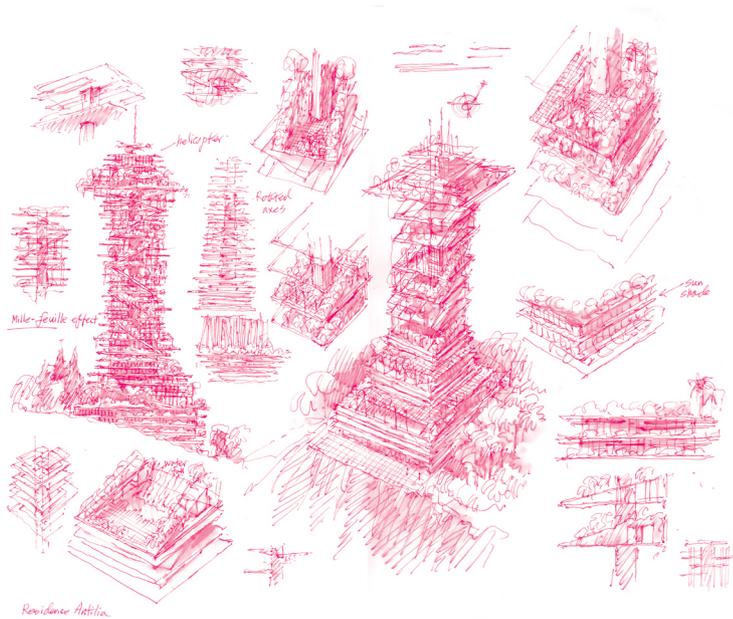


New York



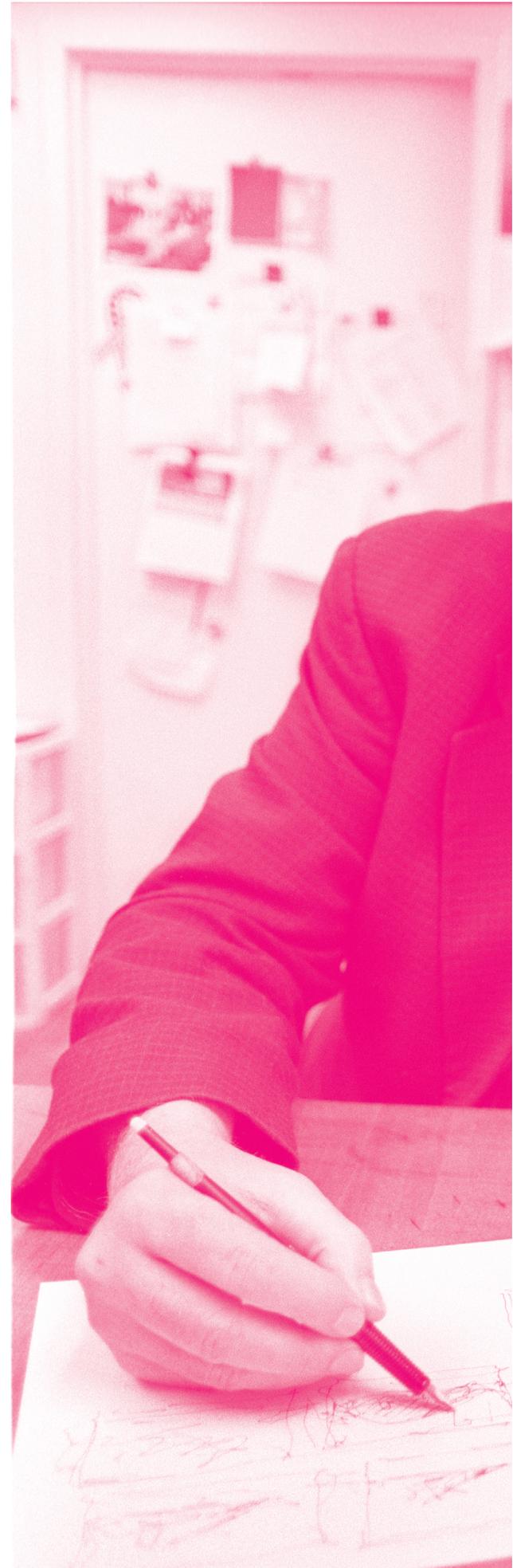
Antilia, a private residential tower, schematic design sketches, Mumbai, India, 2004.

The perpetual non-conformist has the last laugh.



