STRIP APPEAL

REINVENTING THE STRIP MALL
STRI P APPEAL

REINVENTING THE STRIP MALL

Edited by
Merle Patchett and Rob Shields

Designed by
Iwona Faferek
# Table of Contents

1. **Forward**  
   / Ellen Dunham-Jones

2. **The Design Competition as Public Engagement Method**  
   / Merle Patchett and Rob Shields

12. **The Future of Strip Malls**  
   / Merle Patchett and Rob Shields

17. **Winners**  
   Winner/ Free Zoning  
   Runner Up/ Parked  
   Public Vote/ Unbox/Cohere/Embrace

37. **Green**  
   Ferndale Gardens  
   Storefront Greenhouse  
   Strip Weave  
   Bumper Crop

53. **Park**  
   Newton Park-Aid  
   Small Box  
   Pop Up Food Truck  
   REconnect
65 Commercial Strip Tease
/ David Karle

69 **UP & OUT**

    Stripscap[(e]e pg 70
    Cultural Appropriation pg 74
    Harbin, China pg 76
    Queen Mary Park2 pg 78

81 **CONNECT**

    Strip Mall Metamorphosis pg 82
    The Network pg 86
    Span the Strip pg 88
    Combat Concrete pg 90
    Fix the Strip pg 92

95 Re-Imagining Suburbia: The Appeal of the Strip Mall
/ Ondine Park

97 **COMPETITION**

    Competition Shortlist and Bios pg 98
    Competition Brief pg 103

106 Acknowledgements
“While there are many obstacles to retrofitting strip malls (unmotivated absentee landlords for one), they should be the low-hanging fruit of the suburban retrofit taxonomy.”

– Ellen Dunham-Jones
Which comes first – the chicken or the egg? The hypothetical proposals of a design competition like Strip Appeal or pioneering projects indicative of potentially significant market shifts? I like to think they inspire each other - and both benefit from cross-fertilization. When June Williamson and I documented a few innovative examples of retrofitted strip malls, enclosed malls, office parks and so forth in our book, Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs (Wiley & Sons: 2009), we deliberately chose to focus on successful, built examples. We hoped that showing before and after conditions would help overcome suburbanites' general resistance to change. We also hoped that shining a light on changing suburban typologies and market demand would spark designers' interest in this rather neglected terrain. We can hardly take credit for, but are certainly gratified to see the enthusiasm designers are bringing to creatively re-imagining the suburban landscape, its lifestyle and its environmental impact in what is now a substantial series of hypothetical design competitions: Dead Malls Competition, Reburbia, Town Shift, Flip A Strip, Build a Better ‘Burb, and now, Strip Appeal.

Cheers to Rob Shields, Merle Patchett and the University of Alberta’s City-Region Studies Centre for soliciting and assembling this remarkable body of work. Who would have expected to see the much-maligned, generic strip mall as a site for dealing with recycled building materials, mobile weekly markets as a response to being over-retailed, new forms of community centres, integrating greenhouse production with green deliveries via transit, and a host of other spatial devices to integrate parking, green landscapes, public plazas and transit hubs with existing neighbourhoods? In fact, it’s a rhetorical question. While retrofits in “the real world” are less bold programmatically and stylistically than Strip Appeal’s projects, they manifest variations on many of the same themes – and are actually often bolder in scale.

June and I group retrofits according to three main strategies: reinhabitation with more community-serving uses; redevelopment into more urban places; and regreening either into parks, community gardens or green infrastructure. Numerous strip malls have been reinhabited with schools, government offices and churches (there’s actually a website with instructions on how to turn a strip mall into a church). However, of the forty projects in our database, one of the more significant trends in older, three-six acre strip malls is their reinhabitation with destination restaurants and cafes replacing the strictly convenience-oriented retail. In the process, they’re updating their look, adding outdoor seating, turning their backs into new fronts and providing their neighbourhoods with “third places” that provide social opportunities and nightlife for the two-thirds – and-growing portion of U.S. suburban households that do not have children. Since our publication about La Grande Orange in Phoenix, at least five more strip malls, including Lake Grove in Lake Oswego, Oregon, have become better community anchors for the new demographics of their neighbourhoods through programmatic shifts and modest renovations.

More dramatic redevelopments of strip malls into mixed-use sites tend to require a greater critical mass of people and activities – and result in a significant increase in density. Notable examples include larger strip malls of 15-50 acres (such as Santana Row), agglomerations of a few strip malls (such as Excelsior and Grand outside of Minneapolis) or those that are part of a larger corridor retrofit (such as Columbia Pike in Arlington, Virginia.) Especially if transit is being introduced, it is not uncommon to find 5 to 12-storey buildings replacing one-storey strip malls, abutting newly tree-lined sidewalks or framing new parks and squares.

There are fewer regreening projects; however, their value as catalysts for future development is becoming more recognized. The reconstruction of Ames Lake on the site of the failed Phalen Shopping Center, outside St. Paul, Minnesota, was funded for the purpose of wetland restoration. Yet its creation of “lakefront property” attracted the first new private investment in over 40 years to a very low-income neighbourhood. Since then, in 2009, the City of Columbus, Ohio tore down its defunct urban mall and created Columbus Commons Park with the hope that once the economy recovered, the park would attract urban housing to its periphery. Phase 2 broke ground in 2012.

Strip malls are often well-located but unloved, built of cheap construction and surrounded by “under-performing asphalt” with plenty of opportunity for regreening, densification or clever adaptation. I hope this book will inspire more designers, developers and communities to take up the challenge!

Ellen Dunham-Jones is a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology.