

Temple in a House

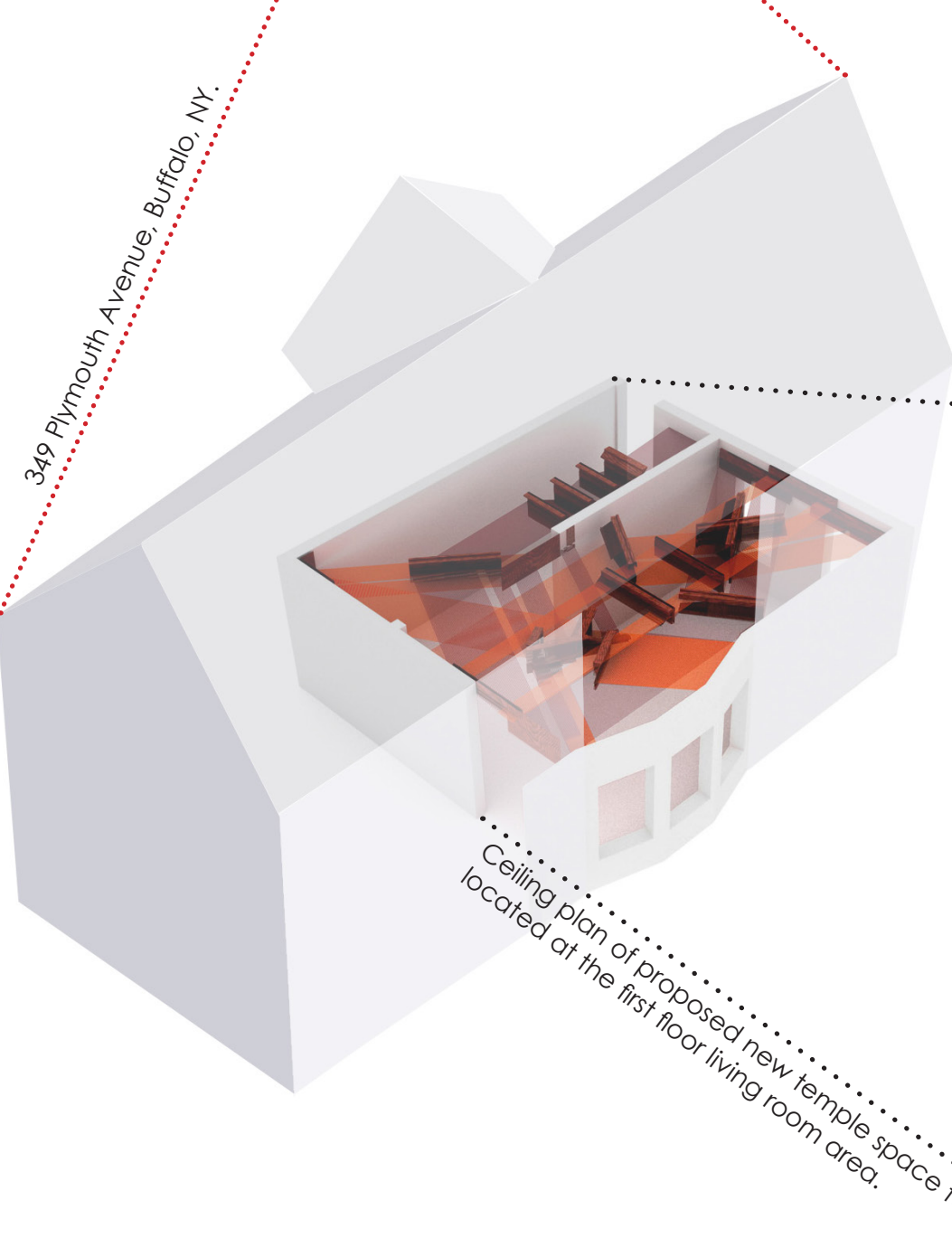
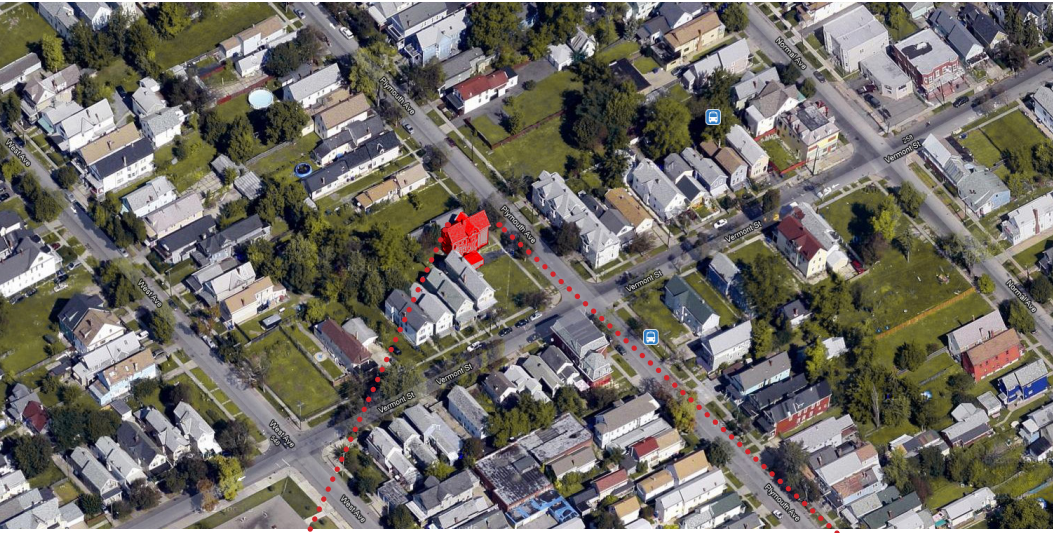
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Over the last years, according to Cramer and Breittling in their book "Architecture and Existing Fabric", conversions and upgrades account for 50 to 70 percent of all construction works. Socio-economic trends, the real estate market, immediate economic interests, and increased mobility, have accelerated dramatically the demand for interior design adaptive projects. It is in this context of crisis between the physical and costly constraints of architecture and the dynamic nature of content cycles that adaptive practice become a critical strategy towards sustainability and that the field of Interior Design stands at the forefront of the architecture discipline.

