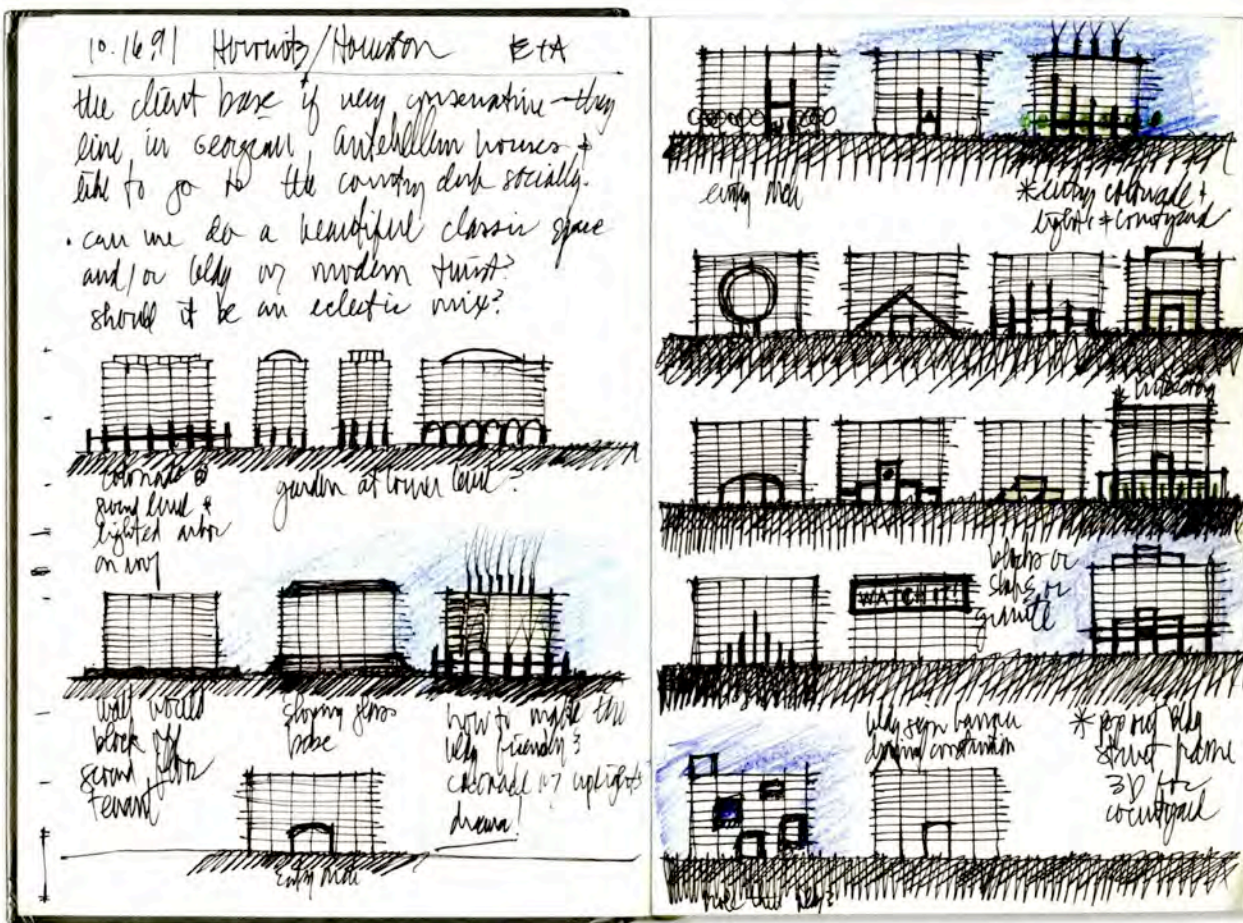


Texas Architect



Rand Elliott keeps all of his sketchbooks and often goes back to them for inspiration.

Elliott's "Ugly Drawings"

by Catherine Gavin

Rand Elliott, FAIA, grew up building model cars and drag racing with his older brother in the streets of Oklahoma City. Never following the instructions, he would make the small cars by twisting the plastic pieces from their stick stems and assembling them as he saw fit. Inevitably, there were parts left over, which Elliott kept in a box — the “ideas box.” As an architect, Elliott’s fascination with plastic has continued; his box of ideas, however, has gone from a collection of plastic car parts to a sketchbook.

Last January at the Texas Society of Architects 2014 Design Conference, Elliott spoke to an intimate group about his design process. A section of his talk he introduced as “Ugly Drawings,” going on to detail how the process of

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sketching is really an exercise in collecting ideas and emphasizing that these ideas need not be

perfect or even pretty drawings, but rather representations of thoughts. “I accept my ugly drawings for their power, not their grace,” said Elliott. “What I have learned [is that] for me it is not about beautiful. I can’t do that. What I can do is write countless words about what I am searching for. [I can] inscribe hundreds of cryptic marks in a sketchbook that become inspiration for an architectural vision. Sometimes I think the pen does it alone, without me.” Over the years, Elliott has gone back to his sketchbooks in much the same way that he turned to his kit of plastic parts as a child: They are a constant resource and inspiration.

When it comes to the architect’s modern-day kit of parts, sketching is just one of many tools. Books have been written about the death of sketching, and yet many architects still sketch — some even enjoy it. This issue looks at the design process and the multitude of tools architects turn to in order to make their ideas reality.

Catherine Gavin