



Studio Guatemala

Prof. Ralph Stern :: M1 Comprehensive Studio :: FS 2025 & WS 2026

Why Guatemala ??? Where is it anyway ??? What you will learn

Guatemala is a small country with a big history. It is located in Central America, just below the Mexican provinces of Chiapas and Yucatan. **Architecturally, it spans from 3000-year-old temples of the pre-classical Maya to contemporary highrises that are as sophisticated as any building in New York, Hong Kong, or London.** In between is the architecture of Spanish colonial baroque, art deco, Latin American expressionism, high modernism, post-modernism, and informal settlements.

Geographically the country ranges from white sand Caribbean beaches to black sand Pacific beaches. Guatemala has thick tropical jungles, highland pine forests, deep mountain lakes, and many volcanoes, most of which are active. **It is a primordial landscape; one increasingly impacted by climate change.** Linguistically the country is Spanish and Mayan; twenty-two distinct Mayan languages are spoken throughout Guatemala. Demographically Guatemala is roughly twenty percent white, forty percent *mestizo*, forty percent Mayan. **Canada's self-identifying Indigenous population totals five percent; Guatemala's is more than forty percent !!!**

Mayan culture is ancient and modern; its continuity offers a coherent worldview, its resistance to five centuries of colonization extraordinary. Together with its physical context, the cultural history of this resistance over the past century is central to Studio Guatemala. **Social, political, and environmental justice are guiding principles of Studio Guatemala.** Urban and architectural design are the requirements of Studio Guatemala.

Ralph Stern Biography:

Ralph Stern has travelled to Guatemala six times. He has lectured on Guatemala in Winnipeg and Berlin, has conducted an ED4 and an M1 Studio on Guatemala, and has supervised a Thesis on Guatemala City. Prior to joining the University of Manitoba as Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Professor Stern taught in the United States and Europe, including the Technical University Berlin and the University of the Arts Berlin, where he was co-director of the Program for Urban Processes. He served as Visiting Faculty for the Cities Programme at the London School of Economics, the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University, and the History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art Program at MIT among other institutions. He has been a Research Associate in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Cambridge and a Visiting Fellow at the Bauhaus University Weimar. He lectures and publishes internationally.



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Studio Guatemala is a collaborative Studio w/ a Guest Workshop and multiple Guest Lectures:

Studio Guatemala is a collaborative Studio. In October, during Field Trip Week, **Mackenzie Skoczylas** will conduct a one-week workshop on Indigeneity entitled '**Cosmo Weaving: A Comprehensive Approach to Healing + Visibility in the Built Environment**'. A lecture entitled '**Navigating the Landscape of Guatemalan Coffee: Through the Lens of Finca Catalán de las Mercedes**' will be held by **Mackenzie Hammond**. **Alisson Denburg** will hold a talk on Antigua **Guatemala: Permanence and Risks of a Heritage City**. Descriptions of these are on the following pages. Other talks are being planned on topics including the planning of Guatemala City, Modernist interventions in the historic city, and the use of National Security Archives to bring human rights violators to justice.

► ► ► ► ► **The Studio Site & Building Program in Guatemala City:**

The Studio site is a large, rectangular abandoned railway yard in central Guatemala City. The site has a significant section across its short dimension and is essentially flat along its long dimension. It is located at the nexus of cultural, economic, and institutional buildings that include a railway museum, a stadium, an important swimming and sports center, a magnificent cultural center including a theater, school, and military museum, modernist bank buildings, and Guatemala's Supreme Court. The site, historically, was adjacent to a bullfighting ring and the panopticon-like State Penitentiary. Future perspectives might include a light-rail hub. The Studio Brief calls for an urban design, which will be developed collaboratively, and the creation of a National Museum of Truth and Memory. It will include housing as well as, potentially, other services such as a school or clinic. Students, through discussion, will choose which building type and program content they wish to pursue.



Cosmo Weaving: A Comprehensive Approach to Healing + Visibility Within the Built Environment

Indigenous knowledge has existed without Western influence for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans on the shores of the Americas. **These knowledge systems are rooted in holistic, relational and cyclical worldviews, or cosmologies**, that offer valuable frameworks for re-thinking design methodologies. By listening and learning these Indigenous cosmologies, designers can develop tools and approaches that foster healing, visibility, and reconciliation within the built environment.

