

# LEARNING TO BE INVISIBLE: A CARPENTER'S STORY

A. Henry Rose  
M. ARCH I  
Fall 2016



*"Beloved" - stone, turquoise, wire, 24" (2006)*

It is easy to cry out for attention, and only slightly more difficult to remain silent. What is hard is to speak softly, and well.

This is not to suggest a bold gesture should not be attempted, still less to advocate for minimalism.

I only mean to say that the strongest work, to me, has a similar elegance and repose. It is grounded with great restraint.

*"But Break my Heart, For I Must Hold my Tongue" – brush and ink, 8" (2015)*





## A Woman Carefully Sweeps at Honen-in

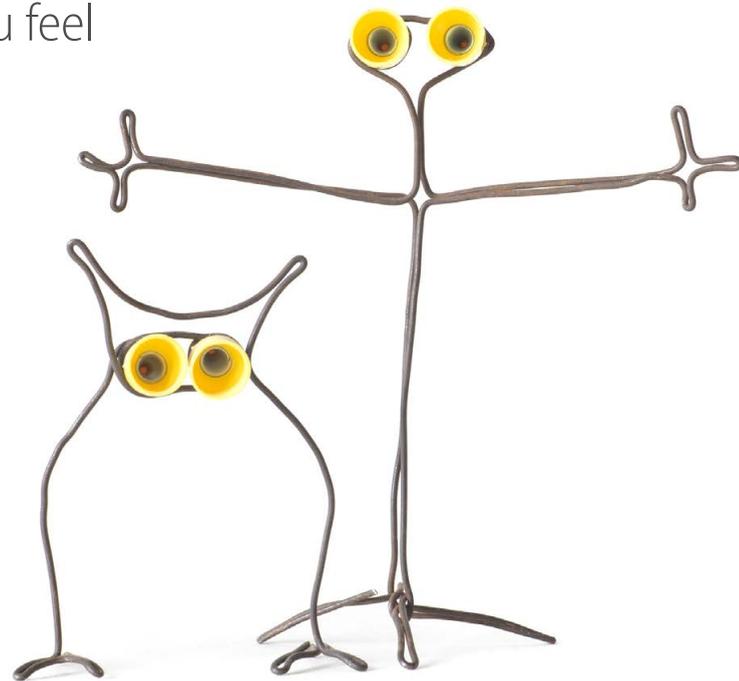
When I arrived that morning another man was perched on an embankment to the left (just out of sight), painstakingly whisking fallen leaves from the moss among the roots with a small brush.

It was a special moment. It was as if he were sweeping the forest itself, and I realized the magic I felt here was no accident. It was the reverence of these people, embodied, and this was how they worshiped.

It is not an idea of beauty that I seek.

When I build, my goal is for the experience to be primary. I want the object to vanish into its use, and beauty is only relevant if it serves this purpose.

