

Chapter 1 : Samuel Mockbee | Encyclopedia of Alabama

The Rural Studio was created by Samuel Mockbee and longtime friend D.K. Ruth in to simultaneously demystify modern architecture and expose architecture students to extreme poverty in their own backyard.

By Curtis Sittenfeld 5 minute Read Of the many things that impressed me about Samuel Mockbee, two in particular stood out. The first was that his work truly made a difference. There, he and his students, who stayed for at least a semester at a time, immersed themselves in the community in order to find out what the residents needed. Then — using natural or recycled materials, proceeding one building at a time, paying as much attention to artistry as to function — the students gave it to them. It was close to degrees during the afternoon and subsequent morning when Mockbee drove me around, over dirt roads and past kudzu-covered trees, to visit the Rural Studio project sites. Later on, when I was able to open the door successfully, Mockbee said it was because the truck had decided I was all right. At the sites, Mockbee chatted with the students working there or the families living there, and at one house, he actually took a nap in the living room while I interviewed a resident. In between, we ran errands at the courthouse and the convenience store and ate, variously, ribs, grits, and biscuits. It quickly became clear that, without regard to race, age, or gender, everyone in Hale County was crazy about Mockbee. As I learned more about the Rural Studio — both about the serious work of building houses and about the canoe trips the students took on the Black Warrior River, or the annual all-night pig roast they hosted — I had a feeling that I sometimes get when watching *ER* or *The West Wing* but rarely experience in real life: I wanted to climb inside the Rural Studio and live there. In creating the Rural Studio, Mockbee accomplished something great. He had a quiet, self-aware intelligence. He was realistic about the challenges of Hale County — especially about its extreme poverty and racial prejudice — but he did not, as others might have, see such problems as insurmountable. He was well read and well spoken, and he was not especially pleased by some earlier articles about the Rural Studio that had depicted him as a kind of hillbilly genius when, he said, he was neither. But still, there was something larger than life about him. He was a big man who seemed to have a lot of energy and I met him after his first episode of leukemia in , and that is part of what makes the fact of his death so hard to grasp. At one point, he introduced me to some prison inmates who were helping to renovate a building. So steeped am I in the northeastern culture of irony that when I saw their prison garb, I thought they were wearing it as a fashion statement, like peers of mine who wear gas station-attendant shirts. After we got back in the truck, Mockbee challenged me to mention the inmates in my article, and several months later, when I sent him the magazine, I proudly pointed out that I had not only worked in a mention of the inmates but had done so in the first paragraph. Not in a saccharine, cloying way, not even really in anything he said, but in his small gestures and the questions he asked me, in the fact that he even asked me questions at all. An interview is, by its nature, a one-sided conversation — subjects are supposed to talk endlessly about themselves. But I have met a few individuals, and Mockbee was one, who ask you questions anyway because, even though you are the reporter and they are the subject, you are both people. After learning that I was interested in fiction — this was over the phone, before we met in person — Mockbee announced that all great writers were from his native Mississippi. It was after 10 PM, and I was about to set off for my bed-and-breakfast, which was 15 minutes away. Mockbee offered to drive me there in his truck. I declined, not wanting to trouble him. I was relieved when he insisted and even more relieved when we actually began the drive, which was along curving, pitch-black roads; without him, surely I would never have found the way. In our culture, and especially in the media, superlatives are used so frequently that they have come to mean little. But I am not, as Mockbee was, a visual artist; the only medium I have in which to express myself is language. And Samuel Mockbee, I believe, deserves superlatives. More than anyone else I have ever interviewed, he inspired me. His death represents a terrible loss. He was an extraordinary person. Curtis Sittenfeld csitten soli. Learn more about the Rural Studio on the Web.

Chapter 2 : Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio: Community Architecture by David Moos

Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee dedicated his life, as a teacher, an architect and an artist, to the goal of providing "shelter for the soul." His inspirational and authentic architecture served to improve the lives of the most impoverished residents of rural Alabama through his work with Auburn University Rural Studio.

