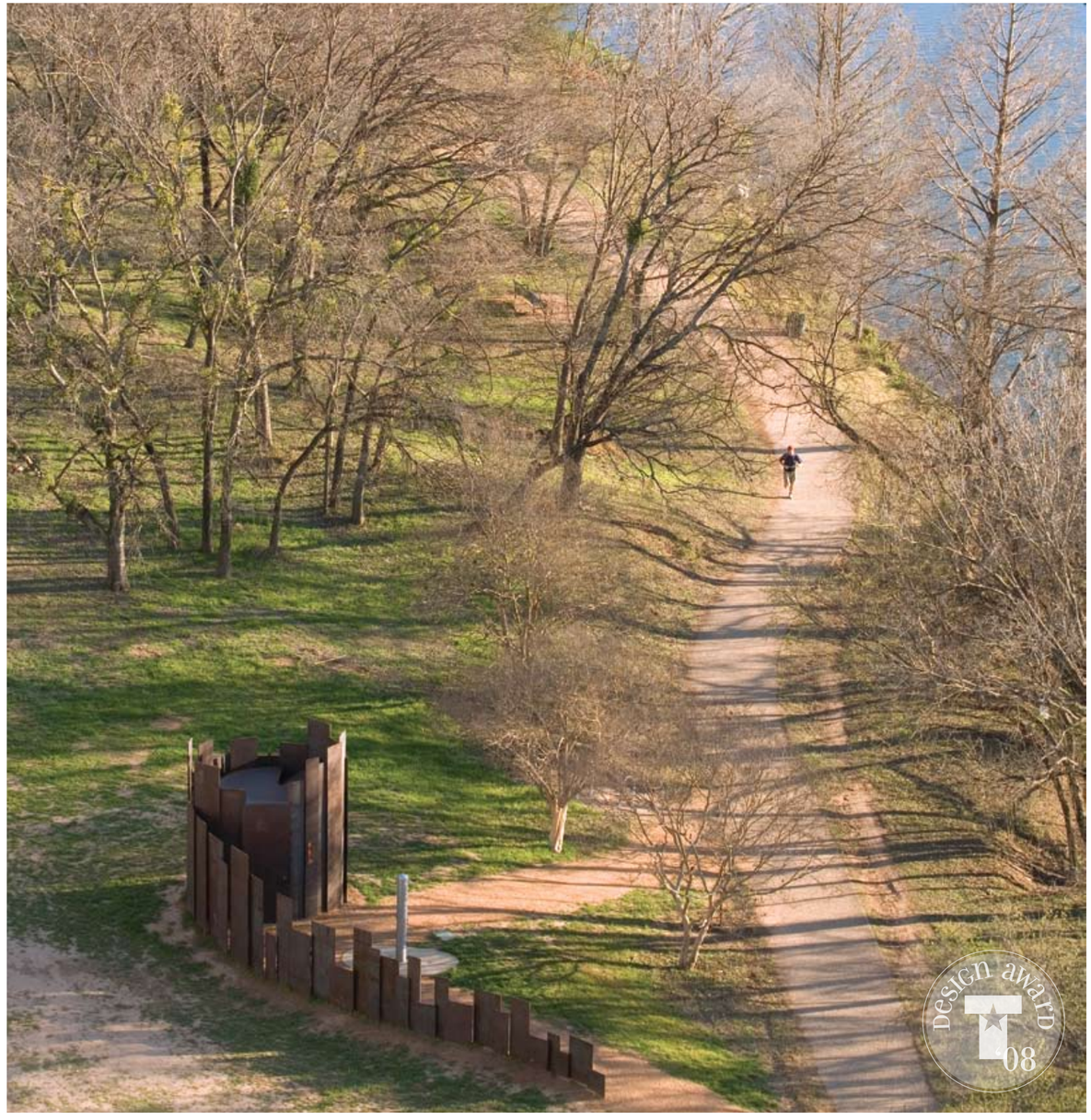
PROJECT Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail Restroom, Austin
CLIENT The Townlake Trail Foundation
ARCHITECT Miró Rivera Architects
DESIGN TEAM Juan Miró, AIA; Miguel Rivera, AIA; Aaron Hunt; Carina Coel
CONSULTANTS Murfree Engineering (civil); Architectural Engineers Collaborative (structural); Austin Architectural Graphics (signage); Capital Survey Company (survey); City of Austin Parks & Recreation Dept. (foundation and utilities); John Duke Plumbing (plumbing); Construction Metal Products (steel fabrication and erection)
PHOTOGRAPHER Paul Finkel – piston design; Paul Bardagjy Photography

RESOURCES CONCRETE MATERIALS: City of Austin Parks and Recreation Dept.; **METAL MATERIALS:** Construction Metal Products; **DOOR HINGES:** Innovative Hinge Products



