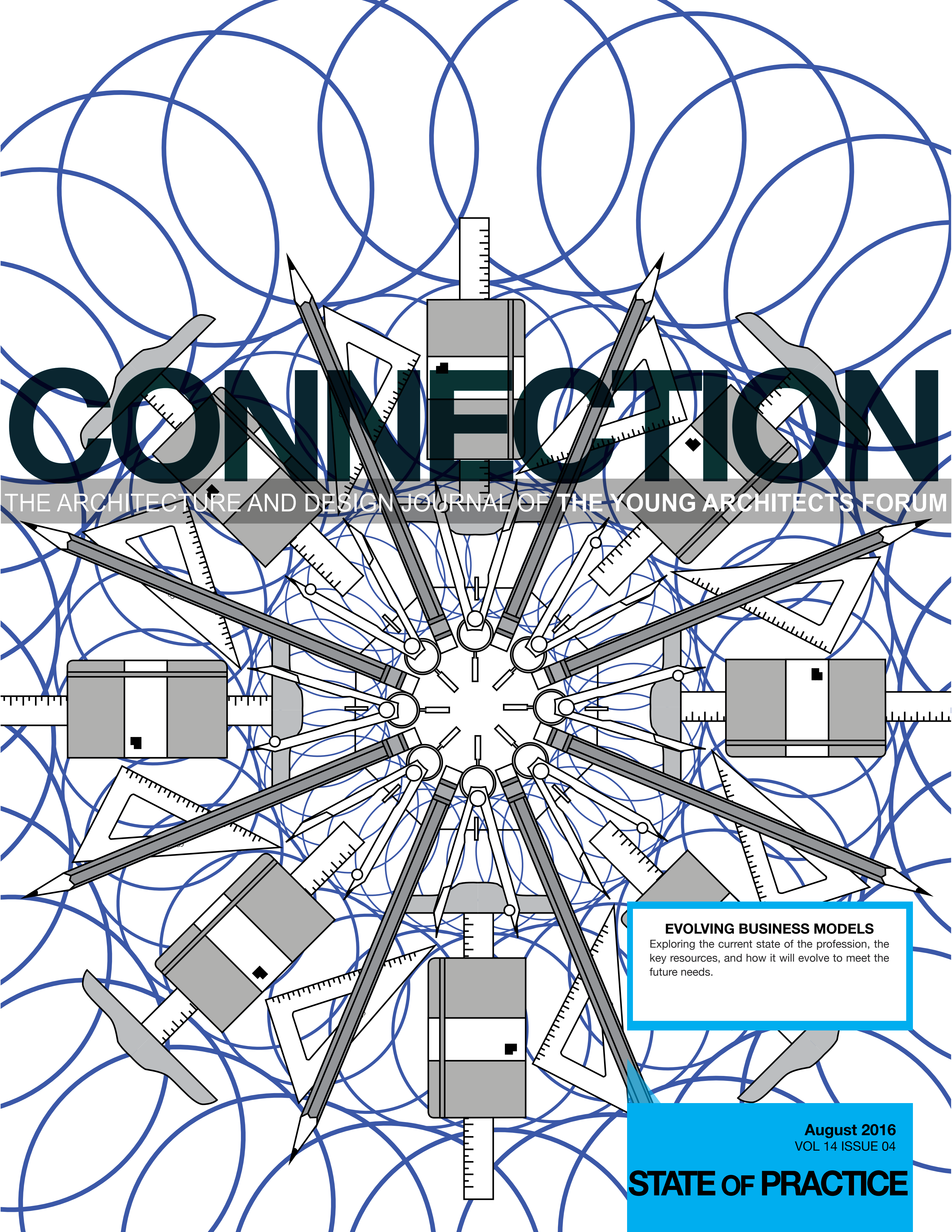

CONNECTION

THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN JOURNAL OF **THE YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM**

EVOLVING BUSINESS MODELS

Exploring the current state of the profession, the key resources, and how it will evolve to meet the future needs.

