



# Someone You Should Know...

## Will Quam - Brick of Chicago

Will is an architecture photographer and researcher, and for the past five years he has worked to reshape how people see the brick buildings that surround them. He spends his days photographing the little details and surprises in brick architecture. In the summer he leads his own walking tours, encouraging attendees to get up close to buildings and touch the brick. He lives in Chicago surrounded by brick architecture, new and old.



I have come to appreciate brick as the most versatile building material, a perfect blend of function and design. It is well appreciated for its function, but too often the design possibilities are forgotten.

Often, brick is used as a referential material, a way to give a new construction building a sense of history and credibility. In older cities like Chicago, brick is a great way to help a new building fit into the fabric of the streetscape. Brick also lends both physical and metaphorical permanence and strength to a facade. Add to that bricks' fireproof nature, ties to luxury, and the fact that bricks can be made using reclaimed or recycled materials (making it eco-friendly), brick can be found on new and old multi-family homes, commercial and government buildings, and schools across the United States.

But what makes brick really soar is when it is embraced as more than a unit of a building, but as a unit of expression and design, just like a brushstroke in a painting or a pixel in a computer monitor. Each one a beautiful piece of a larger, more beautiful whole.

There is inherent beauty in every building material, but as materials go, brick is by far the most expressive and unique. All bricks are made of fired clay, but clays from different locations and geological conditions can make for very different bricks. For example, although Milwaukee and St Louis are only about 350 miles apart, the bricks historically produced in those cities are wildly different – Milwaukee's soft and chalky yellow, St. Louis's crisp and fire engine red. Look in between those cities at the bricks made in Chicago or central Illinois and you'll find two more wildly different types of bricks, no more similar to each other than they are to their neighbors to the north and south.

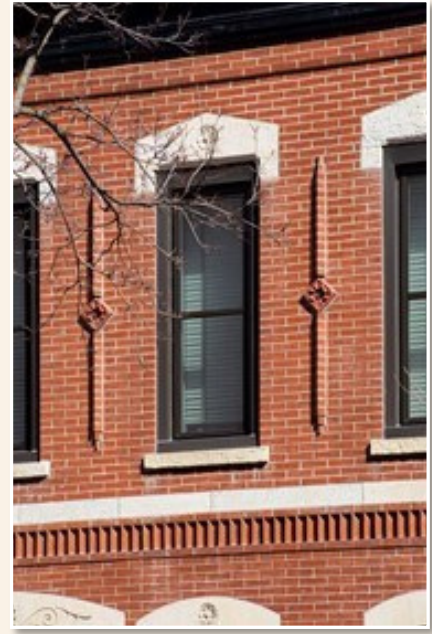


Add to that all of the variables like color additives, how the bricks are formed (extruded, molded, etc), cut or given texture, stacked, dried, and fired. There is so much variety that can be found in bricks, from batch to batch or even brick to brick.

No matter what your brick looks like, be they uniform or varied, brick should be used intentionally. Especially if brick is just being used as a non-structural cladding, why not embrace it fully as a design material?

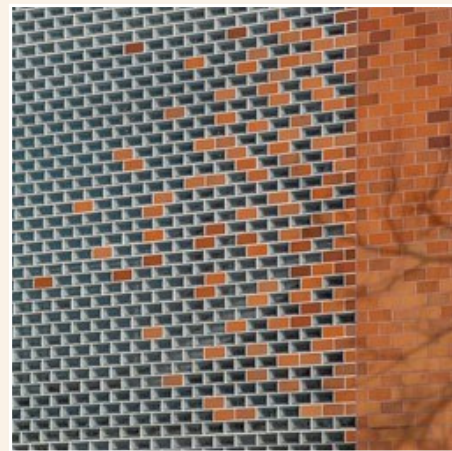
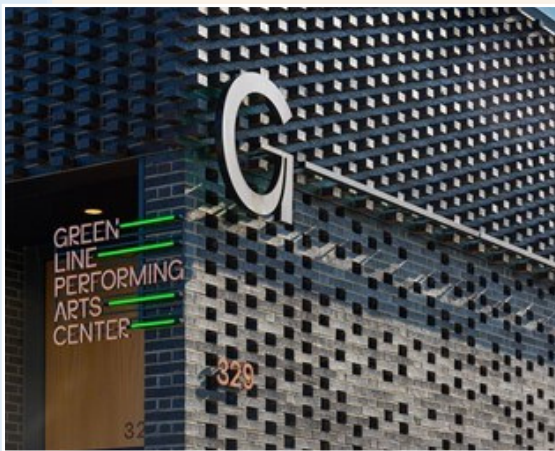


Soft and chalky yellow brick from Milwaukee



Crisp and fire engine red brick from St. Louis

Using brick as an intentional design material can take many forms, from simple to complicated and everything in between. Just changing the orientation or depth of a brick can open up a whole world of design possibilities for a facade. At the moment, removing entire bricks to create screens is an incredibly popular design choice, one that works well in terms of design, light, and privacy. The Green Line Performing Arts Center in Chicago takes things a step further by mixing a screen with bricks that project out from the cornice and corners to create one of the most evocative new facades.

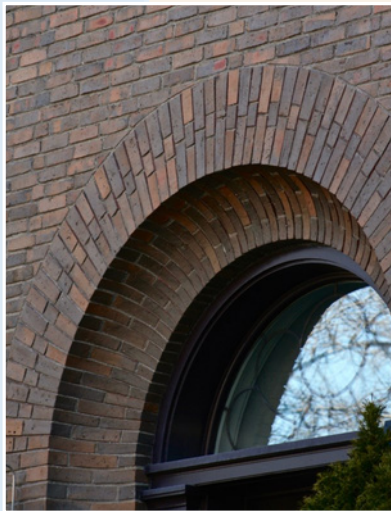


Tumbled, textured, and molded bricks can be used to create new buildings that appear older than their true age, fitting into historic districts seamlessly. Glazed and colorful bricks bring bright pops of color to schools and dark, iridescent bricks give luxury to condos and homes. Custom shaped bricks have been used by architects to create spiky, otherworldly designs, but so much can be done with just a simple standard brick.

Even the great modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, most famous for his steel and glass, understood this quality of brick. For his buildings on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, van der Rohe used large panels of a spotted buff brick as infill around steel, glass, and concrete. Despite the fact that the brick is not structural, van der Rohe chose for the brick to be laid in the appearance of English bond so the structural nature of brick complimented the other materials. The texture and pattern are subtle, but add so much in terms of character and visual interest to the campus buildings.



Some of my favorite brick buildings, new and old, have taken inspiration from things like textiles, watercolors, Legos, digital art, and more, in ways both subtle and grand. The possibilities are endless.



Architect Louis Kahn famously said that if you ask a brick what it wants to be, it will say it wants to be an arch. But why stop there?

Visit Will's Instagram page for more photos and stories @brickofchicago

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