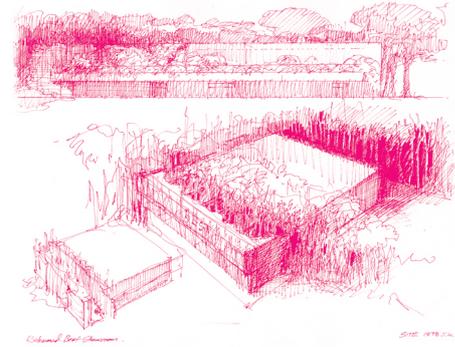
High Rise of Homes, proposal for multiple urban locations in the US, 1981.

JAMES WINES



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JAMES WINES



Best Forest Showroom, sketch for a catalogue showroom for the Best chain-store corporation, 1980.

Left, Wines doing what he does best: sketching in his office on Maiden Lane, in downtown Manhattan.

**Interview by
MICHAEL
BULLOCK,
Photography by
MIGUEL
VILLALOBOS.**



Best Peeling Showroom, catalogue showroom, 1971.

Opposite, Wines and his team discuss an upcoming exhibition at the office's communal conference table.

With his great white beard and jolly sense of humor, James Wines could be an architectural Father Christmas — and each building designed by his firm SITE a giant toy for the community. Since Wines founded the firm in 1969, SITE has gotten away with all kinds of tricks, turning department stores into forests and piles of bricks, museums into oceans of waves, and a skyscraper into the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. It even levitated a McDonald's. Although constantly blurring the lines between art and architecture, between the building and its environment, SITE's work should not be mistaken for Postmodern event design: the firm's special talent is to use alluring spectacle to focus attention on sustainability and to make radical



Best Notch Showroom, catalogue showroom, 1975.

ideas work for even the most commercial clients. So in this day and age, when “green” thinking has become so mainstream that even Wal-Mart has hired a former head of the Sierra Club, Adam Werbach, to make the big-box monster chain environmentally friendly, PIN-UP felt it was high time to meet with Wines, who, with his Best stores, figured out many of these issues decades ago.

Upon entering SITE's downtown-Manhattan office, it becomes immediately clear that this is not the corporate headquarters of some blue-chip architecture firm, but a friendly, family affair whose intellectual father figure is of course Wines himself. He sketches ceaselessly, a quick scribble of the hand supporting every thought, as if the pencil were a natural extension of his brain. Our conversation is frequently interrupted by his loud, infectious laugh, and by his charming wife, the jewelry designer Kriz Kizak, who works from the same office.

James Wines: So what kind of questions you got?

Michael Bullock: Let me start with the Best stores. They never get old!

JW: No, I guess they don't. I just sent a couple of images to a conference in Seattle about big-box stores because they are the only ones still doing business. The Best stores were a big turning point for SITE because up until then I was mainly doing sculpture, books, lectures, or theory.

MB: So one day you were speaking with the owner of Best and he tells you — what? “I need to spice up my showrooms”?

JW: Well, the owner of Best, Sydney Lewis, and his wife, Frances, were great collectors — they'd come into the city on weekends and go on a dozen studio visits. They had a real passion. They would have these big parties and they'd pack the whole art world into an airplane and fly everybody down to Virginia. So you were sitting there and everybody you could think of was on that plane. I remember Phillip Pearlstein saying, “What if this plane went down? It's the whole art world!” and Chuck Close was like, “Yeah, I know what it would be like. The headline in the *Post* would read ‘Andy Warhol and Friends Died in Plane Crash.’” So Sydney Lewis was being criticized because he was a big art collector and he was building these ugly box buildings.

MB: So he was being hypocritical and you proposed to fix his aesthetic hypocrisy?

JW: Exactly. How can you collect all this art and build these things? So I think he really took that to heart. But he was really public-minded; in fact, they were amazing people. But at first he thought we would just tag some art on the front, or hang something outside. He wasn't prescriptive at all and he didn't know what we were going to do. I don't know if he knew it would be affecting the whole building. This type of store is an icon in the way that it's just one big box. Our idea was to change the meaning.

MB: What was the first collaboration?

JW: The “Big Peel” building and the “Ghost” parking lot were going on simultaneously.

MB: When they were finished, he was obviously thrilled with them?

JW: He was, and they got a lot of amused customers.

MB: It's very rare to have a sense of humor translate into building.