This workshop will examine the Indigenous knowledge of both the Anishinaabe in Canada and the Maya of Guatemala, identifying points of convergence and divergence in their respective cosmologies. Through investigations of various case studies, including traditional textile patterns and architectural projects, **students will gain insight into how traditional knowledge and cultural expression are embedded in craft and architectures.**

By the end of the workshop, students will begin to understand how to translate these cosmological insights into Cosmo Fabrics. These **Cosmo Fabrics are metaphorical and visual design tools that support culturally grounded concept development.** These fabrics will serve as a foundation for creating spaces that uphold dignity, affirm identity, and meaningfully reflect the cultural narratives of the communities they serve.

Mackenzie Skoczylas Biography:

Anishinaabe architect Mackenzie Skoczylas specializes in culturally and environmentally thoughtful projects. Born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and a member of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation she completed her graduate studies in 2021 from the University of Manitoba with a master's degree in architecture. Interested in studying international indigeneity, her thesis focused on the challenges the Indigenous population of Guatemala City face, looking at points of cultural convergence between Anishinaabe and Mayan culture. The thesis explored how architecture can work towards reconciliation and create spaces of recognition and healing while investigating topics of environmental impacts and sustainable futures.

Mackenzie has worked professionally since 2021 with Prairie Architects Inc. Since then, numerous projects have expanded her experience working with various First Nations in both Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. Through these projects she has developed a methodology for engagement to truly capture the vision and voice of the people; sharing their story to create meaningful spaces pulling upon knowledge from past, present and future.



Finca Catalán de Las Mercedes is a third-generation coffee farm nestled in the Chimaltenango region of Guatemala, just 45 minutes from Antigua. The farm's clay-like, **volcanic soil contributes to the complex and diverse flavour profiles for which the region is renowned**. Originally cultivating Red and Yellow Bourbon varieties, the farm has expanded to include Pacamara, Geisha, and Maragogipe.

Ten years ago, the finca added a wet mill capable of processing approximately 2,000 pounds of coffee per day. **This facility has since become a cornerstone of the local community in San Martín Jilotepeque**, allowing the farm to support around 400 small farmers by offering better prices than competing intermediaries, known locally as coyotes.

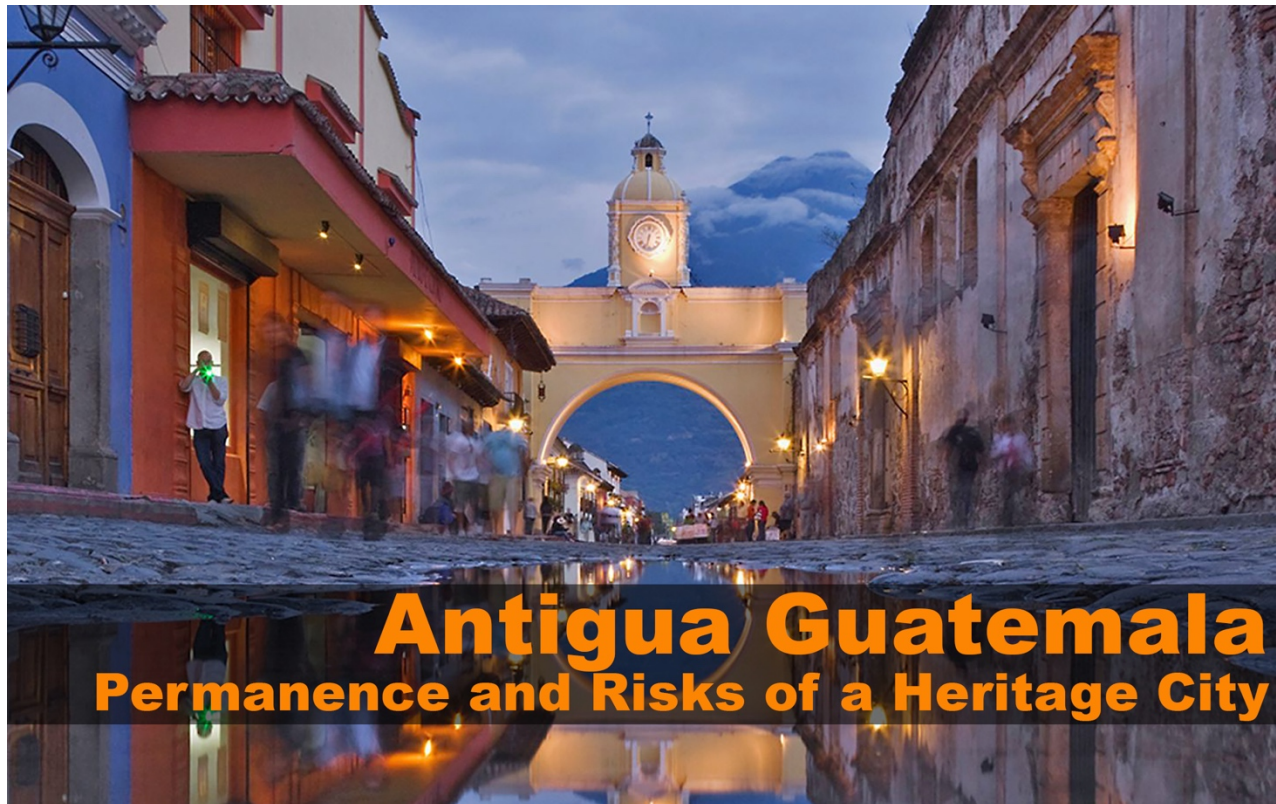
Finca Catalán is committed to addressing systemic challenges common in the coffee industry, including gender inequality, child labour, and barriers to education. In response, **the farm built an on-site school and daycare centre that provides free education, nutrition, and healthcare services to the children of coffee workers**. This initiative supports childhood development while enabling both parents to earn steady incomes during the harvest season.

