In this folio of built projects, the WORK FOR OTHERS illustrates the commercial practices where I learned to be a practicing architect and which ultimately led me to leave market practice for more quirky projects that offered more freedom.

GRAND’S CONVENIENCE STORE was my first built project in solo practice. Although I remain astonished at how much was accomplished in this mundane building, it actually retarded my practice. First, it made me realize how far I could push a client and presented me with ethical limits on this frontier. Second, the architectural press wouldn’t touch it, forcing me to also realize that project types could control an architect’s public image.

The OSTROW OFFICES and SPA SYDELL paved the way for the ACADEMIC + PROFESSIONAL work that came immediately after. In these interiors, I ran up against the limits of small projects on modest budgets, determining to try new avenues of delivery. They also taught me what could be done with space, even on a modest budget, which also pointed ahead.
portfolio of professional practice
PRE-INDEPENDENT PRACTICE 1976-1986
2. PRE-PRACTICE 1976-86

1976
PUBLIC LIBRARY
WINTER PARK, FL
Duer Butler Architects, Inc.
Robert Miller, designer
primary responsibilities: schematic design

1980-81
AT&T LONG LINES BUILDING
ATLANTA, GA
corporate office building
Thompson Ventulett Stainback & Ass.
Robert Miller, designer
primary responsibilities: construction drawings, design of sunshade system and interior monumental stairs.

1981-82
CARNEGIE BUILDING
ATLANTA, GA
historic restoration
Rabun Hatch & Dendy, Architects
Robert Miller, project architect
primary responsibilities: construction drawings, construction administration.
1982-84
WEINCOFF BUILDING
ATLANTA, GA
renovation of historic hotel; designs for transit plaza and office building
Rabun Hatch & Dendy Architects
Robert Miller, project architect
primary responsibilities: design, project management, construction documents and administration

1983
HOUSTON'S WEST PACES
ATLANTA, GA
renovation of strip mall into restaurant + carry out kitchen
Rabun Hatch & Dendy Architects
Robert Miller, project architect
primary responsibilities: design, construction documents, management, and administration

1983
THE CAREW BLOCK
CINCINNATI, OH
restoration survey + design analysis of 1930 art deco mixed use complex
Rabun Hatch & Dendy Architects,
Robert Miller, team member
primary responsibilities: design analysis, existing building inventory
1983-85
COURT STREET CENTER
CINCINNATI, OH
renovation of factory into speculative office building
Moore, Grover, Harper Architects
In collaboration with RHPMHR Architects.
Robert Miller, project architect

primary responsibilities: design development; construction drawings; project and construction administration.
1984-86
HILTON AIRPORT HOTEL + CONFERENCE FACILITY
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL
Hotel/conference center at junction of airport landing zone, interstate highway, + inter-coastal waterway
RHPM HR Architects, Inc.
Robert Miller, project architect
primary responsibilities: design, construction documentation, project administration up to construction.
1986  GRAND'S CONVENIENCE STORE
POWDER SPRINGS, GA
Grand’s Convenience Store was the first executed project in my practice. It was commissioned by a man who, having amassed a sizable convenience store business, wanted to take the type to a new level of excellence and exploration.

The scheme originated as a reaction to the Southern landscape. The rural South is inhabited by artifacts: abandoned gas stations, decaying barns, old signs, derelict drive-in movie theatres, inoperative train tracks, vestigial road beds, junked cars—a whole legacy of debris and cultural evidence that in most places is cleaned away. These objects, which in the South are discarded but never destroyed, are the significant features of the Southern landscape and render the landscape as a palimpsest. Consequently, this project sought not only to respond to this circumstance, but to accept it as a condition of its own existence: the architecture would not exist as an autonomous work free of alteration, amendment, or removal. Grand’s was considered before hand as a ruin, an initial composition subject to uninvited modification. The great wall, the arcing sign structure, the enclosing wall, and the fuel canopy were all intended to outlive several functional lives, eventually to join the great rural graveyard that is the rural South. Consequently, as an architectural language, the pieces engage each other but do not make a whole or complete composition. Pieces could be added, or taken away, without damaging the nature of the work.
The General Store typology, whether in town or country, developed with an extended (often stepping) front façade that added prominence to an otherwise utilitarian box. Enlarging upon this ratcheted outline, the great wall at Grand’s provides a gigantic backdrop at the scale of the frenetic automobile traffic and commercial activity going on in front. It is a huge set; an outdoor theatre; a scene whose background is the archetype of a now dormant typology. It monumentalizes the otherwise banal conditions of outdoor merchandizing.

