

**The American Institute of Architects  
Small Project Awards  
2023 Recipient**

**Jade Alley**

**Architecture firm:** Daniel Toole Architecture, SB Architects

**Owner:** DACRA

**Location:** Miami

**Category:** Two

**Project site:** Previously developed

**Building program type(s):** Mixed-use

Additional information

Project attributes

Year of substantial project completion: 2019

Gross conditioned floor area: 0 sq. ft.

Project team

Design Architect: Daniel Toole Architecture

Architect of Record: SB Architects

Architect of Record (Moore Building renovation): Village Architects

General Contractor: Coastal Construction

Engineer - Structural: McNamara/Salvia

Engineer - Civil: Ford Engineers

Lighting: Speirs Major

Landscape Architect: Island Planning Corporation

# AIA Small Project Awards

## 2023 Recipient

*Information from online submission form*

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<b>Project Name</b>	Jade Alley
<b>Project Category</b>	Up to \$2.5 million in construction cost
<b>Completion Date</b>	1/2/2018

### Project Statement

This alleyway revitalization project is part of a large-scale master planned redevelopment of a defunct warehouse district north of downtown Miami. Over the last few years, multiple phases of new building and programming through a partnership between a local developer and a larger international entity have created the visionary new Design District. We were asked to conceptualize a vision for an underutilized alley, that would bring a fresh new life for this abandoned space. The scope included the alley itself, facades of new mixed-use buildings fronting the alley, the renovation of trash rooms in an existing building into small tenant spaces for the alley, as well as a paving and landscape concept. With no precedents in the city for an activated alley, there was hesitancy if businesses could survive being tucked off the main street, but this place has quickly become a major destination in the district, with multiple long-term tenants, restaurants, art installations, as well as food trucks, and various other programs all thriving within it.

### Project Overview

This intervention within a recently revitalized district of Miami elevates an alleyway into an iconic public place. The project is in the Miami Design District, an area north of downtown Miami that was once pineapple farms, then furniture warehouses, and recently has been revitalized into a major destination with a unique mix of art, retail, fashion, dining, design, and architecture. Through a visionary development and planning team, the district has grown in multiple phases adding new buildings and public spaces, while preserving pieces of the existing fabric. This project revitalizes a leftover alley within this unique neighborhood.

When we began the project, this alley was surrounded by trash rooms, dumpsters, mechanical rooms, transformers, and haphazard parking. The design concept grows out of a ruin-like composition of various sized concrete parabolic arches inserted into the alley, like a miniature viaduct that becomes a new urban structure unifying the future and past - bringing new form, scale, rhythm, and order to the space. Cast in rough sawn board forms, the project seeks to draw from and preserve the rough and informal atmosphere of the original alleyway. The parabolic arch geometry was applied in various ways to new storefronts along the alley and scaled down to transform trash and mechanical rooms of the existing Moore building into small retail and dining spaces to be leased by local businesses. Flowering trees and lush regional plantings throughout create a comfortable microclimate where people find relief from the Miami heat.

As the neighborhood develops, the alley catalyzes new forms of gathering and community expression. Jade alley is the only space in the district that allows smaller locally owned businesses the opportunity to have affordable rents in an otherwise international luxury brand dominated streetscape. In addition to regional and global visitors, Jade Alley also serves as the favorite spot for local workers to take their breaks, as well as students from the local design and fashion magnet high school to enjoy time between classes. An evolving series of murals and art installations by local and global artists such as Virgil Abloh, along with free activities including art walks, family craft days, maker markets, group yoga, and musical performances have cemented this space into Miami's cultural scene, and it has only continued to thrive during the pandemic.

## **Project History**

Following a local AIA-funded research grant, the designers published a book of alleyway research several years ago to showcase travel and lessons learned from alleys around the world. The developers for the Design District found this book online and contacted the design team and had them visit and meet with the master planning team to see if any ideas might arise for this alley that they hoped to preserve and breathe new life into. On this first trip to Miami, the concept for Jade Alley was sketched out the second day after walking around and taking in the surrounding neighborhoods and architecture. A few years later, following extensive excavation and mediation of multiple historic utilities found under the site, construction on the new alley started.

