

Xtreme LA Challenge:

# Teamwork In Tucson

BY GAIL GREET HANNAH

“This was a very complicated assignment in a very short period. It’s the real world. These are the issues and challenges that cities are facing all around the country. We really had to roll up our sleeves.” **Monte Wilson**

The sleeve rolling took place in Tucson. The occasion was XTreme LA 2011, the fourth annual landscape architecture charrette sponsored by Landscape Forms and the Landscape Architecture Foundation. Hosted by the University of Arizona at its downtown Drachman Institute, the October event brought together sixteen UA landscape architecture and architecture students, eighteen young design professionals nominated by their firms as up-and-coming leaders, and two team leaders, both distinguished landscape architects with international experience in urban planning and design. They were challenged to take a fresh look at Tucson’s downtown and environs and to generate workable concepts for connections between Tucson’s historic and new neighborhoods and activities east and west of the 1-10

Corridor; integration of the new Tucson Modern Streetcar, potential InterCity Rail, and inter- and intra-city bus systems into the downtown fabric; development of vacant and underutilized land to provide positive experiences for residents and visitors; and creation of a strong identity for the unique city located on land first inhabited by native peoples 12,000 years ago.

Over a fast-paced 36 hours participants toured the study area, were briefed on local culture, history and politics by Jan Cervelli, Dean of the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, UA Tucson, and were assigned to teams made up of equal numbers of students and professionals. Team A was led by Trevor McIntyre, who leads Toronto-



based IBI Group's design practice in community planning and design, master planning and landscape architecture; and Team B by Monte Wilson, Senior Vice President and Director of the HOK Planning Group in Atlanta. The teams gathered in their separate studio spaces and set to work. Participants used laptops, drawing paper, markers and maps. After an initial hour or so of brainstorming, striking differences in working process began to emerge. Team B quickly generated a list of ideas to "tell the Tucson story" and broke into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to research and refine, scattering with laptops to quiet corners. Team A gathered around one big table and began to draw. Over the course of the event Team B periodically assembled, shared information and returned to work in small groups. Team A continued to draw, after a while separating their large square worktable into two side-by-side tables around which team members clustered and sketched. While both teams used technology to create powerpoints and both included drawings in their final presentations, their predominant processes were strikingly different and, perhaps not surprisingly, so were their proposals. The happy result was that together the two teams provided a layered and rich offering of strategic and tactical approaches, big-picture and site-specific proposals for addressing Tucson's urban challenges.



Monte Wilson described how his team tackled the problem: "We took the approach that we were not going to get into specific solutions, but would come up with strategies around storytelling. Every city has a story and that is the case in Tucson. The history, culture and heritage of the place are unique. We wanted to find a way, through the lens of planning, urban design and landscape architecture, to plant some seeds that will help Tucson build on its narrative." The team defined four strategic initiatives: Celebrate, Re-Connect, Engage and Catalyze. Tucson has a lot to celebrate. Set in the biologically rich Sonora desert and surrounded by a ring of mountains that form a "sky island," a river runs through it – or at least it used to. The team proposed that Tucson celebrate its history by bringing the Santa Cruz River, which was essential to its founding, back into the life of the city. "The river bed is dry and riparian habitat no longer exists," explained a team spokesperson. "We believe it should be rebuilt. The US Army Corps of Engineers has done a study of how restoration might be done, but Tucson doesn't have \$97 million so our answer is to begin by taking small steps." The team proposed green roofs, rain gardens, greenways and floodable parks to harvest water; washes and swales to capture runoff from parking lots and streets; filtering out particulates and slowing water down on its way to the river to control flooding; and widening the river channel and building planted terraces with walking trails along its banks.



“Eventually this would bring the river back, not necessarily in its original condition but as a central feature of the city that will also help handle water collection and distribution,” the spokesperson added. The team created a logo to express the importance of water to this desert community: three splashes of water – red, blue and green — lined in a row and overlapping at the edges. The message: “Water holds it all together and connects the river, nature and community.”