Grand’s also tells the story of the transformation of a type: from the general store into the quick-stop convenience mart.
The signage and constructional systems develop this narrative of the transformation of the general store typology. The long “GRAND’S” sign on the great wall is a painted metal sign, front illuminated, in the tradition of the old Coca-Cola signs that used to attend country stores. By contrast, the arcing marquis in front of the building is internally illuminated, with changeable type. It derives from the often bizarre relationships between signage structures and buildings that prevail in today’s commercial landscape.

The building is, consequently, both a “duck” (in Robert Venturi’s nomenclature) as well as an architecture of signs.

The long “Grand’s” sign is also encoded with other stories, stories about the building and its inhabitants. Examples:

⊙ The red #7 indicates that this building is the seventh in the owner’s chain. It also makes a kind of arrow on the entry axis, one that delineates the collision of checkout-counter and fuel-island-path (immediately below).

⊙ The thin-blue-line (over the R) marks the building’s centerline.

⊙ The hoops, dots, standing-bolts, and other elements sign stand for people on the staff, the design team, and the contractors who worked on the building.
ROBERT MILLER, ARCHITECT  PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

VIENNA SAUSAGE AND A MOON PIE

The Architecture Society of Atlanta eats junk food at GRAND'S convenience store
Thursday, 23 July 1989 / 7:30 pm

Rob Miller Architect
Everyone knows that a convenience store is not necessarily more convenient than a grocery—it just seems that way. It may in fact take longer to run into a convenience mart, find the right brand of vienna sausage, and wait through checkout than to make a similar purchase at Piggly Wiggly. But, because customers retain visual and physical proximity to their cars, a convenience store feels more convenient.

The traditional rectangular-plan convenience store puts only about half of its customers in this ideal relationship by parking them across the front—while the rest have blind spots. At Grand’s, due to the bowed parking layout, all spaces are front spots. The sides have been added to the front by the use of the curve and thus the frontage has been dramatically increased. From everywhere inside, the customer retains eye-contact with the car. In fact, the architecture is laid-out according to the parking bays.

The construction logic of the building lays out from the psychology of the building type, starting with the parking:

Ø Two arced parking bays per one marquis bay;
Ø one marquis bay per eleven concrete-block courses in the arcing wall;
Ø two-three course window-openings per arcing wall bay; and so on.
This system, generated from the parking dimension of the automobile, encounters another rationale, that of the great wall and storage bins. The wall and what lays behind are the storage components of the store: cold lockers, freezers, dry storage, and delivery.

Both systems intersect (following a bright yellow path linking the fuel island to the food stand) at the checkout counter.

Since security is a vital component of this business, the site and building were laid out such that a single employee could see and run everything: gas pumps, outdoor vending machines, store interior, and back entry.

Inside (like out), proto- and stereotypical elements of the convenience store world were enlarged upon—from the “end caps” at the ends of isles, to hats strung across the store, to beer signs, to fisheye mirrors.
While change and ruin were themes attendant to the design from the beginning, revisions to the original design were also recorded in the building.

Originally, the great wall was to be symmetrical. A large portion of it was taken out, however, to save money, compressing the left end toward the middle. At this ellipsis, a vertical gap was left to record the erasure.

Originally, the counter had a longer and more elaborate configuration that had to be cut at the last minute due to changes in equipment. At the point of removal, a “bite” was registered in the counter, a gap through which employees could pass to the front of the store.

By registering the process of negotiation and revision, the design advanced the notion that architecture is not an idealized un-aging object, but a material fact subject to unanticipated modification.

As important as the front of this building is the back—a back that is just a back.
Pershing Point Plaza involved the renovation of the front facades, ground plane, and lobbies of three class C office buildings. The two largest buildings, built in the 1950s for Mobile Oil, were Robin’s Egg Blue (a signifier of the petroleum company). The project was a collaboration with Moore Grover Harper Architects (later Centerbrook), who were the design architects and color consultant Brenda Hoffman; Miller was the architect of record and executed design development, construction documents, and construction administration.

In order to meet a very tight budget, the design team kept (and highlighted) what everyone presumed to be the worst attribute of the buildings: the color blue. By overlaying a series of carefully shaded blue and green elements, we altered the appearance of the glazed brick (compare to existing conditions) and altered the visual appearance of the proportions as well.

