

# THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

ARCHITECTURE DESIGN LANDSCAPE URBANISM WORLDWIDE



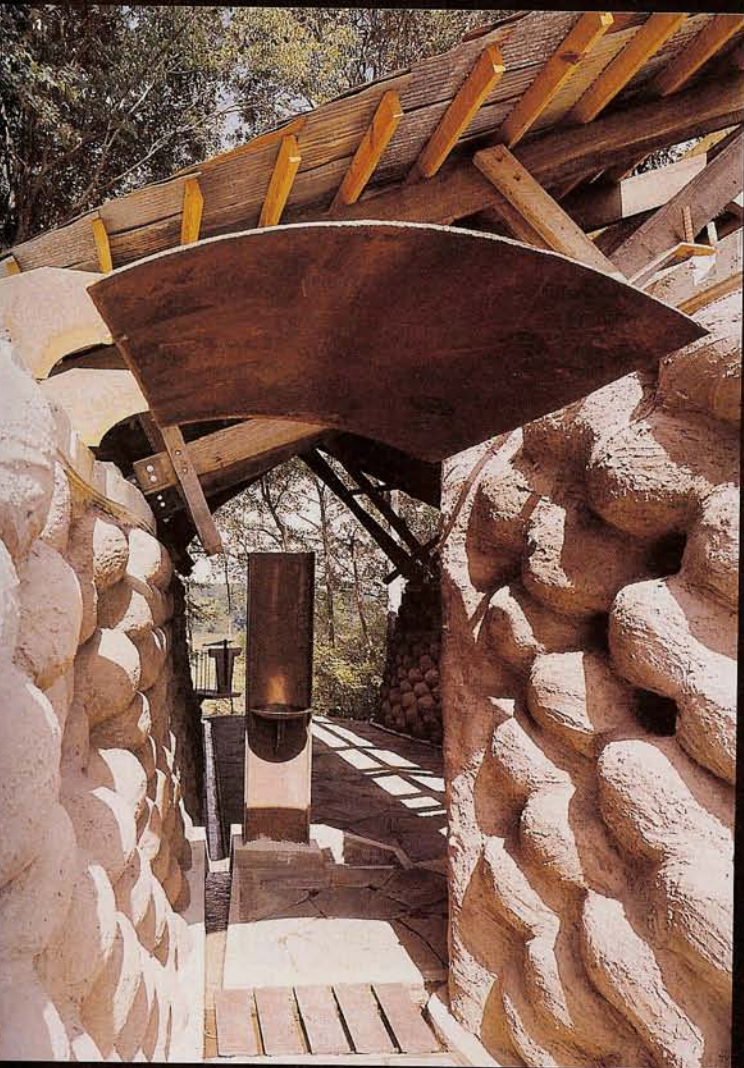
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## Chapel of ease

**Designed and built on a shoestring, this little community chapel deep in the American south uses a combination of salvaged and recycled materials to highly poetic effect.**



- 1 The narrow entrance to the chapel, with font fashioned from scrap steel.
- 2 Tyres filled with rammed earth and covered with stucco are used to make walls.
- 3 At the pulpit end, a timber deck cantilevers into space, communing with nature and light.

Constructed entirely from recycled materials, this remarkable woodland chapel was designed and built by three students at Auburn University in Alabama. The project has its origins in the architecture faculty's Rural Studio, which is based in the small town of Greensboro in western Alabama. Established by Samuel Mockbee, the Rural Studio is run as an experimental architecture clinic, building small, low budget structures for impoverished rural communities. An early scheme involved 16 students in the design and construction of a house made from hay bales and salvaged materials for a family that had previously been living in a shack.

Following work experience with the Rural Studio, Ruard Veltman, Thomas Tretheway and Steven Durden proposed building a chapel for the community, on land donated by managers of a dairy farm outside Greensboro. Resources were limited, so the students set about accumulating salvaged materials, notably around 1000 used car tyres from a company under a court order to clear its stock, but also local slate from the Black Warrior River, timber and steel beams from old bridges and condemned houses and scraps of rusted tin from dilapidated barns. With this random and rudimentary assortment of materials, they have created an extraordinarily lyrical building for a budget of less than \$10 000.

The Yancey Chapel is sited on a ridge overlooking a riverbed, in a heavily wooded landscape. The building is contained in a narrow

trench, topped by a dramatically swooping roof. The tyres line the walls of the trench, packed with earth from the excavations, which was pounded by sledge hammers. As the tyres filled with the rammed earth they expanded, so stabilising the structure. The tyres were then wrapped in wire mesh and coated with stucco. In-situ concrete edge beams running along the walls provide a frame and footings for the timber roof. Reminiscent of the expressive, rural church architecture of Fay Jones (AR April 1992), the structure comprises recycled heart pine rafters supported by an 85 foot long ridge beam. Tin shingles, cut from larger salvaged offcuts, give the building an appropriately rustic quality, emphasised by the raw slate floors and a pulpit fashioned from scrap steel.

The stucco covered walls have a sensuous, organic quality, with the undulations of the tyres providing convenient niches for candles. At the pulpit end, the building opens up like a great maw, where a timber deck cantilevers over a grove of trees, symbolically connecting with nature and light. Combining spatial presence, environmental consciousness and tectonic ingenuity, the Yancey Chapel is a modest affirmation of architecture's capacity to respond to both social and spiritual needs.

C.S.

#### Architects and builders

Ruard Veltman, Thomas Tretheway, Steven Durden

#### Project team

Gary Owen, John Tate, David Brush, Scott Rae, Lindsey Lee, Scott Holmes, Timothy Burnett, Tiffini Lovelace, Charles E. Martin, Jamie Phillips, Andy Sharpe, Brandon Jones, Laura Durden, Jeff Tate, Ben Mosley, Charles Jay, Dennis Langford, Allen Jeffries

#### Structural engineer

Paul Darden

#### Faculty advisors

D. K. Ruth, Samuel Mockbee, Richard Hudgens

#### Photographs

Timothy Hursley



3





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4 The rustic form of the chapel is inspired by vernacular farm buildings.

5 The great maw of the swooping roof, made from salvaged timber and tin shingles.



4