



## Meet Howard M. Blackson III of AVRP Skyport in Downtown

Today we'd like to introduce you to Howard M. Blackson III.

Thanks for sharing your story with us Howard. So, let's start at the beginning and we can move on from there.

As a kid, my mom would get lost in various Mission Valley shopping center parking lots and I knew I had remembered where we parked, which way was north and our direction or I'd never get home in time to watch cartoons. My dad was a Navy submariner and toured the world, so I had a globe and would track his overseas whereabouts via his letters home. Between these parental cues, I also drew comic book characters on every notebook and page margin. In college, my major was undetermined until I made a great grade in a Cartography class and finally got my bachelor's in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin ('89).

Surfing gave me a great reason to travel and I was able to take my drawing, design, and map making skills to live an expat life in South Korea and Singapore with stints in Hawaii and San Diego in between overseas adventures. The Singapore gig in the mid-90's led me to see the value of designing for mixed-use, 'walkable' urban places as opposed to Orange County 'drivable' suburban sprawl. This new-found passion in my own profession led me to getting my Master's in Urban Design from the University of Westminster, London ('00).

Finally resettled permanently in San Diego, I was fortunately married to a wonderful woman, Kristin, and had we kids and a mortgage. I was then able to learn from New Urbanist gurus, Leon Krier and Andres Duany, while working for the both the County and City of San Diego in various planning/urban design positions, as well as having my own urban design and planning company, PlaceMakers, and have been hired, bought out, and downsized with a couple of large international firms in San Diego while working on various projects across North America.

I have been appointed to boards, led non-profit advocacy groups, and have published on, and spoken to large and small audiences on the social, culture, and economic value of building mixed-use, walkable places. While I feel somewhat successful in getting us to understand that value, there is much left to do as we continue to hermetically seal ourselves in our cars, offices, and homes for too many hours in a day to fully appreciate the outdoor lifestyle San Diego affords us. Today, I lead AVR P Skyport urban design and planning studio with a great group of architects and creators who are dedicated to designing San Diego's best stuff.

We're always bombarded by how great it is to pursue your passion, etc – but we've spoken with enough people to know that it's not always easy. Overall, would you say things have been easy for you?

Challenges have been few as I have lived a blessed and fortunate life. Of the few obstacles I have faced, which are mostly of my own invention, I have had the loving support of my family, wife, and friends who helped me along the way. Know that I'm knocking on wood as I type this... As Joe Walsh once sang, life's been good to me so far.

So, as you know, we're impressed with AVR P Skyport – tell our readers more, for example what you're most proud of as a company and what sets you apart from others.

At AVR P Skyport, we design amazing things. Our clients have asked, "what is a Skyport?" We explain it as the place where big ideas take off. Located in downtown's East Village, AVR P Skyport is a 40=person firm building a new tradition of urban innovation with Skyport Studio in collaboration with AVR P's long-standing architectural excellence. Doug Austin, Chris Veum, Randy Robins, Frank Wolden, and Howard Blackson have been successfully designing and building mixed-use, walkable urbanism throughout San Diego for decades.

We are unique in our ability to both design buildings (Smart Corner), institutions, master plans, and waterfront districts (Seaport Village), as well as craft General Plans, Community Plans, and Form/Place-Based Codes (San Marcos) to guide municipalities policies and regulations.

So, what's next? Any big plans?

The City of San Diego is in desperate need to meet its Climate Action Plan targets of getting 50% of all trips around the city to be made by walking, biking, and/or riding transit. This will be daunting as today about 90% of all trips are made by single-occupancy automobiles.

In comparison, Vancouver and Portland are achieving these travel mode percentage goals, so it is possible. And, being outside on a bike or sidewalk in San Diego is near heavenly as our weather is perfect. I intend to assist San Diego's citizens and political leadership to achieve these economically, socially, and physically healthier targets.

Our office is redesigning Seaport Village. An important place, our mantra is to build 'The Best of San Diego.' The best waterfront experience, the best place to hang out and spend time, and the best places to understand what it means to live in San Diego. We are looking forward to turning Seaport into a destination as opposed to a place for tourists to walk through between the Convention Center and Navy Pier.

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Holtville Main Street BEFORE

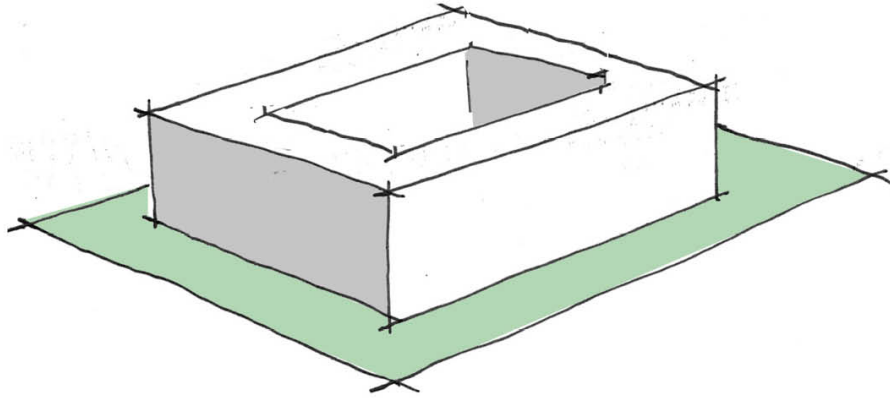


Holtville Main Street AFTER



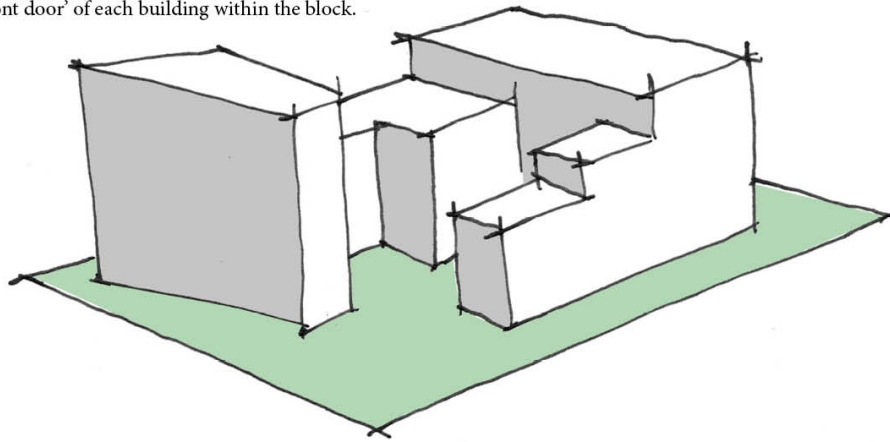
#### A. Perimeter Block Building - Evil Dallas Donut

Still fearful of inter-acting with others (Urbanism) offering only the streetscape for public space. The human scale building and private court are steps in the right direction from the armed guard protected lobbies of the Vancouver Tower model.



#### B. Civic Space Oriented Block Building(s) - The Danish

Anchored by a civic plaza on the most connected corner of the block (Urbanism). The buildings front onto each street in context with its neighbors. Public spaces, semi-public space, and private spaces define the 'front door' of each building within the block.



# THIS MACHINE KILLS APATHY



Howard Blackson & AVRP Skyport

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