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Morris Richardson II / The Detroit News

Lawrence Tech student Kimberly Volmering looks at a model of Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Township, which was designed by Minoru Yamasaki, a late Metro Detroit architect who also designed the World Trade Center.

Detroit Studio class explores city's streets

Students envision community upgrade

By Christopher M. Singer / *The Detroit News*

A good architect walks the streets like a poet trying to soak up the texture of a place, Joongsub Kim teaches his students.

So Kimberly Thomas of Chicago shot photos of the neighborhood around Davison and Rosa Parks boulevards. And Robert Ferguson of Madison Heights is studying its demographics.

These junior-year students, along with classmates from Lawrence Technological University, are immersing themselves in the area as part of a creative, educational link



David Coates/The Detroit News

Lawrence Tech student Robert Ferguson, right, works on an exercise as architecture professor Joongsub Kim assists him.

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between the Southfield collegians and west-side Detroit blocks.

Elders of Greater Quinn African Methodist Episcopal Church, on Rosa Parks at Davison, this year commissioned The Detroit Studio to design a new church at its current site.

The studio is an off-campus classroom, in Detroit's New Center, that was launched in 1999 by Lawrence's College of Architecture and Design. It gives juniors a chance to gain hands-on experience in design and community development, while performing a free service.

Currently, 34 future architects are learning that sidewalk-level research must be done before they think about the new building's shape, size, materials and cost.

"The first seven weeks of class will be spent understanding the area," said Kim, an assistant professor.

Early 20th century roots

Their clients at Quinn Church hope the replacement site will be a catalyst for revitalizing the neighborhood, which dates to the early auto boom around 1910-30.

Quinn was founded in the 1920s, and is now at its third location, said Quinn's pastor, the Rev. Daniel Reid.

His church initially was in Hamtramck, then on Cameron on Detroit's near-east side. In the 1960s, it moved north and west.

Older members find it increasingly difficult to move around the church because of stairs and multiple levels, Reid explained. At the same time, he added, the 625-member congregation is outgrowing its building as young newcomers join.

The church owns several lots in 10 blocks around its base, and Reid has grand plans -- including housing and a day care center -- once the current church is demolished and his congregation gains a new home.

The Design Studio

* **Location:** 2990 W. Grand Blvd. in Detroit's New Center.

* **Mission:** It serves as an off-campus classroom for junior-year architecture students at Lawrence Technological University, based in Southfield. It provides free design and urban planning services to community groups.

* **Coordinator:** Joongsub Kim, assistant professor of architecture

* **Phone:** (313) 871-0408



Bridget A. Barrett / The Detroit News

The Rev. Daniel Reid stands in front of Greater Quinn A.M.E. Church in Detroit, where Lawrence Tech students will design a new building for the church's growing congregation.

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Kim sees the area as ideal because the Davison Freeway ends at Rosa Parks. The freeway literally funnels traffic to Quinn's doorstep.

Reid said about 85,000 cars a day go through that intersection.

"It is a busy intersection," observed student Hassan Hammoud of Windsor, Ontario. "It has potential for businesses. Let's give it hope and maybe people will go there."

Full-service approach

The Detroit Studio, fittingly, is across West Grand Boulevard from Albert Kahn's Fisher Building -- one of the city's architectural gems. Kim, a 44-year-old assistant professor of architecture, early last month was named as his college's coordinator of Detroit projects during the 2002-03 academic year.

Kim and his students will go beyond sketching one new church.

"The goal of the studio is to present multiple plans," including several financing possibilities, he said. There's no cost estimate or time frame yet for the project.

The neighborhood now is a patchwork of used-to-be's, next door to new. The 1967 riot began just on Rosa Parks at Clairmount, now marked by a vest-pocket park.

Fast food outlets dot Davison between Rosa Parks and Livernois. There's a big new supermarket on Davison at Linwood.

The Dexter-Davison Jewish market, with its old-country smells and cosmopolitan ambience, used to be in the area. The Fred J. Sanders factory also was nearby once. Another landmark of sorts, a house on Indiantale that was the local Black Panther Party headquarters, is gone as well.

Impact on community

Michigan Bell Telephone Co. had a big facility on Oakman Boulevard, which now is a part of the sprawling Focus: HOPE complex. It was Focus: HOPE economic development advisers who sent Reid to The Design Studio.

"What we want is to build a new sanctuary, first of all," explained the pastor, who is also an attorney.

After that, Reid envisions housing for senior citizens, a community center, day care center and low- to moderate-income housing. Quinn owns scattered properties on both sides of Davison up to La Salle Boulevard.

For the Lawrence architecture professor, helping the church is an ideal fit for The Design Studio.

"We continue to look for projects that benefit neighborhoods," Kim said. "We solicit projects that benefit everybody in southeastern Michigan.

Kim came to the United States from South Korea in 1983 and was trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

He admires architect Minoru Yamasaki, a late Metro Detroit architect who designed the World Trade Center and local landmarks. Since his students are designing a church, Kim took them on a field trip to Temple Beth-El on Telegraph at West 14 Mile in Oakland County, a striking

1974 structure that Yamasaki designed.

In his 1979 book, "A Life in Architecture," Yamasaki described the building -- designed to symbolize an ancient Hebrew prayer tent -- as "a monumental space."

Attractive vs. practical

Thomas Jablonski, executive director of the congregation and tour guide, told the students last week that Yamasaki spent a huge amount of time at the 30-acre site to ensure his clients would be satisfied.

He also pointed out that as times change, design shortcomings can emerge.

A rental hall used for events like wedding receptions, for example, was never designed for high-intensity lights for video cameras, stacks of amplifiers for rock bands and other electronics of the 21st century. Temple Beth-El had to install upgraded transformers to meet its energy needs.

Student Kimberly Thomas, who comes from Chicago's south side and already has an interior design degree, recognized immediately how the field trip will influence the Quinn project.

"Other architecture students haven't had the exposure that we have," she noted. "Like at Quinn Church, they eat a lot." Her point was that its new designs should allow plenty of room for cooking and serving banquet-style meals.

Lesson of shivering rabbis

Another lesson came from the fact that the all-concrete synagogue, with heating-cooling ducts hidden under the concrete for esthetic reasons, is difficult to cool with zone air-conditioning that adapts to different needs. As a result, the rabbis' offices are bone-chilling when larger public spaces must be cooled.

Students got the point.

"God is in the details," Chicago architect Mies Van Der Rowe said. Shivering rabbis are not a minor detail.

Another observation came in the sanctuary, surrounded by unbroken walls of glass. Yamasaki envisioned that landscaping would shield worshipers from nearby traffic on busy Telegraph.

Didn't work, Jablonski answered in response to a student's question about the constant stream of vehicles. Headlights are a distraction during Friday night Sabbath services, he acknowledged.

And back at Quinn, Reid wouldn't object to a glass and steel modernist church. "I'd like to have people see something nice like in Oakland County," he said.



David Coates/The Detroit News

Joongsub Kim, left, an assistant architecture professor, talks with student Nicole Cosbitt during an integrated design class.

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