JW: I was using architectural means to write commentary. The absurdity of the whole thing. And also the inversion of people's expectations: when you're driving down a highway you

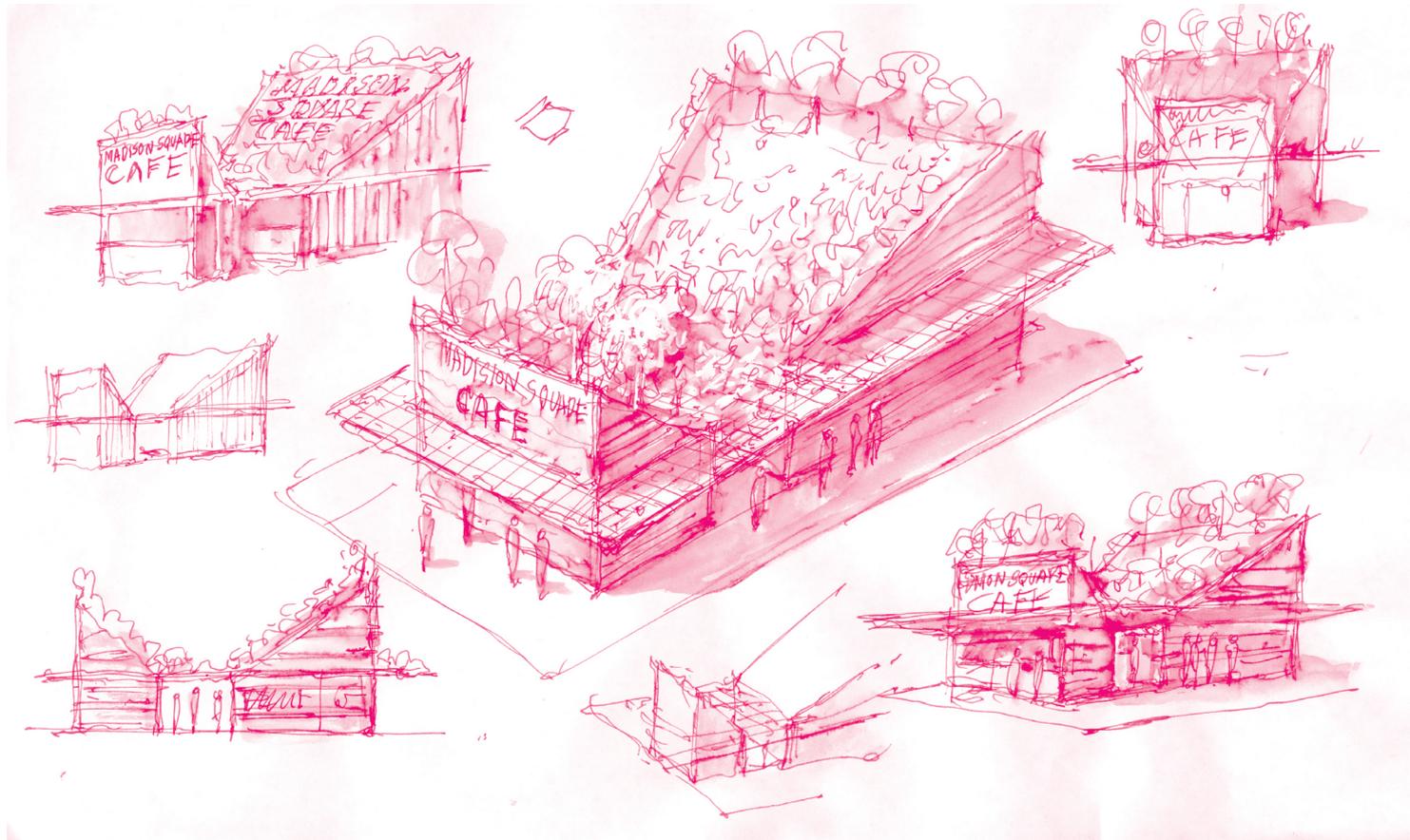




Villa Claudia - Roma

SITE J.W. Nov. 2002

Villa Claudia, design for a private house in Giandomenico Fabiani, Olgiata, near Rome, Italy, 2003.



Shake Shack, a restaurant in Madison Square Park, New York, 2004.

have all these built-up expectations, that is if you're thinking about it at all. I remember I heard people say, "I never thought about a building till I saw that!" It was funny: the foreign press was saying, "Phenomenal! Amazing! So American!" and the American publications were saying, "So un-American." [Laughs.]

MB: How did SITE begin?

JW: The 60s were when radical architecture was really starting again, here and in Europe. Everything was political: there were all kinds of rallies, events, and protests. Everybody was in that spirit of the moment, that drive to protest. In fact, architecture was one of the last to get into that arena. There had been an awful lot in art, and it wasn't until later that people realized, "My God! Architecture is the most public thing of all!" So we zeroed in on that premise. We just questioned a lot and it all just happened together at once. I found a lot of confreres who agreed with me kind of overnight. *Archizoom*, *Superstudio*, *UFO*, and *Archigram* were around already. And all those things happening at the Architecture Association in London all had protest at their core, or came out of it. So it was really interesting in that there was a lot of support — not official support, since there was no kind of gallery showing or whatever — but it became a kind of street art, intervention art, and events.