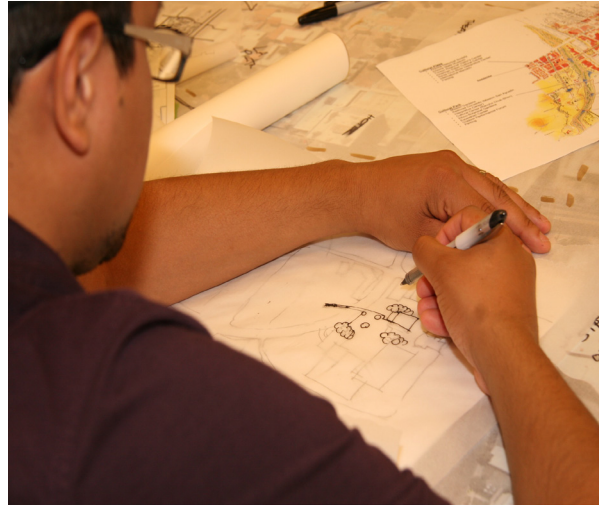
Team B considered strategies for re-connecting the city with its history, culture, nature, neighborhoods and transit. It looked at the transportation infrastructure - Modern Streetcar, Inter City Rail, bus systems, I-10 and bike paths and walkways through the greenbelt - and proposed an Inter Modal Transit Hub activated with retail and office spaces, and expansion of the 4th Street/Congress corridor across I-10. It recommended locating major events and activities requiring a large amount of space along the I-10 corridor and future rail line. It proposed consolidating Tucson’s overabundance of non-permanent parking space, much of which is used only once or twice a year, and creating parkland that could accommodate the Gem Show (an annual event of significant iconic and economic import to the city) and other annual events while providing open space at other times for sports, festivals and celebrations. It proposed “nodal spaces” within each neighborhood that express individual neighborhood identity and provide a place to gather. And it called for mixed

use development in areas of transition between the barrios and downtown, drawing design inspiration from historic adobe architecture.

As part of its strategic approach, Team B considered what would be required to turn good ideas into reality. It advocated for community input to build engagement and wide spread buy-in, and creation of a detailed process for revitalization that would galvanize the community and attract development. This, it noted, will require committed leadership and clarity of vision and goals. Citing the experience of other cities in which green space has successfully leveraged economic investment and development, the team’s spokesperson called for “Eyes on the Green,” declaring, “Invest in open space and development will come.”

To jump-start the process, the team proposed a catalytic project designed to capture the imagination and energize the community. It described a Western Gateway along the I-10 corridor to the Inter Modal Transit Hub highlighted by a linear procession of solar panels that would double as shade structures, providing an arresting landscape element and a utilitarian solution to a major climate concern. “We imagine a system moving down I-10 that is highly visible and creates a real identifier for the city,” the team’s spokesperson explained. “It will be innovative, welcoming and will serve as an icon for the city. It says that Tucson is a city closely identified with the sun and looking to the future and new technologies.”





Team A took a more specific approach to site plan issues. “We looked for a brand or idea that described the study area and chose “Crossroads,” because this the place where Tucson neighborhoods come together and where they must both respond to local issues and become the center of a new project,” explained team leader Trevor McIntyre. The goal was to identify opportunities for overlapping programmed spaces within the crossroads and for activating underused spaces, making them more usable day and night, week-to-week and month-to-month. “The sun is hot in Tucson and distances are great so we aimed to make things more accessible and comfortable and, in whatever we came up with, memorable and iconic.”

The team first looked at how three key layers fit together: A Mountain, the Santa Cruz River, and public transit. It mapped the program areas around each layer creating a red zone for year-round activities, including restaurants and cafes; a blue zone for seasonal and occasional use areas; and a green zone for areas with events that happened only once or twice a year. Then it considered opportunities to better connect the zones by filling in the gaps, paying special attention to human scale. “Tucson has a very large convention center surrounded by a sea of parking used only when events happen,” explained a team spokesperson. “It’s run down and doesn’t attract visitors. We found that the biggest issue in all this is the lack of people.” The team looked at the barrio as

a model of human scale architecture and walkable streets. It addressed the challenges posed by the intense heat of the desert sun and storm water flooding after monsoon rains. It tackled the lack of a center for transit operations and it designed iconic elements to convey Tucson’s unique qualities and create a sense of destination for the city.

