

Your Greenhouse Is Your Kitchen Is Your Living Room

Leyuan Li
University of Colorado Denver

A Spatial Manifestation of Food,
Civic Farming,
And Engaged Domesticity



Faculty Lead

Leyuan Li

Collaborator

JXY Studio assisted with the technical development and the construction process of the project.

Design Team

Leyuan Li, Jiaxun Xu, Yue Xu, Brandon Wunder, Xinyu Li, Shan Jiang, Efkliides Tzimapitis, Ignis Zhang, Yuhan Chen

Project Year

2024

Funding

Design Trust Seed Grant

Student Engagement

Two undergraduate students worked 20 hours per week for four weeks at a rate of \$20 per hour.

As an educator and designer, I am committed to creating a supportive learning environment while engaging students in my creative research. Over the course of three months, students actively participated in design and curatorial discussions with the host gallery and the communities involved in this project. They were also trained in digital software and fabrication tools to prepare models and drawings for the project.

Project Description

Your Greenhouse Is Your Kitchen Is Your Living Room is a pavilion that amalgamates the roles of a greenhouse, an outdoor kitchen, and a living room, it speculates on the medium of food as a catalyst for social engagement, proposing new forms of domesticity and collectivity that reframe the intricate relationship between the body, land, and city.

Engaged Domesticity

The pavilion is composed of modular elements, primarily constructed from angle steel and polycarbonate sheets. Adjustable cables stabilize the panels at varied heights, allowing the structure to modulate between openness and enclosure. In its flexibility and indeterminacy, the structure enables various reconfigurations to accommodate different social activities through the interplay of movable and operable furniture, animating the site with vegetable-growing racks, kitchen counters, and folding tables. When enclosed, it serves as a greenhouse that nurtures crops; when unfolded, it becomes an outdoor kitchen and living room, hosting activities of reciprocal care such as pot exchanges, weekend cooking, and communal dining.

Microclimate of Care

In addition, the pavilion cultivates a microclimate of care for both plants and humans. It supports the remediation of contaminated soil sourced from a nearby urban farm, stored in portable planters that encourage agricultural cultivation and exchange among community members. Rainwater, harvested and filtered through an overhead metal reservoir, circulates through the pavilion for gardening and cooking activities. Owing to spatial tactics that mitigate the challenges of subtropical weather—such as panel gaps to enhance passive cooling—the structure provides adequate airflow and sunlight, fostering a conducive environment for plants while providing visitors with balanced, comfortable conditions to cohabit with plants and other species.

Device for Civic Farming

Your Greenhouse Is Your Kitchen Is Your Living Room emerges as a spatial manifestation of food that proposes new sets of social norms and spatial politics. By facilitating the interplay between producing and consuming food, and between farming and sharing food, the pavilion presents a civic forum of farming that solidifies bonds of local identity and solidarity, providing local communities with the fertile ground to nurture cultural and social forms of interdependence.



When enclosed, the pavilion operates as a greenhouse. Photo by Leyuan Li.

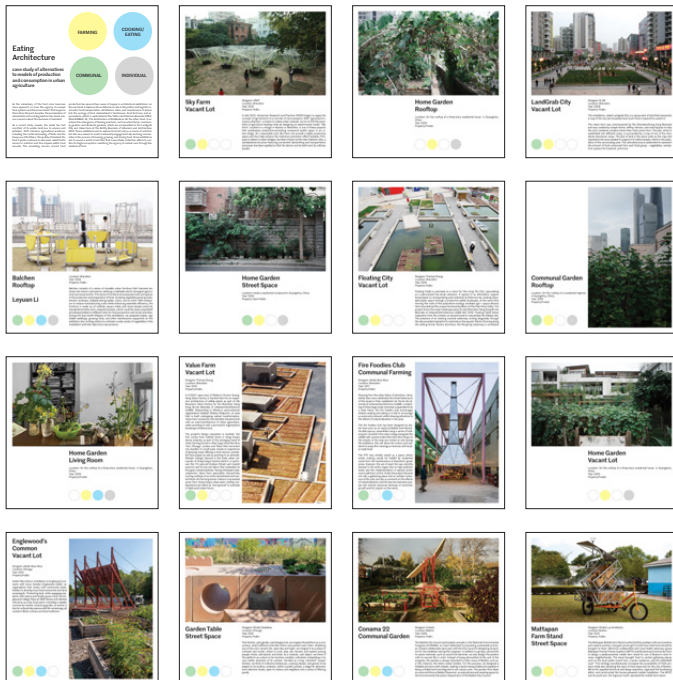


When opened, it transforms into an outdoor living space. Photo by Leyuan Li.