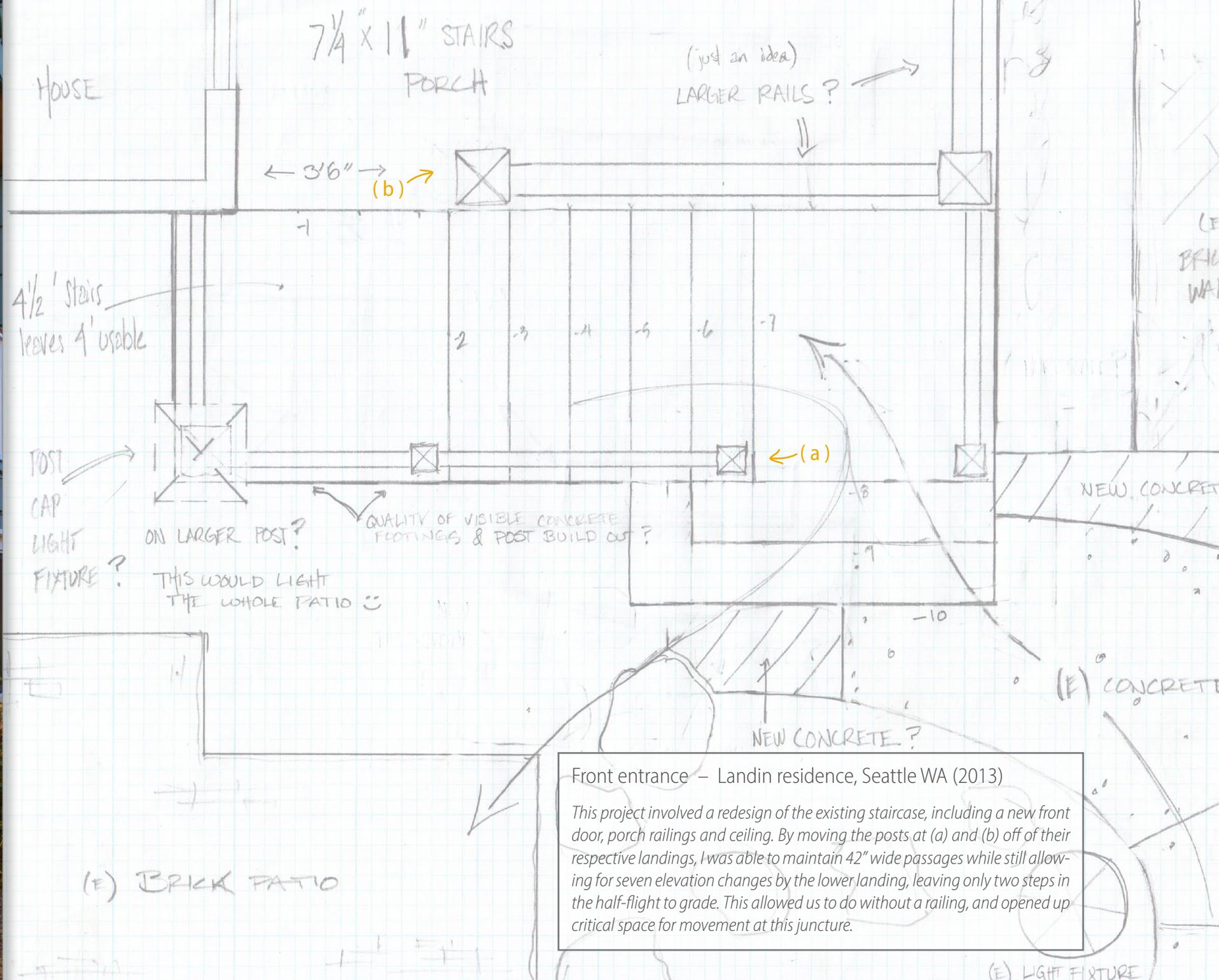
What matters is how you feel when you walk in the door—day after day, year after year. It should feel like coming home. The work simply needs to get out of the way.



*"Friends" – wire nuts and wire, 6" (2009)*



*"Tables are for Cups" – found objects, 18" (2010)*



Front entrance – Landin residence, Seattle WA (2013)

This project involved a redesign of the existing staircase, including a new front door, porch railings and ceiling. By moving the posts at (a) and (b) off of their respective landings, I was able to maintain 42" wide passages while still allowing for seven elevation changes by the lower landing, leaving only two steps in the half-flight to grade. This allowed us to do without a railing, and opened up critical space for movement at this juncture.



**ARVIDS**

**UPPER LANDING**

$\frac{1}{4} + 3\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + 5\frac{1}{2}$   
 $7\frac{1}{2} + 5\frac{1}{2} = 12$

**STAIRS (UP)**

**LOWER LANDING**

**LOWER STAIRS**

**POSTS**

WINDSOR  
 1x6 wrap pre-primed 8'(6)

**FASCIA**

T&G cedar 1x8 10'(2)  
 2x4 (2)  
 3/8 TREATED PLY 1/2 SHEET 12'(1)

**RISERS**

1x or 5/4 x 8  
 8'(2)  
 10'(6)  
 12'(1)

10 DAYS  
 • ROGER

OLD DOMINION FREIGHT LINES  
 24 HR. PRIOR CALL  
 45m. unload time  
 skid \$525  
 haul \$1,375

4' (20)  
 5' (12)  
 6' (12)  
 7' (2)  
 8' (2)  
 34

DIAPHRAGM  
 UPPER





## Chicago's Giant Bean: An Object in Use

In this photograph I wanted to capture the people. I wanted to capture how they swirled about rapt in the acid reflections, huddled in coats trying new vantages, laden with shopping bags, speaking foreign languages, lying on the ground with their friends laughing, all ineluctably complicit on this crisp February evening.