MB: How did you get connected with patrons for your bigger projects?

JW: There were definitely key people in the art world, like Sydney and Frances Lewis. They bought a sculpture of mine early on, and then one thing led to another and they got more and more involved. Back then there was a lot of this crisscrossing going on. Almost all the artists were hybrid in the late 60s. It was nearly impossible to find someone on the cutting edge who was purely a painter or sculptor. Things were moving out of the galleries, Land Art was starting; Gordon Matta-Clark, cutting up, slicing up, or totally changing architecture, expanding it into the environment.

MB: Were you friends with him?

JW: Oh yeah. There was a bunch of us on Greene Street, all within a block of each other: Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson, Alice Aycock, Hannah Wilke. It was an amazing exchange of ideas. But that was the early 70s. It would be hard to do now with the price of real estate.

MB: Is that something you feel is missing today?

JW: Absolutely! And it is also missing in the substance of the work. But then again, those things kind of go in cycles. If you look at French art just before Cubism, everybody was making big bucks, they were all millionaires and had estates in the country. It was pretty official that artists could become grand masters ... and then it happens again. But you always have to have a place for people to live. I see my daughter's generation and there's just no place to live with that kind of money when you have to pay \$2,000 to \$5,000 a month for your studio!

MB: So what made you move away from sculpture and break out of the art world?

JW: It was very organic. My recollection of it is that I was never a careerist. By the time the 80s came around, artists started really being into making money. And they could, so you kind of had to fit into some group, like Neo-expressionist, or whatever. In the 70s there was never any talk of that.

MB: For you it was more about the thrill of seeing your ideas become reality?

JW: More like getting away with it! [Laughs.]

MB: When you were making the jump from sculpture to architecture, were you nervous?

JW: Well, no, because I always thought there was something limiting about being confined to sculpture.

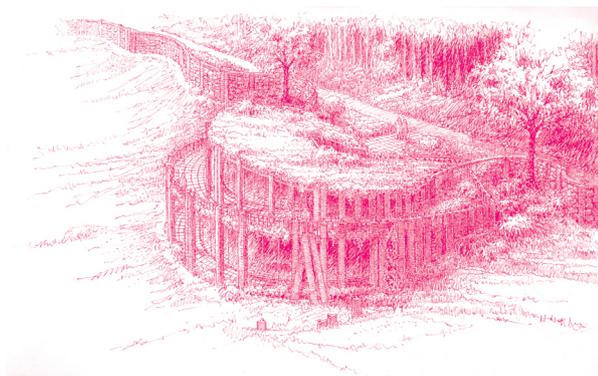
MB: Is architecture sculpture on a much bigger scale?

JW: Architecture is more liberating. As I look back at that period, the most interesting things become performance, or Land Art, or architecture; the public domain became more interested. But, interestingly, of those artists who emerged, the majority had a background in sculpture.

MB: So it was a starting place to generate ideas that then grew into other venues?

JW: Yeah, because it was somewhat confining and you had certain duties: size, or whatever.

MB: Is that why you love drawing so much, because there are no boundaries?



Sculpture Farm, a memorial visitors pavilion and private sculpture park in Briosco, Italy, 1999–2004.

JW: Well, for most architects graphic representation is notational, technical, or illustrative and mainly used as an analytical tool to record design intentions. I consider drawing more as a way of exploring the physical and psychological state of inclusion, suggesting that buildings can be fragmentary and ambiguous, as opposed to conventionally functional and determinate.

MB: So when it comes to actually building, do you partner with someone more technical to translate the ideas in your drawings?

JW: We get along with architects, and we just collaborate. We always have, since the very beginning, with everyone sitting around a table: architects, engineers, visual artists, and we were just pulling minds from everyone. That's what made it interesting. We would sit around in some restaurant always discussing the idea of what's possible.

MB: Now it's the Shake Shack [SITE's design for Madison Square Park in Manhattan]?

JW: Well, a lot of people show up at the Shake Shack, but I have a feeling that they're not necessarily talking about art.

MB: The Shake Shack is amazing because it fits into the park so seamlessly that you don't notice it, especially with the green roof.

JW: Well, the idea was not to jump out like a sore thumb in a Victorian setting.

MB: How did you come to do the Shake Shack?

JW: Danny Meyer and Madison Square Park approached us. We could never have done it if it had been a new addition to the park. But apparently, when the park was designed in the 19th century, they had intended to put some type of kiosk there, but it never got built. So thankfully they didn't have to fight that battle.