Contribution to Design

The project seeks to address the urgency of the food crisis in an urban milieu, secularizing on the tools and spaces of food production and consumption to promote food security and community engagement. By proposing a new spatial typology that intersects the functions of a greenhouse, a kitchen, and a living room, the project provides a civic forum that intersects agricultural and social activities in the neighborhood, materializing the medium of food in an adaptable built form to promote new modes of domesticity and collectivity.

In addition, unlike mainstream architecture, which prioritizes the static, external properties of buildings, this project centers on an area of the discipline often relegated to the margins: the dynamic and adaptable qualities of small-scale installations. It foregrounds an emerging disciplinary shift that instrumentalizes temporary, tactical "micro-architecture" to address the evolving social, political, and environmental issues we face today.

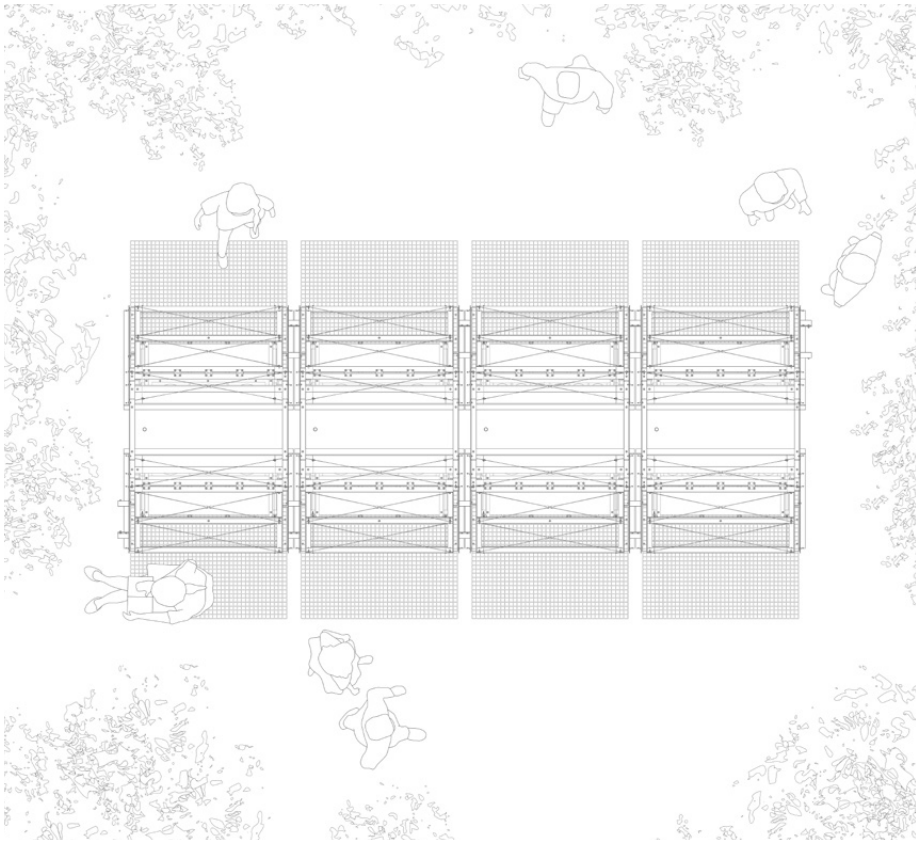


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"Eating Architecture" Research Booklet (excerpted), a case study of alternatives to models of production and consumption in urban agriculture, 2025.

