

ure

# School of Architecture

University of Illinois Chicago 845 W Harrison St  
1300 A+D Studios MC 030 Chicago, IL 60607 [arch.uic.edu](http://arch.uic.edu)

August 24, 2025 12:50pm  
Masterplan Edith Farnsworth House

Fall 2025 - University of Illinois Chicago  
2025–26 Douglas A. Garofalo Fellow  
Nile Greenberg  
[nile@any.nyc](mailto:nile@any.nyc)

Masterplan Edith Farnsworth House







August 20, 2025 9:12am

## Two Paths

The aim of this studio is to monofixate on the Farnsworth House, its site as a legal boundary, its site as a hydrological territory, its structure as a 501c(3) non-profit, its registration as a national historic landmark, its situation in a local and international economy. The complexity of the site is typical. There are overlapping and paradoxical structures and requirements that make it both bureaucratic and a typical design brief. The primary difference for architects is that at its core this site is a piece of architecture that is both relevant and canonized. Its form has transcended into a tome, a meme, or an image torturing architects (see treacherous transparencies by Herzog and de Mueron).

In this studio we will redesign the site to be relevant: floods will increase, economies will change, bureaucracy and non-profit structures will falter. But first a new form of masterplanning needs to happen, one that understands how things fail as well as how things grow. Amateurplanning or failplanning might be more appropriate. But something like resilienceplanning is wrong (a bigger wall preserves too kindly.) Techniques like Managed Retreat might be more interesting and something that the Edith Farnsworth House has examined. But there is a theoretical basis for all of this, Crisis Formalism, which situates itself within the flows of crisis, adopting crisis' fluid and illegible structures.

We take two paths, the first is to fearlessly masterplan the site by adopting optimism and pessimism without hierarchy. The second path is to develop architecture that recognizes this new site, a out of it flows a piece of architecture suitable for this moment.

August 18, 2025 3:31pm

Realities

Stating it plainly would claim that this studio is to develop a masterplan for the museum-house and grounds of the historically important Edith Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois. The house and grounds are in turmoil with a very unique funding mechanism and requirements. But the program is to allow the house and grounds to be continually preserved, but also to increase its capacity for meaning and relevancy. To make a new building that serves the neighborhood and community that supports the building. There are currently 6 buildings on the site that each have particularities that can be discussed, but as a whole the site, its ownership and its future are all being planned in coordination with its own balance sheet positioned in an ever evolving non-profit governmental framework.

We will travel to the Farnsworth House and do workshops with its leadership and teams to survey the needs and conditions. Help build priorities. Open paths to alternative means of development and futures. As architects we understand the meaning of the house as an object of history, media and aesthetics, but to understand how those functions operate in the context of a rural museum-house and its management already begins to destabilize the house as a piece of iconography.

August 18, 2025, 3:47 PM EST

Claude (AI Assistant). "Technical Summary of Fox River Geographic Facts, Environmental Issues, and Economic Benefits." Generated summary incorporating geographic data, water quality research, and recreational/economic impact studies for the Fox River watershed through Plano, Illinois. August 18, 2025.

The Fox River flows northeasterly through Plano, Illinois (Kendall County) as part of a 202-mile waterway that drains 2,570 square miles across northeastern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin before joining the Illinois River system. Located approximately 50 miles southwest of Chicago, the river maintains a gentle gradient through the glaciated prairie landscape with relatively shallow valley banks characteristic of Midwestern agricultural watersheds. While the river faces significant environmental challenges including water quality problems from mercury, PCBs, fecal bacteria, sediment, and pesticides that have led to Illinois EPA impairment designations, along with safety hazards and ecological fragmentation caused by aging dams, it also provides substantial economic and recreational benefits. The river generates millions in tourism revenue, supports the 158-mile Fabulous Fox Water Trail designated by the National Park Service, serves as a drinking water source for over 330,000 people in cities like Elgin and Aurora, and offers diverse recreational opportunities including paddling, fishing, camping, and wildlife observation that connect communities and support local economies throughout the watershed.

August 18, 2025 3:56pm  
Crisis Formalism Notes for EFH

Stating it complexly, this is a studio to develop a formal language based on developing architecture in a thick atmosphere of crisis. Crisis Formalism. The immediacy of an apocalypse mindset is easy to see and hold onto. But while it's very present, there is also no obvious outcome, no vector that feels isolated enough to examine. Crisis Formalism claims that if architecture is to be meaningful, it must be situated within the flows of crisis rather than trying to resist it. How can architecture maintain order within the scale and complexity of the Polycrisis? Architecture that generates responses to visible crises does not contain the disintegrated and fluid qualities that the polycrisis is built from. The proposal is to examine the conceptual, structural and aesthetic qualities in confronting this issue. What if form can be generated by the flows of the polycrisis? Forces large enough to reduce architecture to a plaything. To make form through harnessing these forces, rather than resilience concepts or complexity mindset, is an architecture of the collapse, of the tangent, of the illegible.