Auburn University AU architect and professor Samuel Mockbee was the driving force behind the Rural Studio , a hands-on architectural field school established in Hale County. Mockbee conceived the project while driving between his home in Canton, Mississippi, to his job at AU, a commute that took him through the economically depressed Black Belt region of west-central Alabama. Working with colleague, friend, and architecture chair D. Ruth, Mockbee established what has become a signature design-build training program in one of the poorest areas in the nation. He had one older sibling, a sister, Martha Ann, with whom he was raised in a traditional southern Christian home. He often recalled that as a boy he sat with his mother at the kitchen table drawing fanciful house plans and, from an early age, knew he wanted to be an architect. After a stint in the U. Army, Mockbee met and in married Jacquelyn Lee Johnson, with whom he would have four children. Thought and Process in recognition of their important body of work. The structures they built in the Deep South drew on traditional, local, rural themes and included elements such as brick piers, shed roofs, masonry chimneys, glass walls, wide awnings, and expansive porches. The designs, materials, and structures were at the same time thoroughly modern and innovative and practical and utilitarian. Several also featured whimsical and even urban elements. A warm, burly, bearlike man, Mockbee was greatly loved by his clients, associates, students, and family. In his Canton home and neighborhood, he was known by all the children as "Papa," and he delighted in playing with them, whatever their age. He was self-effacing, optimistic, and enthusiastic and made friends easily of every rank of person. All his life, Mockbee relaxed by drawing and painting, and he was enthusiastic about all artists, no matter their level of education or expertise or the medium of their craft. When he joined the architecture faculty of AU in at the request of Ruth, he brought with him a plan that incorporated all the various elements of his work and philosophy. As conceived by Mockbee, the Rural Studio would pair the needs of families and communities having limited financial resources with the ingenuity and fervor of students seeking practical experience. In the exchange, both parties would educate the other and both would benefit. With a small grant from the Alabama Power Foundation , Yancey Chapel Mockbee and Ruth launched the bold experiment in , eventually settling on the hamlet of Newbern as their base of operations. From there each semester, teams of second-year and fifth-year AU architecture students and outreach students from other disciplines and universities continue to work on projects located in the region. As of , more than projects have been completed by the program. In the 10 years following its founding, the Rural Studio and Mockbee were recognized nationally and internationally. On December 30, , Mockbee succumbed to cancer at age The accolades continued and his ideals and innovations lived on after his death. His students paid a memorial tribute to their leader with a Birmingham Museum of Art exhibit entitled "Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio: Community Architecture," curated by David Moos in Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency. Princeton Architectural Press, Proceed and Be Bold: Rural Studio after Samuel Mockbee. Moos, David, and Gail Treschel, eds. Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio. Birmingham Museum of Art,

Chapter 3 : Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio

The architect and teacher Samuel Mockbee, founder of Auburn University's Rural Studio, was an idealist who put into action one of the boldest programs in contemporary architecture.

Guided by frank, passionate interviews with Mockbee, the documentary *Citizen Architect*: The film reveals that the Rural Studio is about more than architecture and building. A discussion follows the screening, featuring panelists Maureen Colburn, cofounder of the Minneapolis-St. To read the full interview click here. Aside from the family connection and access to the subject, what drove you and your wife, Sarah Ann, to work on and complete this film? They had a lot of life and energy in them. But, more than that, I was inspired by the simple fact that he tried to make the world a better place with his talent, creativity and compassion. I think every artist wants to touch people the way Sambo was able to. As a kid growing up in Houston, I was quite taken by this big Mississippian with a huge beard who liked to draw as much as I did. And, then later on I was blown away when I saw that he was making architecture not only for the usual crowd, but for everyone else and also engaging students to use their skills for something more fulfilling than just a paycheck. Sambo always welcomed me into his home. He always had time to talk art. Samuel Mockbee was an architect who tried to make the world a better place through his creativity and compassion. He co-founded a program called the Rural Studio that invites architecture students to design and build striking, functional, respectful architecture for very impoverished communities in the rural South. He created an educational model that not only provides badly needed homes and facilities but also provides students with a seminal experience that leaves them bitten by the bug of incorporating a social responsibility into everything they do. What did you want to accomplish? We wanted to produce a film that followed a project from start to finish, so you could see the impact the experience was having on students, while also allowing Mockbee to explain the Rural Studio and his motivations, allowing you to get to know this amiable, thoughtful person. And, we wanted to do it in an entertaining, thoughtful way that engages audiences beyond the architecture community. Can you tell us how that scene came about and why you included it? Peanut sets up one of the main questions explored in the movie. Can architects have real impact? Is architecture just for the wealthy or can it benefit everybody? Peanut was very accommodating as far as filming went. He has a masters degree in education from Tuskegee and he loves to pontificate. How did you get access to this? When were these interviews done? These interviews with Sambo were conducted at his home in Canton, MS in They were supposed to be a preliminary interview for a film on Sambo that I knew I wanted to do some day, which is why the production quality is a bit lacking I thought we might just use them to get a grant or something. Sadly, Sambo passed away and these interviews ended up becoming the only candid, in-depth footage that exist of him on camera. Why did you choose to add this element? Was it difficult to get him to open up? Eisenman so the audience can hear from someone who is on the other side of the architectural spectrum from Sambo. He is very sure of his opinions and was very forthcoming, which we really appreciated and respect. All we had to do was ask the question. He liked Sambo, but he approaches his work from a different point of view. It took a while to put this film together. What drove you to complete it? The year before Sambo passed away, he charged me and Jack Sanders with making a film that got to the heart of the Rural Studio. What kind of feedback have you gotten from architects and designers who have seen the film? We hope to continue the conversation and engage those who want more.