August 2016
VOL 14 ISSUE 04

STATE OF PRACTICE

CONNECTION
THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN JOURNAL OF THE YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM

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ON THE COVER:

Image by Nicholas Banks, AIA

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STATE OF PRACTICE

STATE OF PRACTICE CONTRIBUTORS

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current position as Vice President. Parallel to the other roles in management, Carl ha
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has been to implement well structured processes to support an innovative approac
when planning and designing new sustainable cities and communities. Value base
planning, as a model for new developments, was developed under Carl's leadership a
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As a result of simultaneous work in a number of networks and organisations, he
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ESCOBEDO SOLIZ

is a young architecture practice, based in Mexico city since 2011. Thier practice is based on a continuous search in which various forms of experimentation and investigations of design processes are as important as the final product. Each of their projects addresses the particularities of every situation to develop a response that has very strong ties to its context. It is essential to truly experience and live in close proximity (or in) the site as it provides solutions that, although intuitive, begin to make an architecture that belongs to its place.

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SKIN IN THE GAME

Architecture is inherently about place and location, more so than almost any other profession. We thirst for context; the more variegated, the better. Context provides boundaries, rules, vocabulary, and style. It also provides constraints, some we disagree with, but many that fuel creativity. But in the realm of international practice, context has become much more than just the existing built environment. It becomes a question of intimacy and knowledge - the balance between knowing a place via a map and knowing a place based on culture and traditions. In order to fully understand the distant locales we want to build in, we have to do some work "on the come". That is, we have to place a bet - our time and resources - just to roll the dice. Knowingly or unknowingly, those who pursue this journey have put some skin in the game. They are risking something they can't recoup, without a successfully performed project, but risk is what drives our profession forward. The goal should be for every architect to have skin in the game to ensure a successful future.

In our second annual introspective on the state and future of the profession, the CONNECTION team took a hard look at how we are moving practice forward. For us, that means exploring new business models, the opportunities for young architects to lead, and how we are driving the conversation internationally. Our recent political commentary has pounded us over the head with how complex and globalized the world has become. For architects to take advantage of that and export our expertise and services overseas, having a business model that allows for growth is tantamount. It also further underscores the need for cultural understanding, empathy, and communications. All of these skills are becoming increasingly sought after when building a team when charting the next course. With risk on the table, the next move is to figure out how to manage it.

Throughout this issue, we highlight a number of concepts that young architects are employing to show their value and help to mitigate the risks involved. Take our feature on two emerging firms in Hong Kong, for example. The Asian-Pacific market still has a dynamic growth curve, and has thus, attracted many of the traditional global behemoths to take on the challenge. However, openUU and Avoid Obvious Architects are two small firms that have been able to carve out a niche with their US training and cultural knowledge of the region. They also hope to someday compete with goliaths, such as SOM, for large scale master plans. Others, like our YAF colleague Illya Azaroff utilize a specialized skill set to compete internationally. In this case, his depth of knowledge of disaster relief and temporary shelter has made him an expert in refugee camp design.

Young architects are also making an impact within the existing structure of larger firms. In our editorialized webinar, hosted by the trio of Wyatt Frantom, Matt Dumich, and Alison Laas, shows an example of high performers in 100 plus person firms, or the case of Wyatt, the largest firm by architectural billings. Their careers have advanced because of the exposure, and their paths also show a trend in emerging market business development in the face of worsening domestic conditions.

For architecture to take advantage of the globalized world, we need to have a strategy, we need to develop our skillsets and we need to have skin in the game. Eventually this leads to the infrastructure necessary to move the profession forward and provide innovative solutions. The important part is to anticipate the market's moves, because no one wants to crap out. ■

Jeff Pastva, AIA

Jeff is the 2015-2016 Communications Director of the Young Architects National Advisory Committee of the AIA, the Editor-in-Chief of YAF CONNECTION and a Project Architect with JDavis in Philadelphia.

ADVOCACY
PERSISTENCE PAYS DIVIDENDS
by Stacey Keller, AIA

In times of disaster, local government entities need to accurately evaluate levels of damage to structures. According to the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs Division of Emergency Management (WEM), they, to date, have been forced to rely on untrained, often emotionally charged, self-evaluations. When this information transfers to the state and national levels, any inaccuracies slow down the process for emergency response declarations. Architects, however, are uniquely qualified to rapidly analyze structures and provide damage assessments that local governments can use to determine levels of disaster. Layered with a one-day Disaster Safety Assessment Program training, our education and experience have trained us to differentiate surface damage from structural failures. We can serve as a conduit between local and state agencies, assisting with emergency declarations and, most importantly, helping residents get back into their homes.