Multiple adjustments took place during construction that are a reality of an urban space upgrade – emergency vehicle access requirements pushed various arches further in towards the courtyard, newly signed tenants asked for multiple arches to be removed worrying about blocked storefronts and structural codes necessitated vertically cantilevering the arches from grade beams and leaving an 8" gap at existing and new surrounding buildings to ensure they could coexist in severe weather. Eventually the alley finished, pop up leases were signed for the smaller retail spaces, and a couple years later, larger retail and restaurant tenants opened onto the alley as well. By this time, concerns about visibility had waned, and now all businesses in the alley have signed multiple year leases due to the success and vibrancy that only continues to grow with each year in this revitalized alley space. This alley has become one of the most visited, photographed, and instagrammed spaces in the Design District, and is recognized throughout Miami. It continues to host events, installations, tours, and many community activities. It has been the backdrop for fashion shows, engagement photos, music videos, art installations including a permanent Virgil Abloh sculpture, and numerous other public art programs. It serves as a model for the successful revitalization of a leftover alley space into a significant new form of public space.

## **Framework for Design Excellence**

### **Design for Integration**

The concept for Jade Alley is based on the integration of a timeless ruin-like series of concrete arches within a leftover urban space to create something completely new for the community. Through the rhythm and structure of different sizes of cast in place concrete arches, these freestanding elements give order to the future of this public space and surrounding buildings. Rather than close off the space for private use, the project sought to increase publicly accessible pedestrian space within the district, reclaiming this alley from dumpsters and unstructured parking for the community and businesses alike to enjoy.

The design seeks to engage the senses through its vibrant mix of programs and activities, ordered by the large parabolic arches of various sizes to create a visually, acoustically, and thermally different type of intimate urban public space uncommon to the car-dependent sprawl of Miami. The heavily textured arches celebrate light and shadow and give form to a unique promenade hidden between old and new buildings. The board form marks transform familiar concrete into an unexpected tactile encounter with wood, which is not commonly found in Miami's extreme climate. The parabolic geometry is inspired by the local legacy of the arch within Miami's architectural history, from its evolution in the Spanish Revival style to the eccentric midcentury modernism of Morris Lapidus.

To make this alley a space for all, pavement, entries, and transitions to sidewalks were completely rebuilt and engineered to current accessibility standards. Existing utilities and trash services were consolidated into shared spaces to free up the facades facing into the alley. Service takes place late at night when a retractable bollard is removed, allowing short-term vehicular access to the newly pedestrianized space. Care was given to maintain, restore, and revitalize existing buildings to minimize new construction and to give new life to the surrounding structures, some of which are over a hundred years old. Jade Alley has transformed a leftover forgotten space into an iconic public space that will likely last another hundred years, if not more.

### **Design for Equitable Communities**

Despite being in a luxury-focused neighborhood, the alley was designed to be enjoyed by everyone from the surrounding communities. Proper new lighting, regraded paving, and planting make this an accessible, safe, and cool public space for all to enjoy year-round. This is one of the only places in the neighborhood where a purchase is not necessary to enjoy the unique space. In amongst the arches, the rough materiality and mix of new and historic buildings creates a tranquil, shaded, and informal atmosphere where many retail and restaurant workers, as well as local high school students take breaks and relax, in addition to tourists and shoppers from around the world.

### **Design for Ecosystem**

Regional trees and plants were selected for blossom colors, smell, and resilience in the tropical climate. These work together to cool and shade the alley space, creating an environment that relates to the regional landscape. Each year the plants mature and continue to cover the space, even attracting a local family of parakeets that spend afternoons in the two flowering trees in the courtyard. In addition to local plantings, familiar building materials like cast in place concrete, recycled brick, and hurricane-rated storefront systems were used to ensure minimal maintenance and a long life for the project.

### **Design for Water**

By reclaiming the alley from parking, dumpsters, and the litter commonly found in urban Miami alleys, pollution runoff is significantly reduced. The addition of planted ground areas, permeable pavements, and extensive planted roofs around the alley, greatly reduce impermeable surfaces and provide shade that counters the heat island effect.

### **Design for Economy**



With the construction of the arches and other associated improvements, this derelict alley has transformed into an active public space lined with local and internationally owned shops, offices, and restaurants. Despite the up-front costs of the new design, this area was drastically transformed into a vibrant mixed-use environment from what used to be back of house waste and utility space.