"Temple in a House" is a modest interior design proposal that deals with architecture that has outlived its intended use. It proposes a redefinition of space that emerges from new occupants and content. It is an adaptive project which presented a significant design challenge; that of trying to reconcile a very radical change of program, use, behavioral patterns and cultural references.

This project was triggered by the International Institute in Buffalo which is a nonprofit organization helping to integrate refugees and other immigrant groups in the community. They introduced us to the Burmese community in Buffalo's West Side. Buffalo is a postindustrial city belonging to the "rust belt" region which is confronting a proliferating amount of obsolete and vacant buildings.

In 2011, 15 families of the Burmese refugee community on Buffalo's West side collectively purchased a vacant house in Buffalo. They wanted to convert the house to a Buddhist temple and residence for three monks.



We participated in a number of discussions with the community regarding the scope of work for the conversion, primarily consisting of basic heating improvements, insulation, electrical upgrades, painting and demolition of select interior partition walls.

Moved by the Burmese hospitality and the unusual enterprise, we designed an installation inspired by Burmese traditional weaving techniques, consisting of a series of wooden frame combs suspended from the ceiling at different heights through which a number of red rods span in tension throughout the space.

We chose red, because it is the sacred color in Tibetan culture and it is believed to have protective qualities. The simplicity of materials makes for an economic solution. The repetition and the overlaps of the string planes result in a red hovering topography that attenuates the radical, spatial and atmospheric gap between a Buddhist temple and a standard living room.

This interior design intervention enables the building to perform as a time-specific communication and a socialization device for the Burmese community in Buffalo, NY. A succession of transformations of space constructed by different authors, over time can lead to spatial qualities which could not have been imagined when the building was first designed. The overlap of the existing domestic environment and the envisioned temple result in a very rich and unique spatial palimpsest of cultures and temporalities.



Traditional weaving technique

