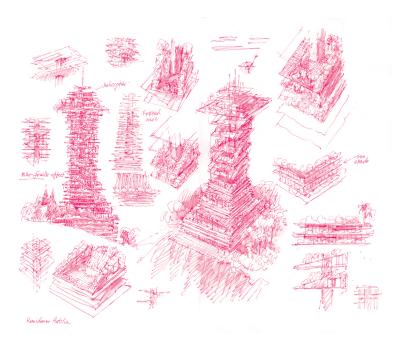
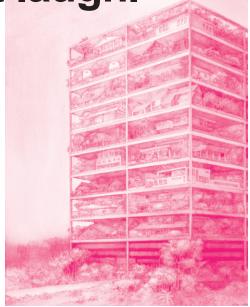
## **New York**



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

The perpetual nonconformist has the last laugh.



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

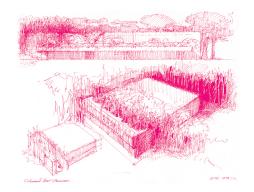
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## **JAMES WINES**



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 head-quarters 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

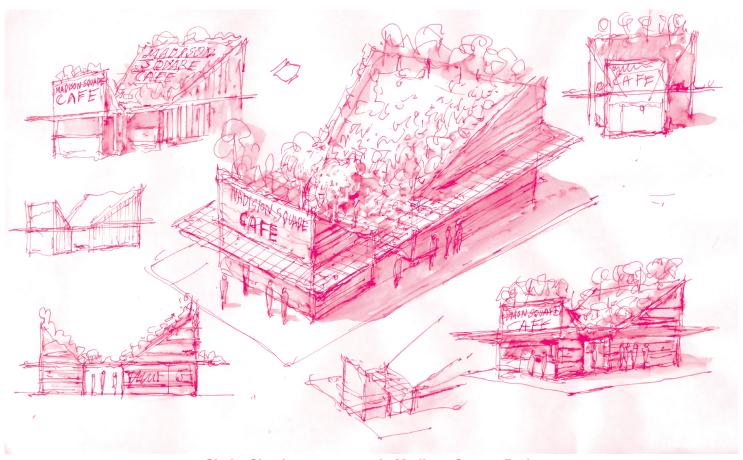


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Villa Claudia, design for a private house in Giandomenico Fabiani, Olgiata, near Rome, Italy, 2003.



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.

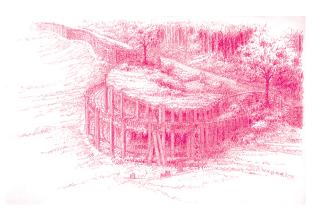
MB: Is architecture sculpture on a much bigger scale?

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.



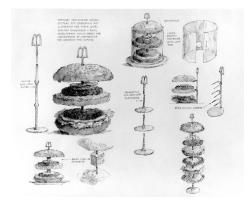
Sketch of a courtyard design for a corporate headquarters, Mumbai, India, 2004.

MB: Is it your only building in New York City?

JW: Yeah, well, there is the second Shake Shack. It's a franchise. The new one is on 77th and Columbus, across from the American Museum of Natural History. Our design was voted by a poll of New York Architects as one of the most beloved buildings in the city. It was the UN Headquarters, the Whitney Museum, Lincoln Center, and the Shake Shack! And what's funny is that while we were designing a 500-square-foot kiosk, we were simultaneously developing this housing concept design for 1 million square feet.

MB: It's amazing that while SITE takes on prestigious large-scale projects like the museum of Islamic Arts in Qatar, it's still up for designing a burger kiosk. While we're on the topic of fast food, I have to ask about the floating McDonald's.

JW: Someone wanted to build a McDonald's on one of



Floating McDonald's, Berwyn, Illinois, 1984.

## Opposite, Antilia, a private residential tower, schematic design sketch, Mumbai, India, 2004.

our client's parking lots, and he said, "If you want to build on my property, you have to use my architect." It was in 1983, and McDonald's had just gotten their new look, and we thought, Well, we *have* to use this. So we just twisted that look around and did it comically, keeping all of the ingredients of that archetype, except that the parts were separated: the roof and the walls — everything was floating.

MB: Does it still exist?

JW: Yeah, but apparently they painted it and got rid of all the natural materials.

MB: Do any of the Best stores still exist?

JW: Only the forest building, but it's a church now, and they destroyed all the trees.

MB: Why would they destroy the trees? That was the whole point.

JW: I don't understand it either. They were actually growing really well. We made a great effort to free up the roots so they would grow over the years. And then, since they were protected — because they were inside the building — they grew even better. It was the perfect nature building: the interior was all covered in vines and the amount of greenery was unbelievable. The whole building looked like a garden.

MB: Well, in a way it was the precursor of this project. [Points to a drawing of Antilia, SITE's design for a tower in India that is completely covered in greenery.] This looks spectacular! Is it being built?

JW: Well, this was going to be a house with a series of public gardens, like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. For the research we read up a lot on the Gardens of Babylon because apparently they were around for almost 2,000 years as a sort of arboretum where you could go see all the plant life. The support system for the project is ingenious. I thought of it myself and I was very proud. I thought so much time and money is spent getting the materials to the top, why not build the floors on the ground and pull them up with the truss? So it's just a simple tower with an elevator core and a huge truss. Our engineer got really excited, but unfortunately in the end the client gave it to some local architect who did something similar but much cheaper. What drives me nuts is that these people have now turned it into a high-rise private home. I don't know if any of the public aspects survived.

MB: I find it amazing that six years ago if you said the word "green" you were a hippie, and now it's this trendy thing. You figured out how to be green and make it enjoyable for the public way before anyone else. You've always combined sustainability issues without compromising pleasure.

JW: Well, it's a big question, that transition from making environmental commentary to being really concerned. That's a big difference. How do you continue to be reasonably inventive and look seriously at these restraints? Because these restraints could lead to the world's worst architecture, and often they do. Most "green" buildings are pretty bad buildings. It's hard to find "LEED approved" buildings that have any interest whatsoever. I don't think it has to be like that. In Italy, this whole field of sustainable architecture has been around for hundreds of years. There's a 600-year-old town in Italy, I think it's San Gimignano, and it's still in active use, and beautiful. My next book is actually going to expand on how the word "green" has become generic. It's "green wash," it's everywhere! General Motors is green, George W. Bush is green, Exxon is green, it's absurd! But I try to be optimistic about it, and I do think the industry is realizing it can't go on the same way forever. I know for a fact it's really affected a lot of architects' business: Frank Gehry lost a lot of work in one year. Nobody wants to spend that kind of money and then be heavily criticized for using titanium and aluminum, and all these obscene materials. We're really entering a period where the pressure is on. Hopefully that will inspire a whole new dialogue. You don't have to build ugly just to be green. In that sense we could be headed toward the greatest period we've yet lived through. Your generation may be lucky yet.

MB: That's good — I'm sick of being jealous of your generation!

— Michael Joseph Bullock is the US publisher and coeditor of *BUTT* and the publishing consultant for PIN–UP.