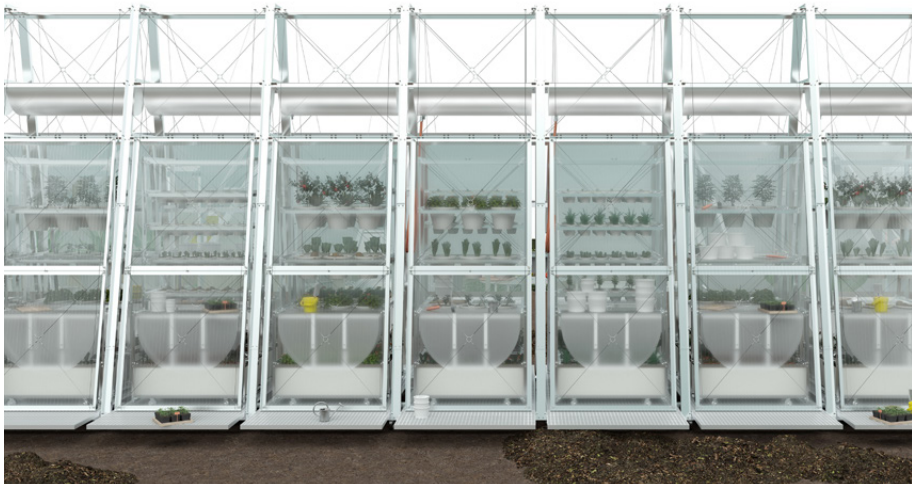
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1:5 Study model of the project. Fabricated by JXY Studio, 2025.

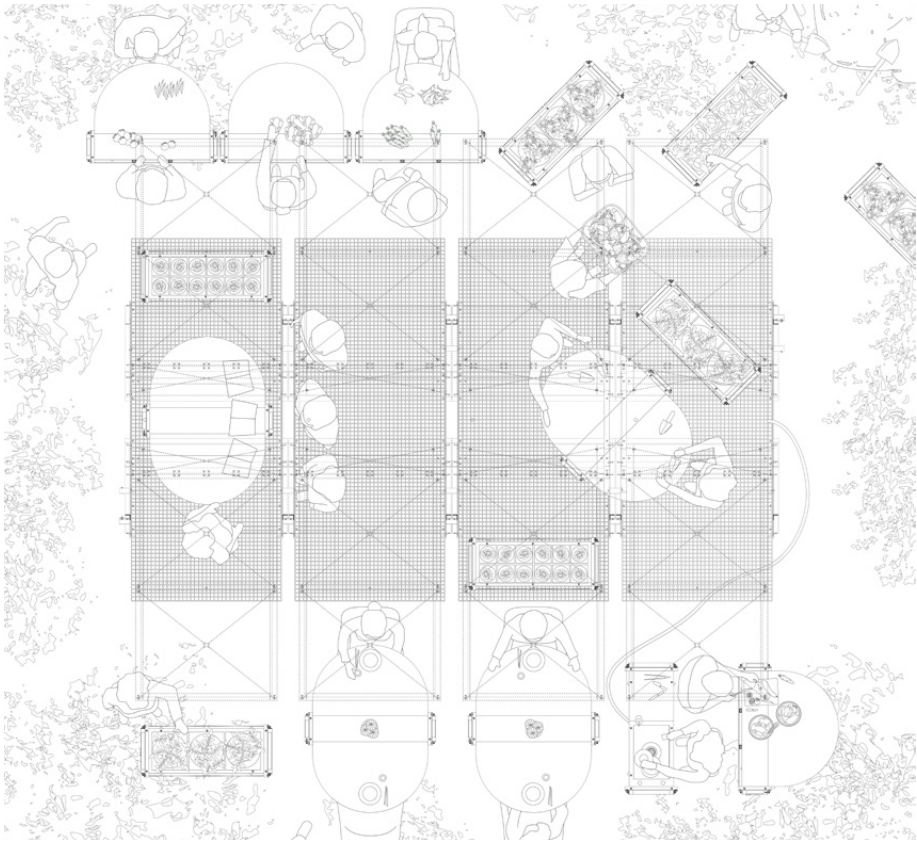


1:5 Study model. Photo by Jiaxun Xu.