This year, AIA Wisconsin entered into its first-ever Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formally establish a relationship with WEM, organized under the Wisconsin Army National Guard. This agreement states that WEM and AIA WI will mutually develop the Wisconsin Disaster Assessment program and procedures, and call on, coordinate, and deploy volunteers to assess disaster-related damage to structures.

As a founding co-chair of the AIA WI Disaster Preparedness Committee, I can tell you that reaching this agreement has been no small feat. Three years in the making, it started merely as a discussion between two members with knowledge and experience in disaster recovery and the urgent sense that Wisconsin needed a plan before the next major event occurred. Janine Glaeser, AIA, and I started a plan of action, but we did not need to develop our program from scratch. There are a number of resources and people with a genuine desire to spread this knowledge nationwide. I was originally trained in disaster safety assessments in Kansas, so we started by tapping AIA Kansas as a primary resource and specifically Stan Peterson, FAIA, who started their program more than twenty years ago.

Our first step was to determine whether Wisconsin had a Good Samaritan law, since this would be required to keep our member-volunteers safe from legal action. AIA has been instrumental in achieving Good Samaritan legislation and MOUs in thirty-four states and counting. Reaching out to our AIA WI staff and legal counsel, we discovered there is a Wisconsin liability exemption for volunteers providing service in good faith during times of disaster and states of emergency. With the legal piece out of the way, we engaged in a two-fold process: educating our AIA leadership and members on the one hand, while building relationships with the WEM leadership on the other.

What Janine and I found as we initiated discussions with WEM is that they had been trying to figure out a better way to perform damage assessments over the past few years. Janine and I brought resources, trainings, and examples to our discussions and set the stage for WEM leadership to see that we, the architects, were THE experts they wanted to utilize.

In July 2014, we hosted both AIA WI members and WEM leadership at our first Cal OES training in Wisconsin. We demonstrated the validity of the program and the value of architects to more than forty people in attendance. This opened an opportunity to develop a formalized committee with AIA WI and show WEM the necessary commitment to develop the MOU. We continued to meet over the next two years to work on the expectations, as well as the disaster management plan and assessment procedures.

After several reviews by both parties and each of our legal counsels, the MOU was finalized and signed. Next we worked to establish procedures to follow in the event of a disaster and created our first draft of the Disaster Safety Assessment Program. We then hosted a second training that incorporated the specific Wisconsin procedures. Our next steps in this ongoing process are to refine the procedures, promote the program and services to the Regional Emergency Coordinators and local entities with WEM, and keep building our AIA WI membership awareness.

This is advocacy without lobbying – true volunteerism – and proves the value of architects to the public. In this era, emerging professionals (EPs) have first-hand experience with resilience – in adapting to changes in both the economy and our careers. We can take the opportunity to be at the forefront of resilience in our communities as well – through this type of state-level recovery program. So use the resources, including the AIA National Disaster Assistance Committee, and the many people who would gratefully share their time and knowledge to help. Make this process our pathway for advocacy. It can take time, but we Emerging Professionals have a passion for making our world a better place: spark awareness, get engaged, and advocate. ■

YAF REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT

Ryan McEnroe, AIA, ASLA, LEED AP, is a Project Architect and Landscape Architect for Quinn Evans Architects in Washington, DC, and is currently the AIA Young Architect Regional Director for the Mid-Atlantic Region.

What organizations are you involved in as an emerging professional?

I have been involved with the AIAS, AIA, NAAB, and NCARB. Most notably, in 2013 I co-founded the Christopher Kelley Leadership Development Program (CKLDP), a year-long program geared toward providing emerging architects important leadership skills in such areas as marketing, effective communication, contract negotiation, and industry trends. This year we have successfully started a second location for the CKLDP as part of AIA Colorado in Denver. We are extremely proud of this endeavor and are looking to assist other AIA components in starting their own CKLDP.

Please speak to your involvement with YAF.

As a YARD, parts of my duties include being a conduit for young architects from the local to the national level. In addition to attending the regional and national conferences and meetings, part of my responsibility is to be engaged within a focus group. For the past two years I have been involved with the planning of the AIA Center for Civic Leadership's Leadership Institute. This is a one-day session held in the autumn during which over 300 emerging professionals throughout the country share their best ideas relating to design and leadership. More information and registration for the event can be found on the program website.

Have some ambition, stand up, speak up, and volunteer for something you are passionate about. If you feel strongly about a particular program or issue, get involved.

