

On **Wednesday, March 24** we welcome **Tim McDonald**, a founding principal of Onion Flats from Philadelphia. Along with his brother Patrick, Tim McDonald, is a founding principal of Onion Flats, a development/ design/ build collective in Philadelphia. Initially, Onion Flats began as the nickname of a side project – a family investment property on Market Street in Old City, (now known as the Market Flats). The dilapidated warehouse became the site of Tim's architectural gallery, FAARM (Foundation For Art And Architectural Research.) FAARM intended to renew cultural interest in local Philadelphian architects, bringing together professionals and architecture students alike from the neighboring universities of Penn, Drexel, Temple, and the Philadelphia University. The combined success of FAARM and the ideas generated during the hands-on work of the very first "Flats" project set the stage for the creation of a unique community-conscious and family-oriented establishment.

The two brothers set forth to combine their individual talents and crafts into a unique business model that would institute positive change and growth in Philadelphia neighborhoods. Onion Flats, the unifying umbrella of three companies each handling one aspect of the building process, sought to redefine the practice of architecture by reinstating the idea of "ownership as responsibility." The collective's namesake acts as the real estate developer, while PLUMBOB is the licensed Architect firm, and JIG, Inc. is the construction/construction management component. Some of the built projects in which Tim played significant roles include: Market Flats, E Flats, Firehouse, Capital Flats, Berks Hewson, Jackhammer, Margarido, and Thin Flats, and notably Rag Flats.

Already pushing boundaries of urban redevelopment, The Rag Flats development, completed in 2006, took one step further to activate sustainable design in Philadelphia. Rag Flats was the experimental project that launched the inception of yet a fourth organization related to the Onion Flats structure. G.R.A.S.S. contains its own three missions; the Green roofs, the Solar Systems, and the Rain Water Harvesting. With these systems now in place as a living exhibit in Rag Flats, Tim insists that the Onion Flats sustainable design approach is one of "common sense," and not one of "green-washing."

Tim studied architecture at Penn State and then went on to Montreal to get his Master's in Architecture, with a focus on Architectural History and Theory at McGill University. During his studies, he apprenticed for an avant-guard architect, Yasuo Yoshida, in Japan. There he learned the art of contemporary steel design and construction, which greatly influenced his architectural language and experimental spirit. Growing up around working middle class sections of a rapidly dilapidating Philadelphia, Tim had a personal interest in the development efforts that started happening in Philadelphia neighborhoods in the 1990s. He returned from Montreal in 1996 to teach at the local universities, to freelance residential and mixed-use work, and ultimately to redefine the residential archetype of the Philadelphia row home.

The success of the "Flats" developments has inspired a new generation of architects. Students and young professionals alike look to Tim McDonald of Onion Flats for his ingenuity in re-ordering pre-existing urban forms and expanding possibilities for light and gardens. Perhaps what is most impressive is that these designs are all performed and executed away from the drawing board. The construction site is also the design site where Tim's mantra is "Think with your hands, not your heads!"