



The Window Unit is a tiny architectural appendage that creates habitat for fish, bees or chickens directly adjacent to the kitchens and dining rooms in which they may be consumed. The modular habitats plug into a rigid framework that can be mounted in the window openings on the existing facade of virtually any building. It is... The Ultimate Locavorism.

Borrowing design intuition from the much maligned window air conditioner units found in cities around the world, this appendage uses the existing structural frame and the accessible aperture of the window to create a new liminal space, between inside and out, between the human and animal realms. In providing useful food for the household inside, the Window Unit is a form of architectural mutualism. This synergistic relationship couples habitat for animals with edible products for humans, creating a scalable model for increasing urban self-sufficiency.

Each type of Window Unit has been designed to reflect the unique needs of the animals it houses. Like conventional bee hives, aquariums, and chicken coops, these individualized habitats create autonomous zones for each species. And like those predecessors, each of these idiosyncratic protuberances has an articulated human edge at the building envelope dedicated for feeding, cleaning, and harvesting.

The Window Unit anticipates a future in which food security relies to an increasing degree on self-help strategies. In areas where urban dwellers lack access to yards, balconies, or rooftops, projections along the skin of a building may provide the only exterior cultivation surface available to a household. The Window Unit claims this transitional space as a new territory for production.

In 1943, more than 80 percent of American households harvested food from their own Victory Gardens." Today, the food consumed in most American households follows a much more circuitous path, resulting in increased preservatives, transportation costs and cultural uniformity. This disconnect particularly penalizes the poor, who are both more likely to live in "food deserts" and can't afford to pay the high price of imported perishables.

Animal-populated Window Units enable the resurrection of household-based urban food production. This bottom-up agricultural strategy enlists urban dwellers who elect to stock their window space with chickens, bees, or fish in creating a new urban food system. Working at a very small scale, with eminently replicable technologies, these wall projections have the potential to link on-site agricultural production to vast numbers of independent households.

While the Homestead Act provided families with 160 acres of cultivatable land, and the freedmen of the 1860's hoped for 40 acres, many of today's urban households lack access to any kind of agricultural medium. Indeed, this missing landscape may account for the recent estimation that only "2 percent of America's food is locally grown." This severe land scarcity presents urbanists with the challenge of retrofitting existing infrastructure, carving out productive spaces in the drosscape.

The Window Unit is a realization of "a new civic realm, one created by appendage and insertion" as described by Landscape Urbanist Chris Reed. Window Units effectively extend the boundaries of the household, working with existing buildings and standard window conditions to populate an underused transitional space.

Like humans, animals have also witnessed a shrinking of their terrain. The Window Unit creates individualized animal habitats that take advantage of the human environment in a way that allows for a mutualistic relationship. Chickens, bees, and fish gain a useful and previously uninhabitable space in the air, their living quarters curiously fastened to a window ledge via a simple and solid steel armature.

Because the Window Unit is a small and scalable feature, it can be produced for affordability and incremental growth. Although the shape of each type of Window Unit differs, the design of each of these habitats adheres to the standard condition of a typical window HVAC unit at the building envelope. This interface with the room inside the building occurs by way of an access aperture, which can be opened by humans to clean, feed, or harvest. Outside of the building, each Window Unit sheds water, self-ventilates, and defies temperature extremes through a thick cast insular shell.

Each Window Unit provides approximately four square feet of productive habitat for resident animals. This tiny farm-space will produce up to 50 pounds of honey per season, 600 eggs per year, or several hundred pounds of fish and vegetables annually. And while Window Units may be dispatched across the globe like their window heating and air conditioner predecessors, their contents necessarily develop cultural, climatic and economic specificity. The same method and structure used in these examples can be readily modified to fit local conditions and to house a wide array of productive species.

Over the course of the coming decades, the tide of global urbanization will continue to deposit an ever greater proportion of the human population in high density cities. While urbanization tends to bring higher standards of living and opportunities for cultural and economic innovation, it has also traditionally ruptured the connection between people and the sources of their sustenance.

The Window Unit adopts the opportunism and flexibility of the humble window air conditioning unit to open a new space for animals and food production in high density vertical urban living environments. The Window Unit offers a vision of the urban future in which people are reunited with their food sources and the façade of apartment blocks and towers around the world will truly come alive.

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