### **Design for Energy**

The alley itself is exterior space completely free of mechanical services for heating and cooling. Previously it was paved in asphalt, and partially exposed, filled with parking and waste. With the new design and development enclosing the alley and introducing trees, heavy planting, and light-colored durable building materials, the heat island effect is minimized, and a human-scaled naturally cooled microclimate is created. During the long, hot summer months, the alley's cool shaded environment is full of people sitting, relaxing, and escaping the sun.

### **Design for Well-being**

By transforming the alley from a rundown parking area into a place for pedestrians, the alley adds a high quality walkable public space to the Design District and to the city of Miami. Various groupings of public seating allow individuals, families, and groups to gather, relax, and enjoy this vibrant space together simultaneously giving a strong sense of community. The regionally sourced plantings and trees bring a sense of nature into the urban environment along with natural oxygenation.

### **Design for Resources**

By using familiar materials and construction labor readily found in the Miami area such as cast in place concrete and applied stucco, Jade alley was built entirely by local labor. In a neighborhood with many exotic facades, materials, and forms, numerous building components and sculptures have been fabricated internationally and shipped to Miami for installation. By creating something new from familiar means and methods, the alley employs a locally established concrete construction culture, and does not rely on fuel-intensive international or national shipping and import of exotic building materials and equipment.

### **Design for Change**

In a sensitive site only a couple blocks from Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean beyond, hurricanes are a real issue that had to be considered in the design. Local code mandated hurricane-proof glazing systems are used exclusively to ensure safety and longevity for all new storefronts in the alley. Concrete was selected as the primary material for the arches and new building facades not only for appearance, but also its strong resistance to the extreme heat, humidity, and tropical storms of the local climate.

The freestanding arches give order and legibility to this new urban space and provide a lasting identity that is open-ended in regard to programming for the space and its surrounding buildings. Restaurants, retail, office, and galleries all co-exist currently, however these spaces and functions will transform and change with the life of the district and neighborhood, but the alley's identity will be maintained through these timeless forms that will likely last for many decades, perhaps even longer than many of the newly built stud-framed retail buildings throughout the neighborhood.

## Design for Discovery

In a bold move by the developers, emphasis was placed on repurposing trash rooms in the historic Moore building along the alley into affordable lower-rent retail spaces to allow local business owners to have a place in a district otherwise populated by international luxury brands. What started out as six-month pop-up leases due to uncertainty of attracting customers down an alley, has surprisingly led to nearly all the original tenants renewing their leases year after year and thriving, even throughout the pandemic.





Location: Miami, FL  
Size: 6,200 SF





The Design District in the 1930's, notice the large Moore Building, the alley is to the left



- A Back facade of historic Moore building
- B New Alley
- C Facades of new mixed-use building\*

We were asked to design the alley itself, transform the trash rooms of the existing building at left into new storefronts, and to design the alley-facing facades for the new building that would be built to the right.