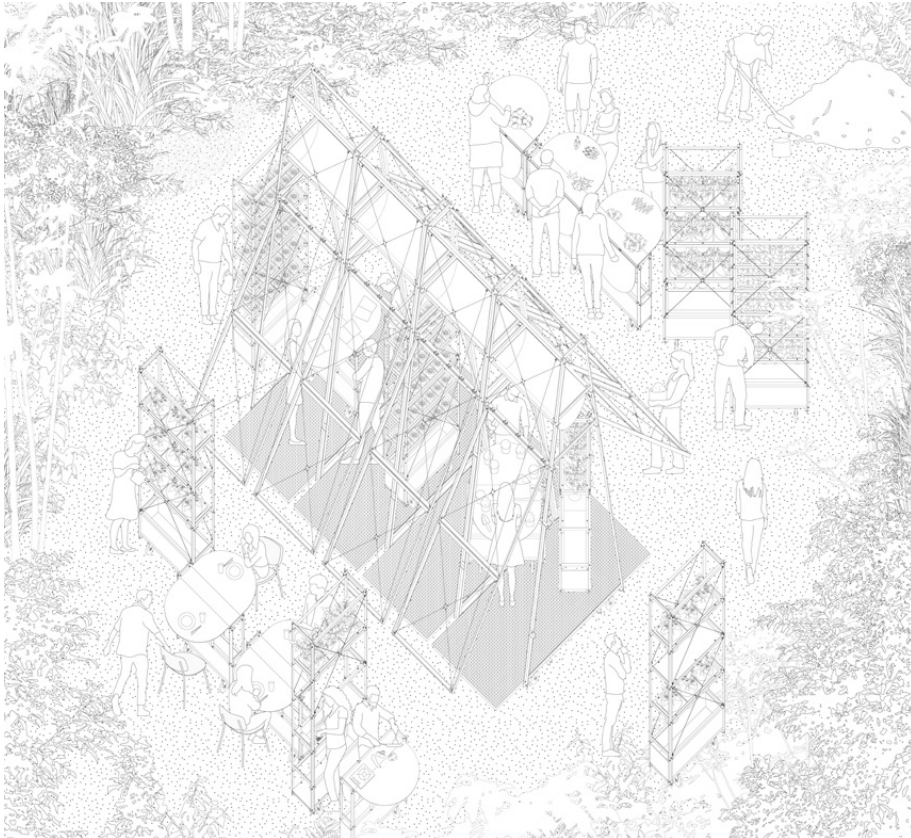
- ^ Plan of the pavilion when enclosed.
- ∨ Elevation of the pavilion showing the farming infrastructure.
- > Isometric render of the pavilion.





- ^ Plan of the pavilion when opened and activated.
- ∨ Elevation of the pavilion showing different farming and social activities.
- > Isometric render of the pavilion.



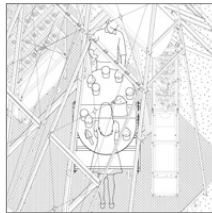


^v Axonometric drawing showing the multitude of activities.
 > Photo of the pavilion.

