

SKINS

Where Design and Technology Meet

CONFERENCE CHAIR:
LAWRENCE SPECK, FAIA, DEAN
University of Texas at Austin

The 2001 ACSA Technology Conference focused on the skins of buildings—that critical zone where the fundamental character of architecture, both in terms of performance and visual quality, often resides. Essential for protection, water-proofing, and thermal control, building skins are also often a primary vehicle for load bearing, visual connectivity between indoors and outdoors, light transmission, and ventilation. They have long played a dominant role, as well, in creating the look and feel of architecture. As with their human counterpart, building skins are often the largest organ (in terms of both quantity and investment) of their bodies. They are complex, temperamental, and, too often, taken for granted.

The conference planning emphasized the multivalent nature of skins—their need to respond to myriad technical, functional, constructional, and visual concerns. Though participants came from a broad range of

backgrounds, from historians and theorists to designers and practitioners, our unifying focus was technology. The conference was about exploring the technology of skins in the broader context of technology's interface with cultural, operational, and aesthetic issues.

The eight different paper sessions drew on a range of topical concerns. Some dealt with the performance and logic of skins as a vehicle for thermal control, moisture protection, daylighting, and provision of visibility. Others focused on aesthetic intentional and material facts in terms of assembling layers, volumes, masses, and membranes to create a desired visual effect. Still other sessions concentrated on production of skins—issues of economics, constructability, regional variation, value, and longevity.