As important as the appearance of the buildings as objects was the ground plane. Retail space was inserted on the two lowest levels, opening the complex to Peachtree Street, and the entire ground plane was reworked to make it more urban and pedestrian friendly. Signage, street furniture, and landscaping were added.

When the complex was sold in the late 1990s and re-renovated, the next architect did exactly what we worked to avoid: covering the buildings with an insulated finish system.
view above, prior to renovation and corresponds to view at right.
view above, prior to renovation and corresponds to view at left.
1990 OFFICES FOR DOCTOR OSTROW
ATLANTA, GA
This medical office for a general practitioner was designed to manifest the client’s particular mode of work. His medical practice was distinguished by its philosophy: the Doctor never gave directives to his patients; rather, he presented alternatives from which the person would construct a personal plan for recovery. Moreover, he never had these discussions in the examination room (where the patient, being unclothed or undergoing medical procedures, was vulnerable); rather, every patient had a closing consultation in the physician’s office. This mode of interaction put the patient in a physical and psychological position of responsibility with respect to health and well being.

To concretize this philosophy, the office was divided in two: on one side the patient was cared for (examination, lab work, treatment); on the other the patient was encouraged to take personal responsibility and action (diagnosis, education, payment, scheduling).

These two distinct functions were given dissimilar environmental settings. One, tucked within a massive raked wall, was clinical, passive, and introspective; the other, sited without, was energetic, ethereal, and action oriented. Moving in and out of the wall made the staff conscious of implementing the philosophy, and it had the patients act out the physician’s mode of healing.

Many of the conventions used by architects in the twentieth century were developed during the Renaissance, a time when the practices of medicine and architecture shared close quarters. For example, the metaphor of “circulation” for people’s movements in a building seems to have emerged at the same time that architects like Leonardo were studying cadavers.

In this physician’s office, the architecture investigates the conceptual ancestry of medicine and architecture. What is a mountain-like wall in one reading, becomes a body in another: it is covered with skin-like scales, it is, in places, surgically incised to reveal a blood-red fleshy interior, and this skin itself covers the functional organs of the office.
The open end of the office was grouped around the corner glass and some extraordinary crape myrtles that screened the view of the office park and filtered a diffused light into the office.

Within this open space, as if slid-out from within the raking wall, was a little cubicle where patients could sit in privacy and examine instructional videos or books.

The front desk—a greatly simplified version of some later constructions in my work—was thought of as a kind of prosthetic appliance (the financial support of the office passing over this armature).
portfolio of professional practice
ROBERT MILLER, ARCHITECT  PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

SPA SYDELL
ATLANTA, GA

1992
Sydell is a day spa and retail store. While undress and intimate touch are commonly employed merchandising strategies for hyping consumption, they are not activities that most consumers would actually undertake in public, especially in that most-public of American institutions: the mall. Nevertheless, enticing shoppers into undress and intimate touch are precisely the goals of this project, located in a mall in Atlanta.

The architectural scheme is essentially a mapping of flirtation, enticement, and undress, staging the movement of clients through progressively more-intimate spaces in their progression through the stages of professional intimacy and body care.

From the mall, the gridded façade is predominantly opaque—a reversal of standard frontage. Within the glossy panels, a series of merchandise display windows become increasingly dense as they approach the entry: a structural framework of exposed steel tubes from which structural glass boxes have been cantilevered. The initial presentation, therefore, is a deliberately mute façade within which screen invites, but also obstructs, viewing.

Passing through this screen, one enters an ovoid space that extends beyond the immediate confines of the reception and sales room. This overlap and merging of spaces, with veils of structure and product occupying the overlap, typifies the architectural boundaries of the entry. Moving in a snake-like pattern, but never opening a door, the client passes first into a sitting room and then through a knuckle and into the Spa’s main interior street.

Even from the mall, one sees through this sequence of entry spaces, looking through display cases, through the retail/reception space, over the counter, and through the framing of a great slanting wall. While it is not possible to recognize a person, it is possible to glimpse the movement of partially clad bodies through miniscule joints separating structure from furnishing. Having passed through several veils, the space becomes a warren of interior streets—nail polishing and pedicure along one set of counters; make-up at another; the sauna down one corridor;
HILLTOP KITCHEN
OXFORD, OH
1993
This simple 1950s house had received numerous additions over its life and had quite outgrown the emotional and functional heart of the family: the kitchen. This renovation gutted the previous room and expanded the kitchen space up into the attic. The scheme was designed for light and view, such that it is possible to eat and work in this space while contemplating a remarkable tree.