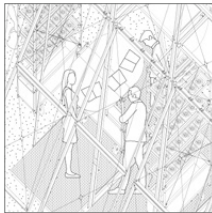
Soil Remediation



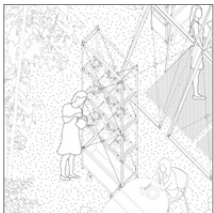
Pot Exchange



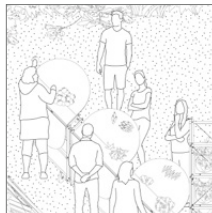
Education Workshop



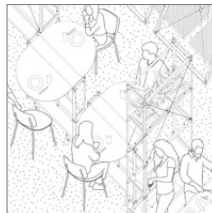
Farming



Farmer's Market



Cooking and Dining



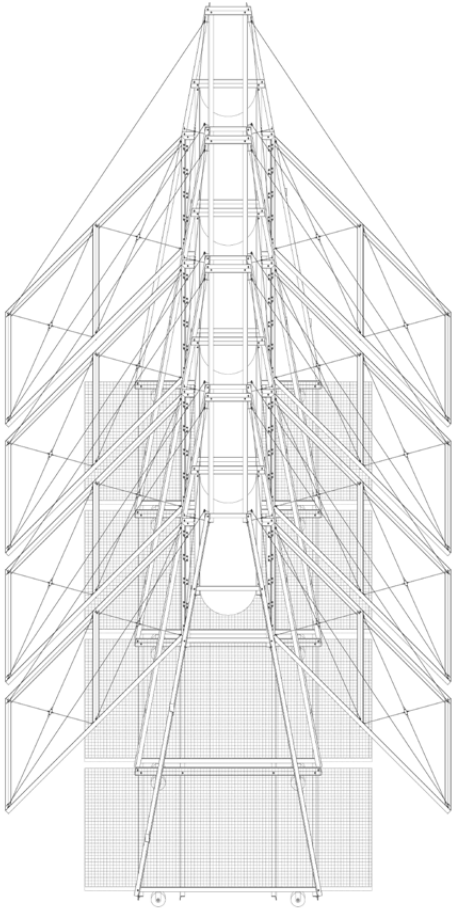
A series of events unfolded around the installation, transforming it into an active social hub. Among them was a pot exchange, where residents were invited to take home a plant-filled pot and, in return, replace it with a new one planted with seeds and soil remediated from the adjacent farm. This simple ritual encouraged cycles of care and renewal, extending the life of the installation into the daily routine of the community. On weekends, the site came alive as a gathering place for cooking and dining, where shared meals cultivated moments of connection.



View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.



View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.



The pavilion is characterized by an assembly of modular elements, constructed primarily with angle steel and encased in polycarbonate sheets. The openness of the pavilion is moderated through adjustable cables that stabilize the panels at varied heights.

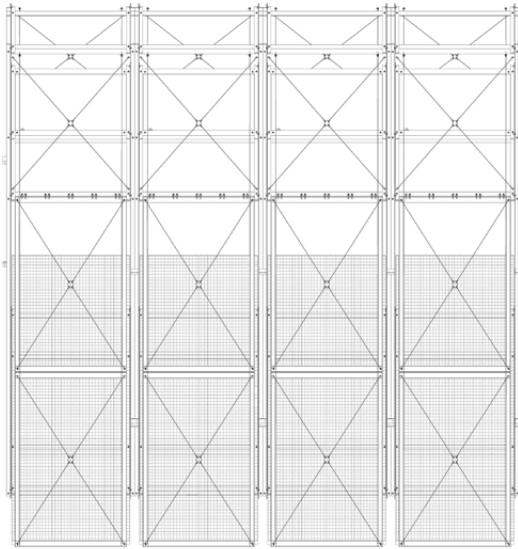


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Tectonic drawing.

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Photo showing the construction details. Photo by Leyuan Li.

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View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.





In its flexibility and indeterminacy, this temporary structure allows for reconfiguration through its movable and operable furniture, animating the surroundings with vegetable growing racks, kitchen counters, and folding tables—all built from the same material palette.



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Tectonic drawing.

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The photo displays the construction details and the overhead water reservoirs.

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View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.



It supports the remediation of contaminated soil sourced from a nearby urban farm, stored in portable planters that encourage agricultural cultivation and exchange among community members.



^ <>
photos of the planter shelf.
The portable pots are color-coded if they are "claimed" by a community member. All photos by Leyuan Li.





View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.

Rainwater, harvested and filtered through an overhead metal reservoir, circulates through the pavilion for gardening and cooking activities.



Views of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.

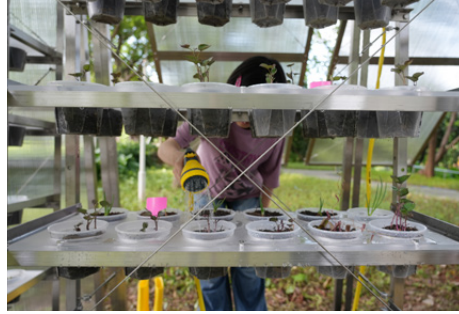
The pavilion is a place for social gathering, providing local communities the fertile ground to nurture cultural and social forms of interdependence.



Views of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.