Through the lens of Finca Catalán de Las Mercedes, we see how **sustainable practices and strategic community investment** can generate long-term value by producing exceptional coffee that is as conscientious as it is flavourful, while also driving measurable social impact.

Mackenzie Hammond Biography:

Mackenzie Hammond is registered with The Alberta Association of Architects as an Intern Architect, working primarily on multi-family projects throughout Alberta. Her curiosity in design and architecture has continued to evolve through her professional, academic, and personal experiences. This exploration has manifested in urban and architectural studies while living in Los Angeles and travelling throughout Guatemala, Germany, Iceland, England, Spain, France, Slovenia, and Italy. She believes exposure to new cities, cultures, and design philosophies encourages growth as a designer, and human.

After teaching architecture at a private institution for 3 years, Mackenzie Hammond received the Professional Instructor Education Certificate before returning to teach at her alma mater, the University of Manitoba. During her studies, she was actively involved in her architecture and environmental design education with the opportunity to be a Teaching Assistant which began her enthusiasm for educating. She aims to connect with the next generation of designers and help them hone their design aptitude. Equality, inclusivity, and diversity within the architecture studio, profession, and beyond are integral to her core values.



Antigua Guatemala was founded in 1543 as the City of Santiago de los Caballeros and **represents one of the most complete and cohesive examples of Spanish colonial urbanism in Latin America**. It is a World Heritage Site, and its title is **due to its exceptional value as a living testimony of a way of life and an urban fabric** that has withstood earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and the ravages of time.

Its conservation has been a process of constant resilience. **Today it faces new contemporary tensions that threaten its very authenticity**, such as real estate growth and gentrification, interventions in unregulated structures, invasive modern infrastructures and mass tourism.

From an architectural perspective, Antigua Guatemala is not only a built ensemble, **it is an urban narrative that speaks of seismic adaptation, of its colonial symbolism and of its cultural permanence**. To speak of preservation not only implies stopping time, but also that contemporaneity is integrated with respect. The greatest challenge for architects, urban planners and preservationists of the 21st century is to **maintain a dynamic balance** that allows Antigua Guatemala to continue to develop without losing its colonial soul.

Alisson Denburg Biography:

Alisson Denburg is an architect specialized in sustainable architecture and conservation of built heritage. Born in Nicaragua and resident of Antigua Guatemala for 19 years, she has developed her training and professional career in the historical and cultural context of this emblematic city. Graduated from Rafael Landívar University in 2020, her thesis work focused on the creation of a museum of urban history, earthquake of Santa Marta 1773 in the city of Santiago de los Caballeros, better known as Antigua Guatemala. The project proposed the architectural revitalization of a heritage house in a state of abandonment and deterioration, in order to rescue its architectural value and convert it into a functional and sustainable museum space. The proposal was based on a rigorous analysis of national and international regulations for intervention in heritage properties, including the regulations of the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala (IDAEH), UNESCO guidelines and the main International Heritage Charters. In addition, she incorporated principles of environmental sustainability as an integral part of the intervention, demonstrating that it is possible to conserve the tangible legacy of the past through contemporary environmentally responsible solutions.

She began her professional career in 2020 at the firm Seis Arquitectos, where she participated in the development of large-scale architectural projects in Guatemala and Central America. She is currently on the design team of the RoxBox Containers studio in Colorado (USA), where she works on the development of innovative modular projects using shipping containers as a construction system, contributing to efficient and adaptable architectural solutions in different regions of the country.