickly and supported staff and committees to deliver results. Their courage enabled us to center on current priorities.

- A successful virtual conference focused on the principles of AIA’s Framework for Design Excellence and Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
- Our epic virtual Homes Tour brought global attendees and, for the first time, CE credits.
- Committees stayed strong and involved—meeting on Zoom and pivoting programs.
- Momentum towards creating a world-class Center for Architecture in Austin continued by engaging with leaders from successful global centers. We’re learning from the best and moving ever forward.

The Austin Foundation for Architecture continued to develop strategically under the leadership of President Chris Cobb, AIA, and the board. Programs like PARKSPACE brought new partnerships, and the Guide to Austin Architecture mobile site launched in September—perfect timing for restless Austinites in need of a walking tour.

We welcomed two AIA Austin babies this year! Bridget is mom to Cass Ground, born in January, and Julia welcomed Naomi Brown in June!

We were also fortunate to add Development Coordinator Annissa Calvillo to staff in March. She has integrated flawlessly with our team, helping us navigate a year of tricky fundraising.

I’m proud of how we operated this year, and I’m so honored to have witnessed the leadership of President Eric Rauser, AIA, whose grace, strength, humor, and imperturbable attitude in the face of any hurdle taught me much about effective leadership. Working with him and our officers and board has truly been a revelation.

And with Stephi Motal, AIA, ready to take the reins, I’m looking forward to 2021. Bring it on! We are ready.

INGRID SPENCER

Executive Director,
AIA Austin and the Austin Foundation for Architecture
The DesignVoice Committee envisioned and implemented the Force Majeure design ideas competition, which received entries from around the world. The project reached an even wider virtual audience at Austin Design Week.

The Latinos in Architecture Committee reenvisioned their annual Perspectivasdosmil exhibition to include an online exhibit and coverage in Texas Architect magazine.

The K-12 Committee created the Architecture at Home program, ending the year with a series of videos showcasing diverse architects reading children’s books (left, below.)

AIA Austin reinvented our large-scale events to create moments of delight through multichannel experiences. The Design Awards winners were revealed through a series of “unboxing” videos in the fall (middle, below), and a virtual celebration in December. And our Homes Tour (right, below) combined virtual tours, webinars, photography, video, and merch to entice a worldwide audience, including viewers from Germany and Australia!
Well, that was interesting!

What a time to be the treasurer of — well, any organization, really. But, as is always the case, I have learned so very much about this one and the people who keep the wheels of AIA Austin turning.

First lesson learned: This organization has done a fantastic job of selecting their leadership.

Because members of the finance committees that came before me set very strong groundwork, we had the funding and mechanisms in place to not only weather this storm, but actually make progress toward our future goals and mission.

Next lesson learned: Never underestimate the power and ingenuity of the AIA Austin staff and committees.

I cannot express the gratitude I have for our amazing team and what they were able to pull out of the hat this year. When we did initial projections in April for what it would look like to hold no events in 2020, the financial outlook was a bit grim.

The reinvention of what it looks like to deliver on our commitments to the mission allowed us to remain in the black.

That is not something most nonprofits are able to boast this year.

And now I turn this job over to Christy Taylor for 2021. It will be another interesting year to be sure. My new job will be to support Christy’s team and our new president any way I can.

No one knows what is around this next corner, but I’ll gladly face it with this group!

AIA Austin could not do this important work without the trust and support of our Members and Allied Members. Thank you so much for your encouragement and generosity.
We can’t talk about this year without first acknowledging how disrupted our lives have been by all manner of events, ranging from simply strange, to infuriating, to utterly heartbreaking. And yet, by some small miracle, many of us have managed to find numerous glimmers of hope as we have adapted.

For me, serving alongside Eric, Ingrid, Camille, Mark, and the rest of the AIA Austin Board and Staff has been a highlight of 2020. AIA Austin has a dedicated staff, crafty committees, and a culture of scrappiness; those qualities shined bright this year. I am incredibly proud of the agility with which we pivoted some of our key events.

Particularly near and dear to me this year was our Design Excellence Conference (formerly known as Summer Conference).

The name change was intentional: to signal a shift in focus toward presentations that broaden our understanding of AIA’s Framework for Design Excellence, developed by the Committee on The Environment (COTE) Knowledge Community.

The thoughtful conference planning committee came together to steer the conference toward aligning with those principles. Despite not getting to network with our colleagues and sponsors in person, it might have been our best conference yet.

The virtual nature of our Design Excellence Conference offered much-needed flexibility. It allowed us to add sessions that help educate on the work ahead as we persistently seek to root out systemic racism within our organization, our practices, and our community.

The first, baby steps have been taken with the formation of our J.E.D.I. Taskforce. Striving toward perfection in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity, as well as environmental stewardship, this taskforce will guide us as we continue to move forward.