Did they approach and say, this is big and metallic and silver—? No. Without a word they said: This is *wonderful*.

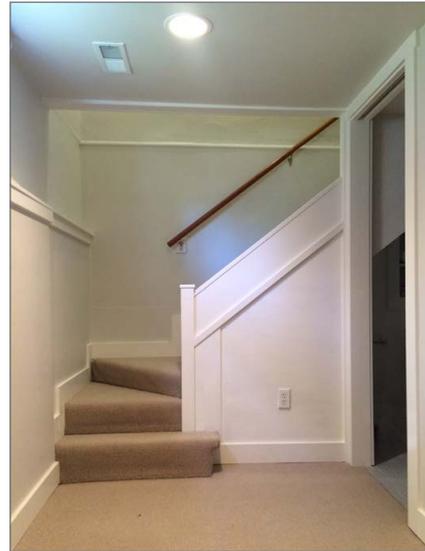
Millennium Park, Chicago  
35mm film (2015)

# HOW TO DISAPPEAR:

What I think about when I work

1 Heed context. The environment dictates what is needed; the object is just a response.

Every house has a corner where things don't line up. It could be exterior grades, or it could be a mess of millwork held together by bevels and caulk and thin pieces of veneer poorly glued onto things (pictured). In these situations I chose priorities and extrapolate a hierarchy of forms that will organize a collection of unrelated surfaces. In other words: I go in, untangle, and vanish. There's nothing glamorous about it, but this is my favorite kind of work.



3 Start at the end. No amount of brilliance on the page can redeem a mis-managed project.

Lead times need to be sorted out early and fixtures need to be on site asap. The knowledge of which lumber yard has the best cedar and who stocks the most moulding profiles and where I can quickly find 4" pvc fittings, say, or stainless cap head screws is invaluable.

# A PRACTICAL GUIDE

2 Make it last. What is broken calls more attention to itself than anything.



Particular care should be given to things that move (like doors) and things that get wet. All it takes is for one water drop to go the wrong way—another will follow. Slopes should be 1/4" per foot minimum, sealant alone is always insufficient, ground contact should be made exclusively by metal or plastic or masonry, and end-grain needs copious ventilation. When waging the war against water, coordinating drainage, shingling and capillary breaks is the only long-term defense. As for the moving parts: just reinforce them—a lot.

4 Build with reverence. It will remain long after you are gone.

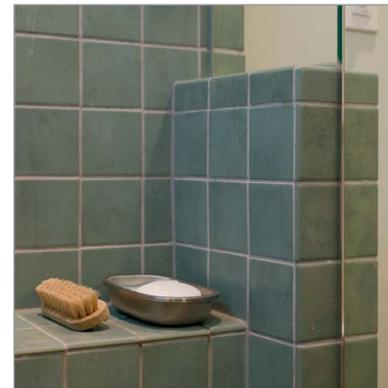
The previous three alone are only adequate. When this last is added something special happens. The work becomes its own guarantor: people will notice, they will take ownership, and they will take care. I am willing to venture that the world's most beloved buildings all share this quality.





Bathroom – Tarleton residence, Seattle WA (2010)