Chapter 4 : Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

For almost ten years, Samuel Mockbee, a recent MacArthur Grant recipient, and his architecture students at Auburn University have been designing and building striking houses and community buildings for impoverished residents of Alabama's Hale County.

By moving predominately white architecture students out of university classrooms and into largely African American Black Belt communities, the studio not only has taught young architects to design and construct exceptional buildings, but also to forge relationships in a world that most of them would not have encountered otherwise. In addition to being a social welfare and education program, the studio, which employs donated, leftover, salvaged, and nontraditional materials, has also become a model for sustainability in construction. He was convinced that architecture should have a moral aspect and that architects should care more about improving living conditions than their own fame and fortune. Mockbee took over as head of the studio, first in the Hale County seat of Greensboro and then nine miles down the road in tiny Newbern. The community consists of four extended families of about people who lived in tumbledown dwellings along a dirt road at a bend in the Black Warrior River. The Bryants explained to Mockbee and his students that they wanted mainly two things in a house: Hay Bale House, Interior To create an inexpensive, well-insulated dwelling, the students constructed walls using hay bales wrapped in polyurethane that were fastened with wire, stacked like bricks, and then covered with stucco. In the finished dwelling, known appropriately as the Hay Bale House, three barrel-shaped niches for the children extend from the rear of the main interior space, and a wide covered porch runs the length of the house in front. The sharply angled wing-like porch roof accounts for the nickname "Butterfly House. Costs were kept low by using reclaimed tin for the roof and heart pine recycled from an old church. In addition to designing and building individual homes, the Rural Studio under Mockbee built a range of distinctive structures, including chapels, churches, community centers, playgrounds, and outdoor pavilions. How it Works Students with Clients Each semester, approximately 15 second-year students and a comparable number of fifth-year students live and work in and around Newbern, a town consisting of a general store and a post office. More recently, professors have chosen the clients. The second-year students, who stay one semester working on a house, meet with family members to identify their needs and then design a suitable dwelling and lay a foundation. The next semester, a new group of students continues the work, modifying the design as needed. The fifth-year students spend a full academic year in Hale County and work in small groups on community-oriented projects. In , the studio established an outreach program for students from other universities and other disciplines who work on projects of their choosing. Some of their projects are architectural; some serve other community needs. The studio has collaborated with many local civic organizations, such as the Hale Empowerment and Rehabilitation Organization HERO in Greensboro, for which the studio renovated a storefront and designed and built a community center and playground. Lindsey subsequently left Auburn, and Freear assumed the sole leadership position. Newbern Little League Baseball Field The studio changed focus under Freear, who shifted efforts away from individual homes and more toward fifth-year projects and community-oriented buildings that have grown larger, more complex, more socially significant, and more numerous. Freear has tried, above all, to raise the level of craft, with an increased emphasis on planning and drawing, either by computer or by hand. He views drawings as a means for design teams to communicate better among themselves, better convey ideas to clients, and complete projects more quickly. There is a shift of esthetic: It is clad in pine and translucent polycarbonate, with south-facing horizontal cedar slats to provide shade in summer and admit low winter light. The interior is dominated by an exposed structure of steel and timber wall trusses stretched taut by heavy-gauge steel cables and metal anchors. Perry Lakes Park Restroom The studio also now tackles multi-year, phased projects. An aluminum and cedar pavilion, completed in , marked the beginning of the renovation. During the next academic year, students added three unusual restrooms: As the projects have gotten larger and more complicated, the studio has tended to use fewer nontraditional materials but continues to emphasize sustainability and reuse. Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency. Princeton Architectural Press,

Chapter 5 : Rural Studio – The Official Website of Samuel Mockbee

Play the trailer. A documentary film on one man's quest to make the world a better place through architecture.