March 12, 2025  
Crisis Formalism Pedagogy

Architecture is facing a crisis of relevance where form is losing its immediacy, with "Crisis Formalism" proposed as a framework to reconnect architecture with crisis.

As a working definition we are using Edgar Morin's "Polycrisis" - not a single problem but interconnected crises that resist reductionist approaches or singular solutions.

Young architects are abandoning form-making in favor of focusing on policy, financing, labor practices, and post-occupancy considerations.

Traditional architectural responses to crises (like defamiliarization, dystopian visions, or engineering solutions) ultimately get absorbed into the system that caused them.

Crisis Formalism suggests that architecture should not confront crises directly but approach them obliquely, avoiding easy codification or analysis.

Some architectural projects intentionally embrace illegibility, noise, and rejection of precision to create forms that cannot be easily codified or copied.

We are proposing an architecture that harnesses the flows of crisis rather than fighting against them, potentially formalizing the collapse instead of resisting it.

Projects that exemplify these approaches include works by DSR, Kaiping Diaolou, Frei Otto and others.

The polycrisis is constantly generating forces, but reactions don't drive new architectural forms. Instead we need to build work within the flow of crises.

March 12, 2025, 8:55 AM

## Edith Farnsworth House History

### Flooding History & Site Selection Tensions (1945-present)

The house was deliberately sited in a floodplain of the Fox River.

Dr. Farnsworth herself noted this problem in 1954

Major floods (1954, 1996, 2008, 2013) with waters reaching up to 5 feet inside the structure.

### Preservation vs. Adaptation Struggles (1968-present)

Lord Peter Palumbo in 1968, the house underwent significant alterations to make it more livable, including air conditioning installation and furniture changes. The National Trust's 2003 acquisition began a complex negotiation between strict preservation, climate resilience, and financial sustainability.

2012-2014 site restoration project

### Media Image vs. Physical Reality (1951-present)

The house gained architectural fame through carefully composed black-and-white photographs that emphasized its geometric purity while concealing practical problems.

### Public Trust Management vs. Economic Pressures (2003-present)

The National Trust's stewardship represents converging tensions between preservation mandates, climate adaptation needs, and financial sustainability. The trust has had to balance maintaining historical authenticity with generating revenue through tourism, events, and fundraising.



February 18, 2025 4:05 PM

First Impulse

I'd like to study work that creates meaning from the immediacy of crises by formalizing the Collapse. There are a set of failures that architecture defines itself by avoiding. In an architecture that accepts them, meaningful form generating becomes limitless. Gravitational and material failure, chemical decomposition, high resolution digital decay and other logics of collapse superimposed over one another. But forms such as these dissolve the moment you confront them with an analysis. For these reasons Crisis Formalism is difficult to find, design or analyze.

The Edith Farnsworth House and its masterplan will serve as a site to attempt to analyze Collapse and Crisis Formalism through its current issues around climate change, political governance, historic landmark status, economic needs linked to its rural condition, evolving national non-profit status, etc all in the context of the architectural iconography it lives in. Apart from the core work of architecture, it's also a site of architecture media that has had a profound impact on discourse through its photography and continued pervasiveness as an image. Collapse has two meanings, first it's the crumbling of an object, a loss of gravity and soundness. The second meaning is closer to convergence, or that suddenly a lot of different things suddenly mean the same thing. This intersection of historicism, climate, economics, its failing structure and canon status make the site a petri dish for studying architecture out of scale with the world we're in.

August 22, 2025 12:31pm

Studio Plan

Assignment 01 - Superimposition

2 Weeks

Develop and present a survey of the site

Assignment 02 - Rhizome

2 Weeks

128 Images

Paragraph

Found text (film, book, instagram post, sculpture...)

Assignment 03 - Clarity

4 Weeks

Presentation of New Site

Assignment 04 - Illegibility

8 Weeks

Design of Visitors Center as required

## Edith Farnsworth House Building Inventory

Edith Farnsworth House Building Inventory	
Building	Gross Area
Edith Farnsworth House	2100
Visitor Center	1734
Barnsworth	310
Boat House	800
Pool House	
Garage	750

### Edith Farnsworth House Expansion Program

<b>Current Visitors Center</b>	
VC Room Description	Area SF
Entrance/Shop	515
Orientation Room	350
Toilet Room	42
Toilet Room	42
Storage	97
Staff Work Area	194
Office Area	156
Exterior Public Area	960
TOTAL VC interior NSF	1396

<b>Visitors Center Expansion Program</b>	<b>Area SF</b>
Visitor Areas	
Ticketing/POS	350
Retail Display	500
Retail Storage	200
Corridor/Interpretive/Donor Wall	200
Multipurpose Room	600
AV Closet	9
Storage Closet	15
Exhibit Space	
Multipurpose/Program/Exhibition	1200
Gallery	1000
Storage and Prep Area	600
Office Area	
Open Office Area	300
Private Office 1	60
Private Office 2	60