



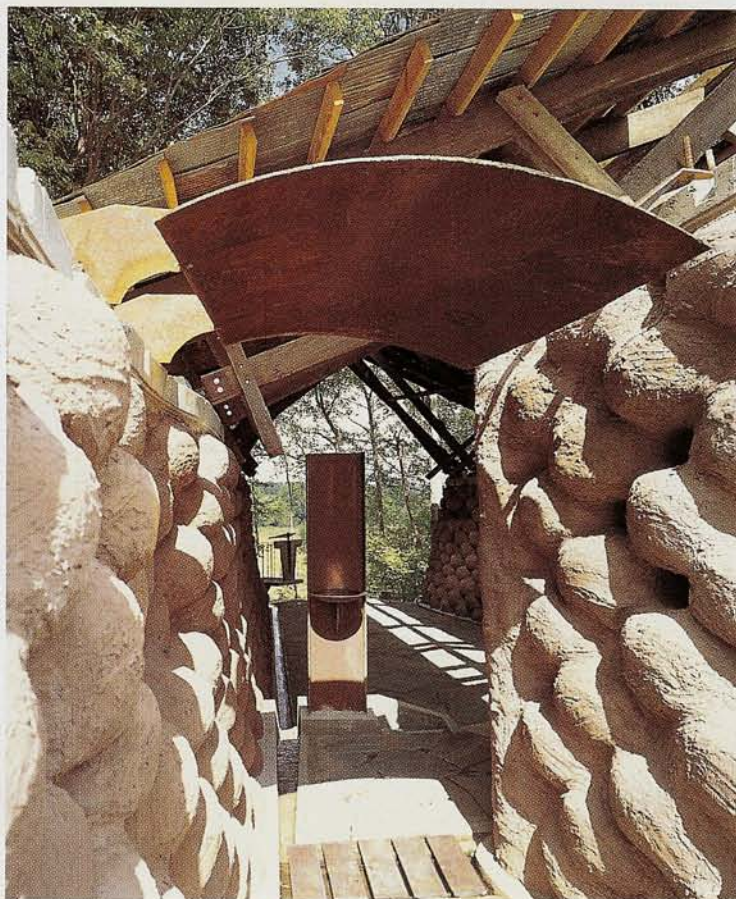
Yancey Chapel Hale County, Alabama

After an academic quarter with Professor Samuel Mockbee's Rural Studio in Greensboro, Alabama, working on the Bryant House (opposite), Ruard Veltman proposed a building rather than what he calls a "typical paper project" for his fifth-year thesis. Thomas Tretheway and Steven Durden joined him and the three students eventually received approval for their proposal from the architecture faculty of Auburn University.

"It went backwards," recalls Veltman of the design process. The trio had the idea of constructing a chapel—"something for the community," says Tretheway—and then went about finding a client and funding. Managers of a dairy farm outside of Greensboro heard of the project and offered a parcel of land. Knowing that construction would have to be done as cheaply as possible, the students researched low-cost materials, settling on used tires, which were plentiful in the area and at the right price—free. Central Tire in Selma, Alabama—an unofficial landmark on the twice-weekly route between the Rural Studio's Greensboro outpost and the University campus in Auburn—was under court order to clear its lot, so it donated some 1,000 tires to the project. Tretheway says the "longevity of tires" appealed to the three designers.

The students sited the chapel on a ridge overlooking a riverbed and excavated a slice of land so that visitors descend into a long, narrow space. Tires were packed with the excavations: as the tires filled with dirt, which was pounded with sledge hammers, they inflated, stabilizing and strengthening the structure.

This technique of rammed-earth construction proceeded at a slow pace, about 10 tires per person, Veltman reports. Rebars were planted to reinforce the frame. The tires were then wrapped in wire mesh and coated with stucco. Concrete beams provide a frame for the roof structure, which was built from salvaged lumber. Veltman, Tretheway, and Durden cut tin from old barns into 18-



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inch square shingles, and used scrap steel donated by the Hale County Department of Transportation to fashion a font and a pulpit. In all, less than \$10,000 was spent on the project.

Intended to fit into its rural surroundings, at first glance the chapel intentionally resembles a dilapidated barn. After stepping down into the compressed entry way, visitors face a sculptural assemblage of materials: above, an 85-foot-long ridge beam supported by wood rafters, which Tretheway likens to “oars in motion;” on the floor, a puzzle-work of slate was culled in part from a nearby river bed. The sagging roof rises at the south end, admitting daylight into the end of the darkened space, where a wood deck is suspended over the bluff (opposite). Says Veltman of the procession from darkness to light: “It’s like a jaw that opens wide to let you out. You’re released back to nature.”

Credits

Yancey Chapel

Hale County, Alabama

Owner: *The Estate of J.L. Morrison*

Designers, Builders: *Ruard Veltman, Thomas Tretheway, and Steven Durden*

Faculty Advisors: *D.K. Ruth, Samuel Mockbee, Richard Hudgens*

Consultant: *Paul Darden (structural)*

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*