Trail Restroom

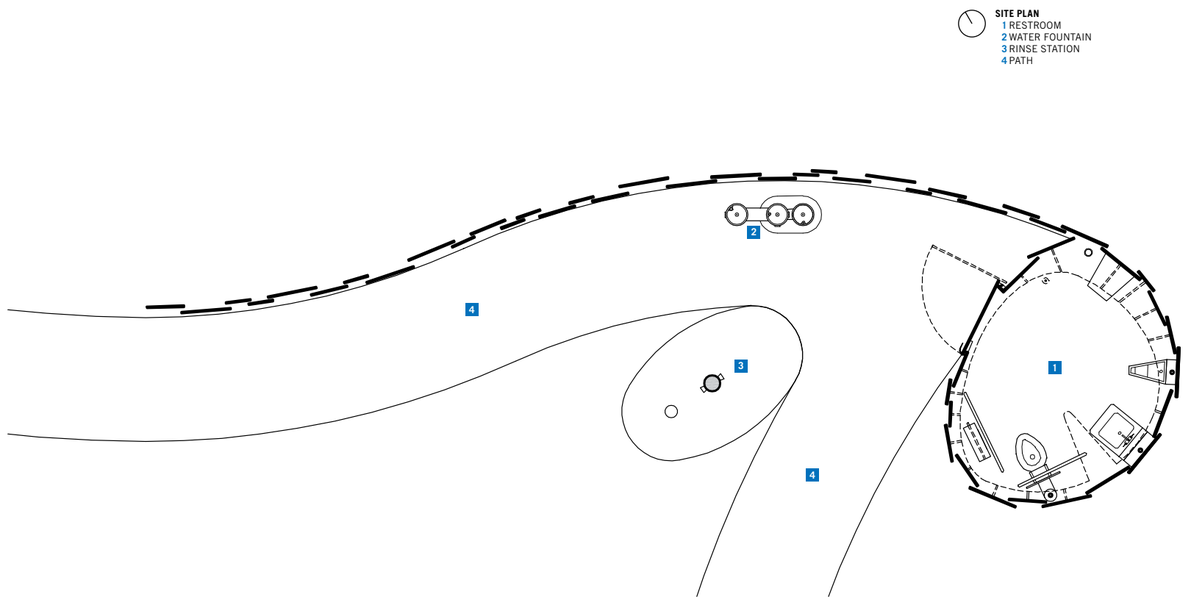
by **DROR BALDINGER, AIA**

AN ASSEMBLAGE OF 49 CORTEN STEEL PLATES arrayed in a coil-like shape, Miró Rivera Architects' Trail Restroom is a captivating work of brutal simplicity.

The architects have made something extraordinary from what otherwise was ordinary. They went beyond the programmatic needs of a maintenance-free and ADA-compliant structure (required to contain 70 sq. ft. of enclosed public restroom, an exterior shower station, and a drinking fountain with an attached pet fountain) by creating a project that directly displays the beauty imbued in raw materials and showcases an evocative use of natural light.

Located along the north shore of Lady Bird Lake (formerly Town Lake), the restroom is the result of a long-standing partnership between the non-profit Lady Bird Lake Trail Foundation and the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. With the entire A/E team donating their services, the construction process exemplified the unique nature of the project. The architects printed a full-sized plan and laid it out themselves on the site. The steel fabricator then erected all 49 panels in one day.

The naturally weathered, ¾-inch-thick steel plates vary in height from two feet near the edge of the trail to 13 feet where the restroom is enclosed. They elegantly rise in a gentle, vertical, staccato rhythm. The plates are positioned horizontally in a manner that provides natural ventilation and blocks views into the restroom's interior.



The roof and door are also made of ¾-inch-thick Corten steel. The roof is a single, free- shaped steel plate that partially protects the enclosure from the elements. Natural light enters the space primarily from above, through gaps of varied dimensions between the vertical plates and the roof, highlighting reddish patterns in the oxidizing steel. The door is a massive and imposing 840 lbs. of steel plate. Stainless steel plumbing fixtures are set on a bare concrete floor.

The intangible aspects of the project are educational. Louis I. Kahn approached his universal truth by regarding the program as a guide and not as a command. The architects at Miró Rivera are clearly artists who, like Kahn, never read the program literally. Moving beyond the functional requirements, they transformed the project from a one-dimensional satisfaction of programmatic needs.

The enduring lessons in this captivating project lie in the demonstration of how clear vision, creativity, and artistic intent can transform a mundane structure, from which not much is expected, into a richly layered work of art and architecture.

Dror Baldinger, AIA, is a partner with Marmon Mok Architecture.