Team A offered two “big ideas:” a Transit Hub to consolidate transportation functions, connect the big empty spaces currently used for temporary tent structures during annual events and provide a more permanent space for those activities, and spur development of “a vibrant networks of nodes and spaces throughout the streetcar corridor;” and a large public plaza it named Plaza del Bosque to bring together civic and natural elements in a walkable district that would connect newly developed spaces around it and support water harvesting. The team called for treating the existing Convention Center and the area around it as a campus – eliminating much of the street level parking and, after the new transit system is in operation, closing part of the area to cars and creating a pedestrian space with opportunities for programmable activities such as festivals and parades. It recommended study of a potential opportunity for constructing access to the roof of the Convention Center where parking could be provided and rainwater shed into washes connecting to the riverbed. Around the edges it proposed multi-use commercial, residential and retail devel-



opment with “nooks, crannies, turns, vistas and pedestrian boulevards.” In contrast to Team B’s river restoration strategy, Team A proposed a poetic “Ode to the Arroyo:” long vistas along the dry river bed broken up by clumps of mesquite that would recall the river in the dry season and channel water during floods.

The team proposed using a mixed palette of materials and colors for applications such as metal shade sculptures that mimic and compliment natural shade and vibrant paint applied in stripes and patterns on streets. And it offered design sketches for two innovative landscape structures. The first it described as “human scale, single cell shade structures.” Dubbed ISS for Interactive Solar Sails, these lightweight structures with fabric sails would create shadow spaces for shade, could be easily moved to follow the sun, and used individually or in combination to form larger shadows. The team suggested that the concept and structural skeleton might be further developed to enable formation of tent networks to flexibly accommodate multiple activities and

functions. The second design concept envisioned a striking tubular Pedestrian Bridge based on the ribbed structure of the Saguaro cactus that would extend over I 10 to the center of the Crossroads and provide a signature identity that announces, “You’re in Tucson!”

Richard Heriford, President of Landscape Forms, thanked guests for their participation. “This is bigger than just building new friendships for Landscape Forms,” he said. “It’s an incredibly valuable experience to watch three generations work together, to witness the development of the profession and to be able to contribute to that. Every year we think this one is the best -- and every year it gets better because landscape architecture is enlarging its vision and engaging with the big picture. The young professionals and students in Tucson faced the kinds of challenges that they will encounter in many cities and many projects in the years to come. We hope this experience helps them envision a path to collaborative, innovative solutions.”



## 2011 EXTREME LA TEAMS

### Team A – Trevor McIntyre

Steven Tuttle	Mayer/Reed (Portland)
Chad Stacy	Perkins & Will (Atlanta)
Darran Scott	Howard-Fairbairn Site Design (Oklahoma City)
Dan McDowell	LaQuatra Bonci Assoc. (Pittsburgh)
Christie Jarvis	Joni Janecki & Assoc. (Santa Cruz)
Megan Abernathy	Newman, Jackson, Bieberstein (Dallas)
Claire Agre	West 8 (New York City)
Kristin Couris	HOKPlanning (Washington, DC)
Nichole Sheehan	Hitchcock Design Group (Chicago)
Jason Satterly	Student – Landscape Architecture
Brandon Herman	Student – Landscape Architecture
Travis Mueller	Student – Landscape Architecture
Yasmein Okour	Student – Landscape Architecture
Bethany Johannessen	Student – Landscape Architecture
Julio Carrillo	Student – Planning
Hillary Turby	Student – Planning
Samuel Paz	Student – Architecture

### Team B – Monte Wilson

Art Milito	Context (Fortville, IN)
Michael Dellis	PWP Landscape Architecture (Berkeley)
Ross Altheimer	HGA Landscape Architecture (Rochester)
Shawn Davidson	Wolff Landscape Architecture (Chicago)
Nathan Brightbill	Phillips Farevaag Smalenberg (Vancouver)
Shi Park	The Office of James Burnett (Houston)
Shannon Lee	Sasaki (Watertown)
Melissa Cooper	SEPTA (Philadelphia)
Jeremy Beals	TenEyck Landscape Architects (Phoenix)
Laura Jensen	Student – Landscape Architecture
Lee Streitz	Student – Landscape Architecture
Rebecca Blacher	Student – Landscape Architecture
Chi Talley	Student – Landscape Architecture
Farzaneh Farahani	Student – Landscape Architecture
Katherine Mitchell	Student – Planning
Garrett Smith	Student – Planning
Shaun Poon	Student - Architecture