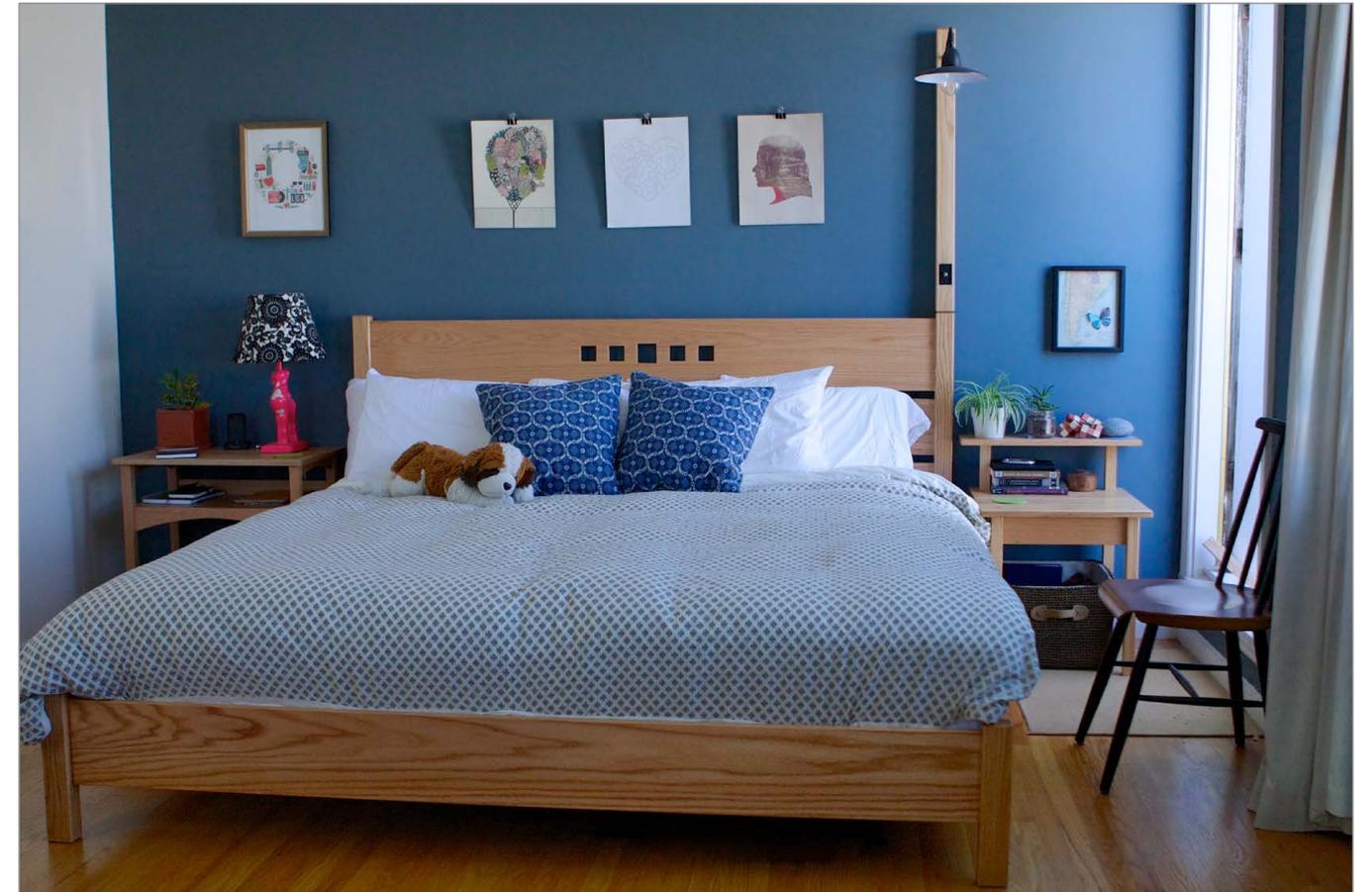
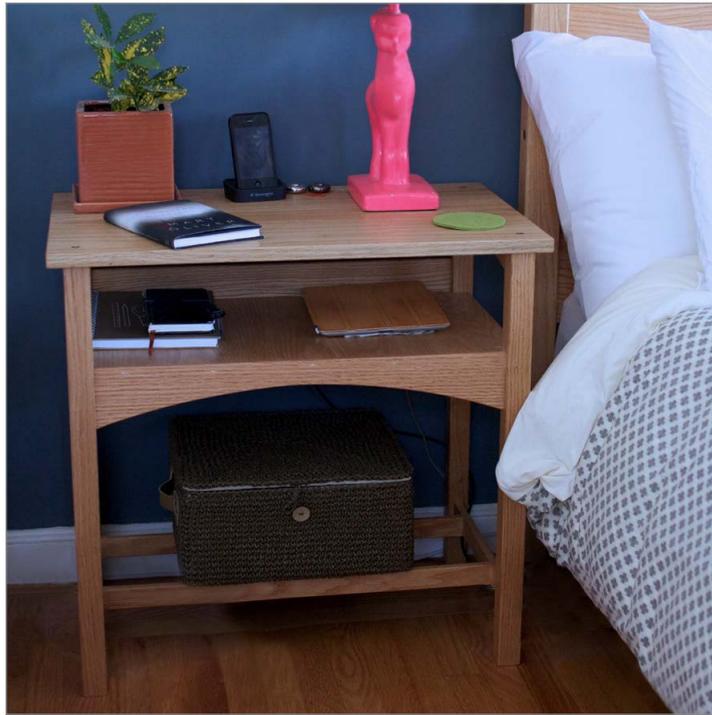
*I was responsible for design, management, general contracting and finish work; subcontractors were employed for plumbing, HVAC, electrical, sheet-rock, cabinetry, stone, tile. The project took four months and began with a complete demolition, including a new joist layout to accommodate the placement of the shower drain. On the right is a detail of a shelf concealed behind the pony wall on the hinge side of the shower door.*