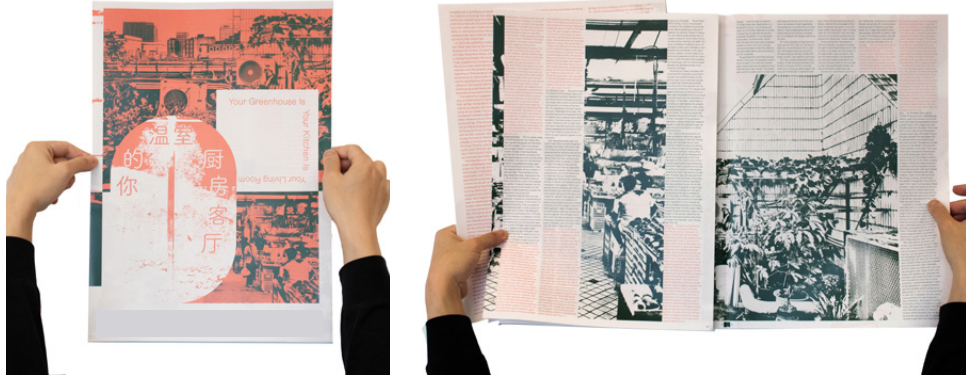
The pavilion is a place for social gathering and food education, providing local communities the fertile ground to nurture cultural and social forms of interdependence.



A series of events was hosted at the pavilion, including an educational workshop that introduced practices of civic farming (Figures 1-3) and a harvest party that invited residents in the neighborhood to participate (Figures 4-5). Photos by Leyuan Li and Jiaxun Xu.

Associated Program

In addition to the installation, *Your Greenhouse Is Your Kitchen Is Your Living Room* includes a **storytelling brochure** that gathers food stories along with their spatial contexts. All stories were collected through an open call, which solicited answers to three questions proposed by the curatorial team. They were showcased in the exhibition in various formats and compiled into a food newspaper disseminated in the local communities.



Tomato Even though my parents no longer have that maple table or a screened-in porch, the tomatoes still return to our kitchen table each summer. In the spring, my dad tills the soil and prepares his garden in our backyard. Some years, my sisters and I would help him plant, and later, pick tomatoes, squash, zucchini, and corn, though raccoons and deer would often destroy the corn stalks before we could harvest any for ourselves.

My grandparents were also avid gardeners. They grew the sweetest "pascals and cream" corn and flavor-dense green beans that were a staple at every meal we ate at their houses. They would also recruit my sisters and I to help them

shall peas and shuck corn in the summers. My access to fresh vegetables has spoiled me my whole life and is the reason I have a deep appreciation for fresh produce and farmers' markets. But it's tomatoes that always remind me of home.

For over a decade, my dad has hosted an annual "BLT Day" at TLM Associates, Inc., an architecture firm in Jackson, Tennessee where he worked for 40 years before retiring in 2023. Still, today, the BLT Day tradition continues. BLT Day, usually scheduled in early August, invites the local business community to stop by the firm over the lunch hour to enjoy a classic bacon, lettuce, and tomato (BLT) sandwich (and

many other rich and delicious potluck dishes made by the employees of the firm). His garden has grown to include more tomato plants each year. In preparation for the 2024 BLT Day (and even more so for my family's enjoyment), he planted 60 "better boy" tomato plants.

