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A Little Shadow Box

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Rudolf Schindler described architecture as a combination of the cave and the tent. Perhaps he was referring not only to the pleasing combination of reassuring refuge and adventure-some spirit, but also to the interplay between deep shade and animated light.

I recently designed a refreshment pavilion for a garden at the Dallas Arboretum. The pavilion,

which is made of canvas, sheet metal surfaces and mahogany, is erected only for special festivals then dismantled and stored in-between. It is like a straw hat at the civic scale.

Stepping under the awnings of the pavilion, one is offered more than lemonade. The shade is luminous with lemonade-colored light filtering through the canvas. Planes of sheet metal have letter forms punched out, inviting brighter bursts of sunlight to spell. A partnership between the sun's passage and surrounding trees yields dividends of free ornamentation: Nature's shadows play on the canvas like a puppet show.

There are plans to string a few bare light bulbs in the rafters during night events. The little

pavilion will then appear as a giant lantern, and shadows will be cast from the inside out, reversing the day's animation.

Why are we so distracted by the pyrotechnics of technological light that we forget the wholesome satisfaction of opaque silhouette against light (as in the case of the sheet metal signs)? The cacophony of our built environment calls out more than ever before for the soothing power of the simple pleasures of this world. This modest building has reminded me of light's ever present eagerness to help us out in this regard, free of charge. ●

Photos courtesy Max Levy.