As a professor at Auburn University, in Mockbee created the Rural Studio , an off-campus study opportunity for Sophomore Architecture and Thesis students as a way to show how good architecture can be used to impact and change the local community, rather than merely being reserved for the elite. The Mission Statement of the Rural Studio program is: Abstract ideas based upon knowledge and study are transformed into workable solutions forged by real human contact, personal realization, and a gained appreciation for the culture. Working with other community organizations in the area, Mockbee, and now his team, identifies families in need of housing, and it becomes the work of the students to build houses around the needs and aesthetic desires of the family, for the smallest amount of money as possible. Under these conditions, students are immersed in the community and collaborate directly with their clients, come up with strong, innovative designs with very low cost materials, and are then responsible for carrying out all of the construction work that is usually only an abstract concept for many architecture students. Each year the undergraduate students involved in the program design and construct a house, while Thesis students work on community focused structures including chapels, Boys and Girls clubs, community centers etc. To date the Rural Studio has completed over 80 projects in Western Alabama. Projects created by the Rural Studio must organically arise out of what the community itself identifies as needs, and the must students work to bring these projects about. Working with a limited budget, students must rely on community resources and often uses salvaged materials such as street signs, pipes, hay bales, cardboard, and even car windshields to complete structures. The intended result is to create culturally appropriate, socially and environmentally conscious buildings to benefit these rural communities. The Rural Studio epitomizes that aspiration. It is through this process that they learn the critical skills of planning, design, and building in a socially responsible manner. It is interesting to consider the model of the Rural Studio as a way to develop similar kinds of learning experiences for students in the urban art classroom. In the way that Mockbee believes that his students benefit from having to complete the entire construction process of their projects, how can we use technical skills to empower our students? How can we create opportunities for students to leave their geographic comfort zone and have the chance to collaborate with people different from them? Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency. Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio: Birmingham Museum of Art ; D. Book Documentary on the Rural Studio: Rural Studio Film, [http:](http://)

Chapter 6 : Samuel Mockbee's Rural Studio | Visual Culture

The studio was founded in by architects Samuel Mockbee and D. K. Ruth. It is led by UK-born architect Andrew Freear. It is led by UK-born architect Andrew Freear. Each year the program builds five or so projects - a house by the third-year students, three thesis projects by groups of fifth-year students, and one or more outreach studio.

One of my top three favorite quotes from the book sums this all up quite neatly: I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one. Humans are caught in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too in a net of good and evil. There is no other story. A man, after he In his novel *East of Eden*, John Steinbeck took on an argument for the inherent struggle of man to do good over evil. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only the hard, clean questions: Was it good or was it evil? Have I done well or ill? *East of Eden* takes place in the rural areas of the United States, around the turn of the century or just thereafter, as boys are going off to war, and the car is still a novel idea waiting to catch on. Where *East of Eden* is a philosophical, fictional look at good versus evil, I find parallels to the work of Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency, for it is within these pages, that we find acts or architecture performed in tune with finding simple and honest acts of good, where there seems to be only evil. In a place where materials are scarce, and money is even scarcer, the late Samuel Mockbee revolutionized the idea of giving back. Rural Studio began as an idea on how the architecture students of Auburn could give back to society in meaningful way while developing a collaborative, realistic classroom experience for students in their second or fifth years. Whether coming out to help or joining for their Thesis, students who were selected each year to participate would join Samuel Mockbee and live near their chosen site for the entire semester, literally living and breathing the project. Each project starts by interviewing individuals who needed new housing, and then selecting the client they felt most deserving or in most dire need of a new home. They frequently talked about how this was not an easy choice, and I could empathize. The book is broken up very simply by project, with short briefs on the program, the client and the process that went into putting the final building together. Its honesty and integrity complemented the projects extremely well. The only possible criticism of this wonderful book is that some of the students seemed to speak about their clients in a way that condoned the standardized image of poverty. For example, the Newbern Baseball Field Project was definitely in need of repair originally, but the conditions did not seem to inform a sense of unhappiness in its users. While its community members would arguably be happier by a new design that could give them a sense of pride in the place where they lived, these people seemed to find joy in community first and foremost, not necessarily the condition of the built world around them. This is less a critique on the book itself, than perhaps on human nature. Even within this context, it is a small one because at the end of the day, good was being done. While there certainly are questions of the lasting effects on individuals, and the philosophical debates about status that could and probably have been waged over this topic, the only aspect that ultimately matters is that the projects in Rural Studio: Something far too rare in this day and age highlighting the importance of this book despite being over a decade old. John Steinbeck has another beautiful line from the dedication of *East of Eden* that will stay with me forever like the works showcased in Rural Studio.

Chapter 7 : Rural Studio Film

Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio 57min | Documentary, Biography, Drama | TV Movie April In rural Alabama, architecture students cross the threshold of poverty to build communities, not just structures, and leave snakebit to make a better world.

Chapter 8 : The Official Website of Samuel Mockbee

Samuel Mockbee and D.K. Ruth founded the Rural Studio at Auburn University in with the goal of improving the lives of

the rural poor in Alabama. Each year the design/build studio constructs approximately five houses, often integrating experimental and sustainable design elements.

Chapter 9 : Rural Studio | Encyclopedia of Alabama

Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee (December 23, - December 30,) was an American architect and a co-founder of the Auburn University Rural Studio program in Hale County, Alabama. Biography [edit] Mockbee was born in Meridian, Mississippi.