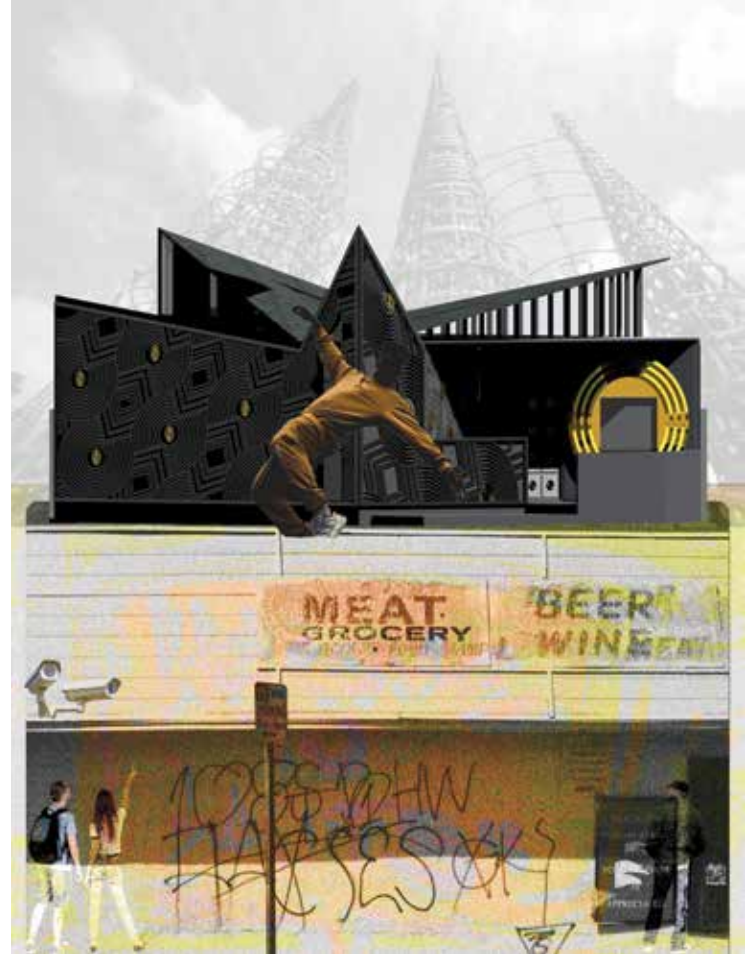
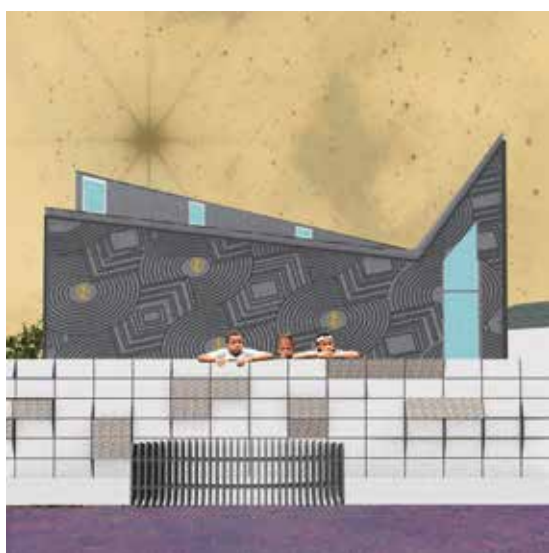


## The Marathon Continues

With his vision for a series of case study homes built in Black neighborhoods across the country, architectural designer Demar Matthews of OffTOP Design hopes to create a new paradigm that celebrates Black culture

**CLOCKWISE:** Renderings by Demar Matthews to explain the project; *To Host Space; A Black Section; New Perspective*



Given that only two percent of licensed architects in America are Black, Demar Matthews had few role models—or the buildings they’d designed for that matter—that spoke to him. It was an issue that was driven home when his girlfriend pointed out a community in L.A. that resembled her Mexican hometown. “I wondered, ‘Where was the architecture that spoke to my identity as a Black person?’”

The question drove his graduate thesis and galvanized him to launch “Unearthing a Black Aesthetic.” He envisions the project as a series of nine sustainably built case study houses to be built in Black neighborhoods around the country, beginning with the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. For the design, Matthews draws on motifs that channel the Black experience. Its crown shape finds its echo in the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat; the structure’s exterior skin reimagines security gates in the lyrical waves and box braids of Black hairstyles; the movement of light through the interior conjures up dance moves; and a mirrored and framed entrance, which nods to the work of Kehinde Wiley, encourages residents to layer majesty over their self-image. “I want the architecture to positively impact perception as much as possible,” Matthews explains.

To that end, he has goals that reach beyond the visual. Created to serve as an art studio, residency and exhibition space, the buildings will support and champion local artists; presenting the structures as ADU models how communities can work toward financial equity; and gardens will address the dearth of grocery stores. Along the fence line he also proposed an interactive art walk that offers free resources to the community such as fruits and vegetables and a miniature outdoor library. “I see people going into these neighborhoods in the future and seeing spaces that redefine Black culture and Black people. Additionally, our goal is for a space that pays homage to a vision of creativity and sustainable Black life. I see design without displacement. I see the Black community being able to benefit from this design.” That is a change we’d like to see in the world.