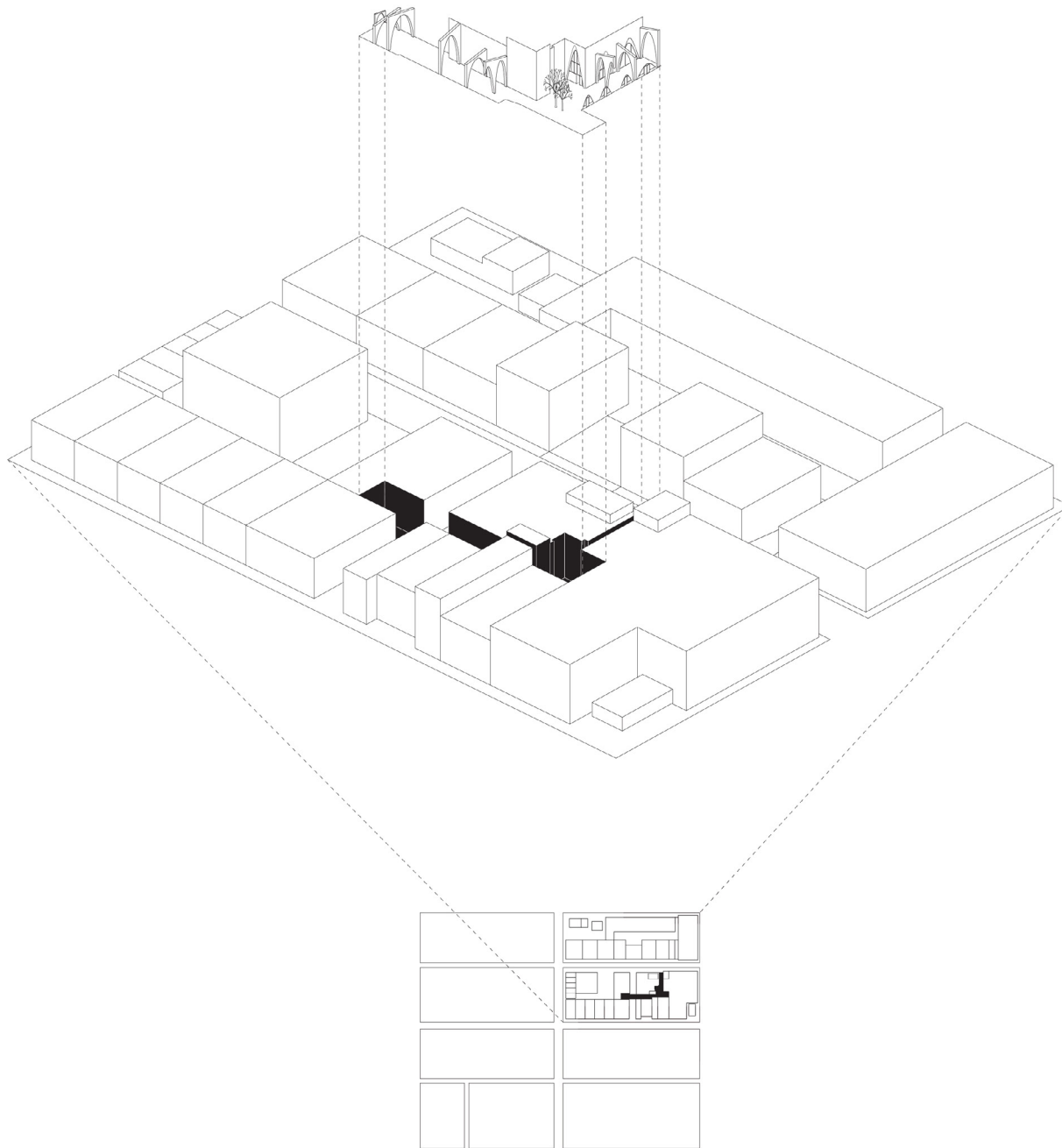
\*building core & shell, TI by others

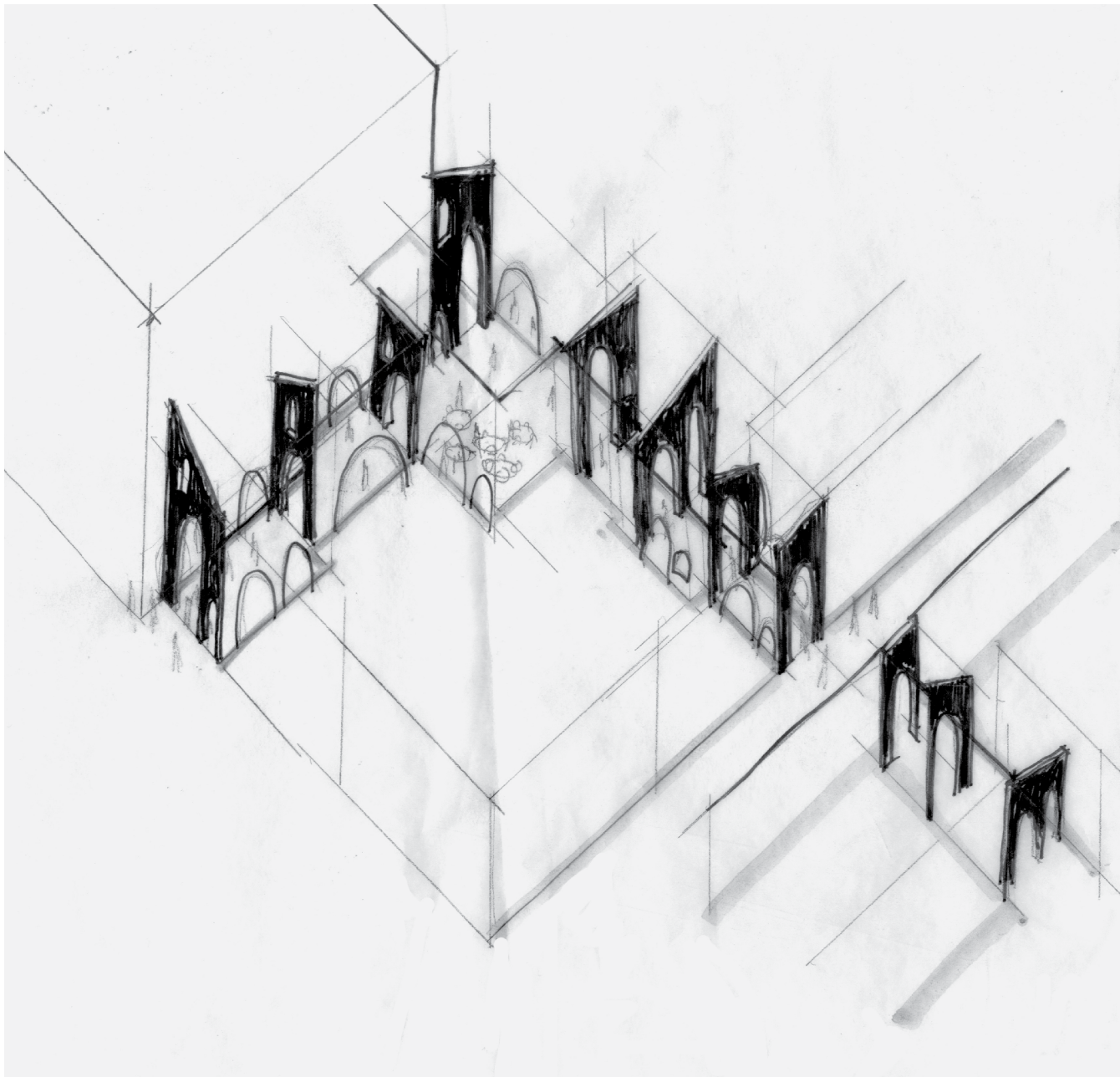
## Jade Alley

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**Size:** 6,200 SF

**Scope:** Alley, facades of new and existing buildings, landscape & hardscape concept





Initial concept sketch



Early study model





Arches shape new movement through the Alley



Newly planted trees & vegetation continue to thrive





The alley is a catalyst for new activity and engagement



Public art including a Virgil Abloh sculpture



The alley has become a favorite destination in the district





The courtyard at the heart of the alley unifies new & old buildings around a new civic space





Light and shadow create different atmospheres depending on time of day

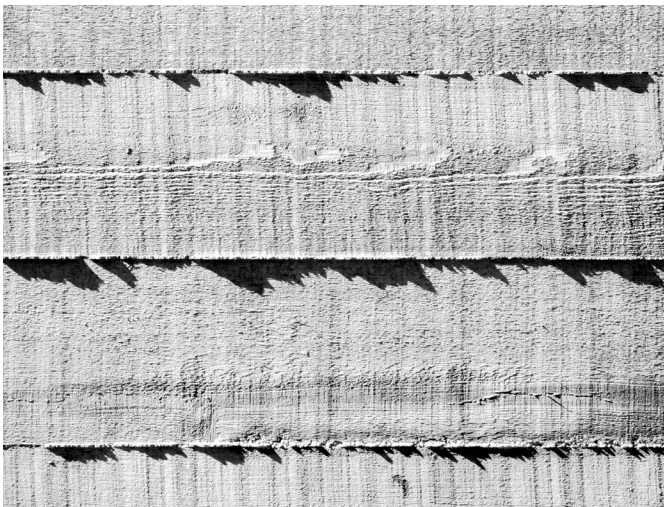


Small arched retail spaces repurpose former trash rooms along the alley





Detail



Roughsawn formwork texture



Shadows become part of the composition of the space





From a forgotten space to vibrant civic place