Thanks to the diligence of past leaders and the enthusiasm of our current board, I can—honestly—say: I’m looking forward to the curveballs 2021 will throw our way.

Structurally oppressive systems are unjust and inhumane. We must change these systems to achieve our organizations’ goals of equality.

AIA Austin’s Statement Against Systemic Racism, June 2020
AIA National is rolling out a new visual identity for all chapters in 2021.

The LGBTQIA+ Alliance became an official AIA Austin Committee in the last quarter of 2020.

The Emerging Professionals Committee has continued to hold their Design Shine exhibit — socially distanced, of course—at the UMLAUF.

AIA Austin has been providing capacity support to the newly formed NOMA (National Organization of Minority Architects) Central Texas chapter’s Empower Speaker Series.

Committee chairs and outreach stakeholders have seized opportunities to collaborate on programming. Their efforts have already resulted in reaching underrepresented design communities—but there is much more work to do.

What’s with the circles?
A sneak peek at our new look! AIA National is rolling out a new visual identity for all chapters in 2021.
In June, the Austin Foundation for Architecture (the Foundation) launched P A R K S P A C E, a series of interventions in Austin’s parks and green spaces to help visualize social distancing guidelines. To date P A R K S P A C E has been installed at six sites, with some 60 AIA Austin committee volunteers helping to paint the 430 P A R K S P A C E squares. The project has received much media coverage, inspiring audiences from the regional to the international.

At Form:Function, the Foundation joined AIA Austin to celebrate the AIA Austin Honor Awards. The honorees received special, socially distanced delivery of their awards, and were then recognized through a virtual multimedia event at The Independent.

The virtual event space has been viewed more than 226 times by 121 visitors—and counting!
The Foundation received support from the City of Austin for Las Piñatas ATX. Organized by the AIA Austin Latinos in Architecture committee with the Foundation, this program consists of large-scale, papel picado banners designed with community artists and installed at various sites of significance to East Austin’s LatinX and African-American communities. The series will continue in early spring 2021.

LEFT: The Foundation hosted webinars to launch two books by local architects: Juan Miró, FAIA, and Miguel Rivera, FAIA, discussed Miró Rivera Architects: Building a New Arcadia, which celebrates the firm’s 20th anniversary while exploring why people want to live in Austin (drawing 1118 registrants). David Heymann, FAIA, presented his book John S. Chase–The Chase Residence, discussing Chase—the first Black registered architect in Texas—and the home he designed for his family (drawing 1352 registrants over two sessions).

RIGHT: In September, we released the first walking tour for the Guide to Austin Architecture, a joint venture between the Foundation and AIA Austin that offers insight into the city’s places and spaces through mobile-friendly walking tours curated by local architects, urbanists, and designers. We will add to the Guide to reflect Austin’s diverse communities while exploring Austin’s singular spirit for architecture enthusiasts and casual visitors alike.
At the end of a year where creativity and problem-solving took center stage, The Austin Foundation for Architecture is pleased to report the successful fulfillment of its vested mission:

- develop the general public’s education, awareness, and appreciation for architecture, and promote responsible stewardship of the Central Texas environment; and
- develop sustainable architectural leadership for AIA Austin and other public, professional, and community organizations in Central Texas.

Our premier fundraising event—scheduled for March—had to be cancelled just two weeks in advance. The event was rescheduled for the fall of 2020 and reimagined as an innovative virtual event. Thanks to the creativity and dedication of the planning committee, AFA Board of Directors, and the Foundation’s Staff, the event was a triumph by the standards of the day. In addition, a number of new opportunities presented themselves, were seized, and turned into active programs—notable among them being PARKSPACE, the launch of the web-based Guide to Austin Architecture, Las Piñatas ATX, and the hosting of two virtual book launches by David Heyman and Miró Rivera Architects, respectively.

The Foundation looks forward to expanding its impact in the future through increased programming, recruitment of new and diverse faces into its leadership, and exploring the possibilities of a thriving, Austin-based Center for Architecture—a hub for all our architecture outreach activities.

In addition to looking forward, we also want to reflect back a little bit and recognize and appreciate two individuals who have left an enduring positive mark directly on The Foundation, and indirectly on architecture enthusiasts throughout Austin: Chris Noack, AIA, and Jacqui Dodson, AIA. The Austin Foundation for Architecture will be forever grateful to the countless generosity of the time and effort they have given to this organization.

The Foundation of the Future:

- Our grant program will act as a means for collaborative programming that serves all Austinites.
- We will establish a separate scholarship/fellowship program at the K-12, college, and professional levels to continue our leadership development mission—with diversity as a key factor.
- We will continue to collaborate with other organizations and our City to be the heart of discourse and education about the power of design in Austin.
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AIA Austin, a chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and the Austin Foundation for Architecture (the Foundation), a 501c3 charitable organization, work together to make the appreciation of architecture and design a standard for our community. We share a home in the Austin Center for Architecture.