

BIG THINK

CHAD MITCHELL OF MERIDIAN 105 IS MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF WITH HIS OUT-OF-THE-BOX, CEREBRAL DESIGNS

WORDS: Jane Craig • IMAGES: Raul Garcia

If your vision of an architect is someone perpetually hunched over technical drawings at a drafting table, think again. Chad Mitchell, founder of the innovative Denver architecture firm Meridian 105 Architecture, is just as likely to be found in the parking lot outside an old '50s Texaco station he owns in an industrial area of Denver, creating innovative patterns out of brick or setting pieces of wood on fire to replicate an ancient Japanese charring technique called shou sugi ban.

“We like to explore new techniques and materials, new forms and patterns and textures and generally push the bounds a little bit. We try to find straightforward solutions to common problems, focusing on creating a very refined, clean overall expression on buildings, then bringing in heavy-textured components like brick and wood and other materials that have a handmade quality to them,” says Mitchell, who launched Meridian 105 on the first day of 2011, naming the firm after the longitudinal line on the globe that runs through Union Station. “We’re not creating new materials. We’re just trying to find cool and creative ways to use ones that have been around forever.”

Mitchell’s projects, the majority of which are commercial or multifamily, include the Tejon Mixed Use development at 35th and Tejon, which includes a striking facade of textured brick and internal mezzanines and which won an American Institute of Architects 2016 Award of Excellence; a black-and-white three-unit townhouse project at 18th and Boulder that is faced with a brick “fabric,” water jet-cut metal screens defining

PORTRAIT: James Florio



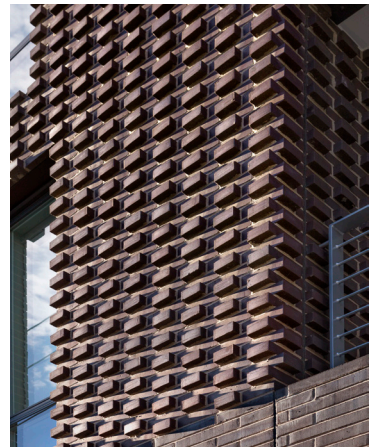
“WE LIKE TO EXPLORE NEW TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS, NEW FORMS AND PATTERNS AND TEXTURES AND GENERALLY PUSH THE BOUNDS A BIT.”

the porches and shou sugi ban siding; the award-winning Avanti restaurant, for which Meridian 105 reinvented a nondescript 1935 one-story brick building, giving it some of the best views in the city; a four-unit multifamily development on Jason Street with sunken Japanese-style kitchens, solariums and a second story clad in mirror-like stainless-steel panels; and the Pallet House, a Sloan’s Lake residence that gets its name from light-filtering wooden screens on the exterior that resemble shipping pallets and that won an AIA Denver Award of Excellence this year.

“So many of the townhouses in Highlands are just the same—1,800-square-foot stucco boxes—and there’s nothing cool about them. But there’s nothing cookie-cutter about Chad’s work—I just kind of fell in love with his stuff,” says developer Brooks Ferring, of Gateway Development, who has hired Meridian 105 for a variety of projects. Ferring worked alongside Chad and his team for 10 straight weekends charring about 10,000 linear feet of wood for the 18th and Boulder project. “I like the fact

that Chad is really hands-on. We’re on site once a week for our owner/architect/contractor meetings, but Chad goes by a project two or three other times in a week keeping an eye out for what’s happening. He’s as detail-oriented as anyone I’ve ever worked with.”

After working for renowned German-American architect Helmut Jahn in Chicago for six years, where his focus was large commercial and civic projects, Mitchell moved to Denver in 2005, where he worked for OZ Architecture before founding Meridian 105. “I like looking at what other architects are doing to push the boundaries, and I wanted to be one of those firms. There’s so much great architectural work happening all over the world right now,” says Mitchell, a big admirer of Studio Gang’s innovative work, like the wavy-facaded Aqua Tower in Chicago. “Jeanne Gang makes really creative building expressions out of components that are already in the building without introducing a whole bunch of additional costs.” >P.93



For LoHi’s Tejon Mixed Use project, which won an AIA Denver 2016 Award of Excellence, Mitchell created balconies that open to the sky, interior mezzanines for the apartments, and retail space below. The building is wrapped in a patterned brick that plays with light and shadow.