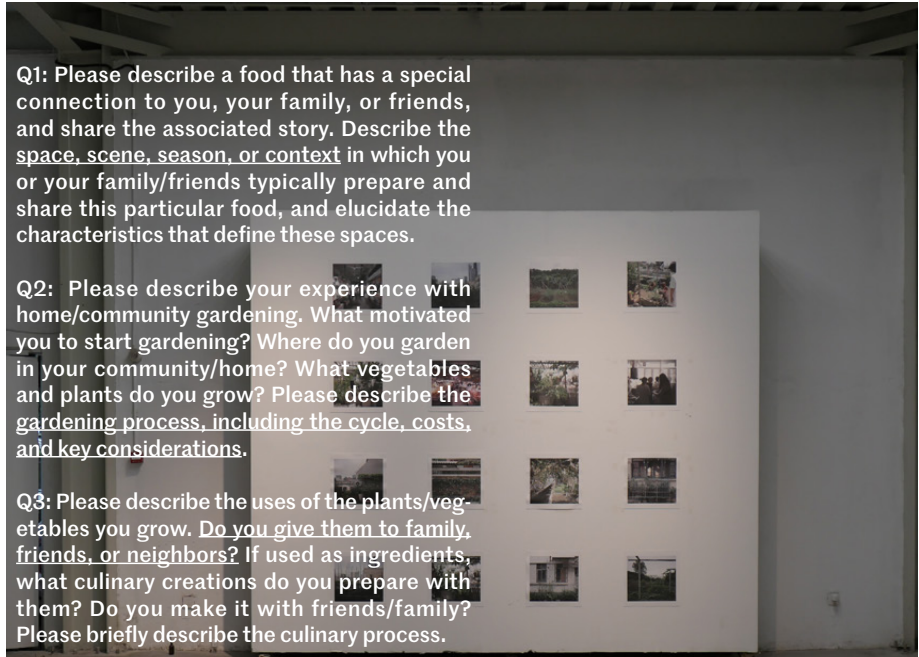
Since moving from Tennessee to Denver, Colorado, I've been fortunate enough to travel back home just in time to snack on at least one ripe tomato. In the years when I was not able to visit during tomato season, my dad gently and securely boxed up several tomatoes and shipped them to me overnight so that I was guaranteed at least one out-of-this-world tomato that year.

As much as I would love to grow my

own "better Denver, we humid suns South. So, I plan summer threes of th heat all for to visit id gently eat one year: grow my

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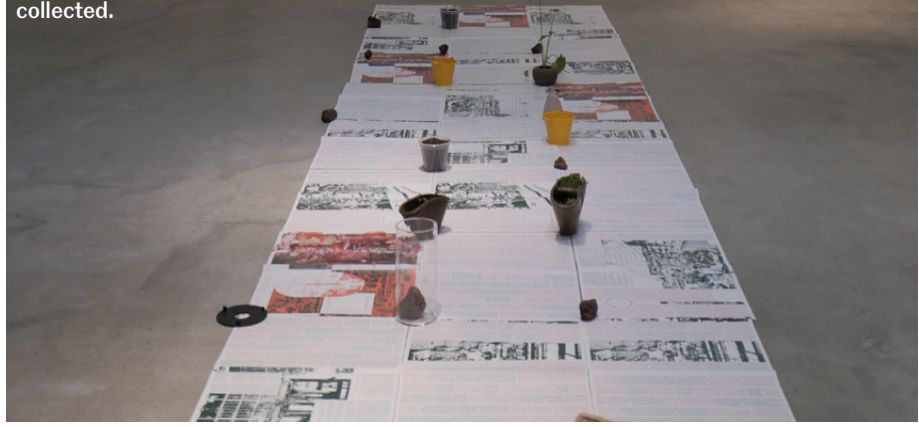


Q1: Please describe a food that has a special connection to you, your family, or friends, and share the associated story. Describe the space, scene, season, or context in which you or your family/friends typically prepare and share this particular food, and elucidate the characteristics that define these spaces.

Q2: Please describe your experience with home/community gardening. What motivated you to start gardening? Where do you garden in your community/home? What vegetables and plants do you grow? Please describe the gardening process, including the cycle, costs, and key considerations.

Q3: Please describe the uses of the plants/vegetables you grow. Do you give them to family, friends, or neighbors? If used as ingredients, what culinary creations do you prepare with them? Do you make it with friends/family? Please briefly describe the culinary process.

Below are some of the food stories we have collected.





The Radical Project

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Oca Pavilion
Ibirapuera Park

TEMPORARY INSTALLATION

Architects:

Area: 12 m²

14th São Paulo International
Architecture Biennale

Extremes: Architectures
for an overheated planet

Project Impact

- <^ The project was shortlisted for numerous design awards, including the Dezeen Awards 2025.
- <v The design team was invited for a workshop at the Texas A&M University under the same theme, "Your Greenhouse Is Your Kitchen Is Your Living Room," in March 2025.
- ^ The project has been showcased on numerous design platforms and has been selected through an international open call to be included in the 14th International Architecture Biennial of São Paulo.



View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.



View of the pavilion. Photo by Leyuan Li.