*Above is a detail of the shower glass that drops onto the stone of the vanity, which wraps uninterrupted above the concealed tank for the wall hung toilet (left) and into a shallow recess that was carved out of dead space next to the refrigerator in the kitchen adjacent.*

*Because all surfaces were contiguous, tolerances were tight. I had to confirm, for example, that the flange from the undermount sink could be trimmed to allow for the shallowest counter-depth possible before I could frame the pony wall that forms the opening to the shower. Clearance for the little cabinet door (left) also presented an intricate challenge.*





Master bedroom set – Aviza-Sung residence, San Francisco CA (2013)

*Constructed of solid oak, fully mortised. Features include an integrated lamppost that can be used on either side, and a rectangular nightstand that can be oriented in both directions allowing for different centering options in the room.*

## Fifth Avenue, Central Park

What I love most about this photograph is the ghost of 5th Avenue, just barely visible. Do you see the buildings, shrouded in mist, filtered through the elms?

It made sense. There was the iconic 5th Avenue, concealed in the same measure as its conceit was exposed. What made 5th special was the park. The importance of those buildings, I realized, had everything to do with what they were not.

ROSE 20



*Central Park Mall, New York – 35mm film (2015)*



*"Episteme" – wood, wire, fabric, resin, asphalt  
42" x 60" (crop 30" x 60") 2007*



*Fisherman's Terminal  
35mm film (2014)*

Somewhere there are people who know every inch of these boats, what every last thing does, where it will break and how to fix it. It was an entire world I drove by every week I passed those dockyards, full of people with penetrating knowledge and skill and of things relevant in a way I could only imagine.

[My faith in humanity actually stems from this understanding.](#)

If the subtext of pessimism is the lack of knowledge and the veiled sense of impotence this brings, then, knowing that I do not know, I choose rather to trust that there are people who do—good people who in their own way care deeply about their worlds.



*inlay from a Pantera pinball deck*



*Kraus, feeding the laminated sections where we had room*





Bar Installation – John John's Arcade Room, Seattle WA (2015)

*This project was a collaboration. Kraus was responsible for the concept; I was in charge of the execution. The bar is made of over 120 poplar strips that taper toward each end. We accomplished this using a planer and adjusting the height as the boards were fed through. They were laid up in place using a jig on a temporary table.*



## A City is Built By Hand

To replace the highway that you see, a tunnel-boring machine 60 feet in diameter and 300 feet long is slowly grinding through rock and mud and leaving behind a smooth hollow cylinder of pre-formed concrete panels.

When I found this vantage in the twilight a strange tension captivated me. The machines at rest were telling. Maybe the operator was even more evident in her absence, the mechanic all the more needed, but I could sense that despite the magnitude of the endeavor, it still had a human scale.





## Ten Million Tessellae

*"Many experts believe that a work of such magnitude could not be re-created at any price today."*

I read this in a brochure; I stopped. Which experts? Maybe it feels profligate to hand-set millions of flecks of marble and glass, but that only means our values have changed.

As to whether we can still build treasures, things we cherish, keep and revere—if this is the challenge those experts pose, then I accept.

*Lakewood Memorial Chapel  
Minneapolis – 35mm film (2015)*