What are some of the important issues young architects face in today's industry?

Generational Differences – For the first time in history, four generations are working side by side. Different values, experiences, styles, and activities create misunderstandings and frustrations.

Firm Transitioning – A large percentage of firm leadership will retire within the next decade. There is a significant shortage of architects ready to take on this turnover and lead the next generation of firm ownership.

Specialization – It seems there is an endless list of professional credentials available within the industry. Finding purpose within the profession and focusing attention on one or two key specialties will aid young architects in finding their particular niche within the industry.

What advice would you give to young architects looking to get involved in their design community beyond working at a firm?

Have some ambition, stand up, speak up, and volunteer for something you are passionate about. If you are asked to serve in a particular position, and don't really want to take on the extra effort, your work and attitude will show it. However, if you feel strongly about a particular program or issue, you should get involved. I encourage you to engage your local AIA chapter, serve on a committee, join a local design review board in your neighborhood, serve on a PTA committee with your children's school, assist with functions at your church, or volunteer for the next community garden project.

YAF FUTURE WORKFORCE

BY KOREY WHITE, AIA

Disruption is all around us. We have recently seen it in the likes of the transportation industry, the energy market, and in our politics. Historically, major disruptions have transformed how we live and how our cities work. The invention of the car in the 1800s, for example, changed the course of urban planning that has continued to this day. The content delivery of books, a foundation of our society, have been revolutionized to be predominantly digital in nature. And environmental concerns related to climate change have altered how we harvest our energy. These examples have given rise to new industries and advanced technologies, but have also caused casualties to those who didn't adapt. For example, as US policy shifts away from pollution heavy coal burning, the mining industry has been burned. Where does the miner, who has specialized skills, go? This situation can be applied to our own industry as well. If we disrupt the profession of architecture, what does that mean for the workplace and types of employment? Will people lose their jobs? Will technology replace us?

We live in a world where data is accessible, can be gathered by almost everyone and is being used to help others prosper. Take 2016 Pritzker laureate Alejandro Aravena for example. His firm, Elemental, released four social housing designs for public use. Aravena suggested he released his designs because "we need to work together to tackle the challenge of rapid migration" (*ArchDaily*, 5 April 2016). This release of design into an open forum could be seen as a disruption to the profession as we have known it. The benefit of sharing data and design lies in the ability for us to gather what has worked successfully, humanize it, and strengthen the relationship our users have to the buildings.

Over the past few months, the National Associates Committee and the Young Architects Forum have analyzed and gathered data on what the disruptions might be for the architecture industry. And this isn't the only disruption we will see. As a profession, we need to be open to more. We need all architects to think about disruption differently. Disruption isn't going to take our jobs away. It is going to create opportunity for new jobs. Technology has its downfalls but also has the ability to allow for the freedom to use our talents the way we want to use them. Technology allows us to create a kit of parts and use these components to think through boundless design options and new thought.

Change is inevitable and often scary. But if our firms can learn to be nimble and agile, we have exponential potential to create environments that are best for our communities. Whatever it is, I will be ready to embrace Architecture 2.0.

YAF RESOURCE GUIDE

AIA's Young Architects Forum
YAF's official website

YAF KnowledgeNet
A knowledge resource for awards, announcements, podcasts, blogs, YAF Connection and other valuable YAF legacy content ... this resource has it all!

AIA Trust
A free-risk management resource for AIA members.

AIA College of Fellows
Check out the College of Fellow's reciprocal newsletter to find out more about what's going on.

Know Someone Who's Not Getting YAF Connection?
Don't let them be out of the loop any longer. It's easy for AIA members to sign up. Update your AIA member profile and add the Young Architects Forum under "Your Knowledge Communities."

- **Sign in to your AIA account**
- Click on the blue "Add a Knowledge Community" button
- Select Young Architects Forum from the drop down and SAVE!

Call for News, Reviews, Events
Do you have newsworthy content that you'd like to share with our readers? Contact the News Editor, Beth Mosenthal, on twitter - *@archiadventures.*

Call for CONNECTION Articles, Projects, Photography
Would you like to submit content for inclusion in an upcoming issue? Contact the Editor, Jeff Pastva, at **jpastva@gmail.com.**

SUCCESS + IMPACT

EXPLORING INNOVATIVE BUSINESS MODELS IN ARCHITECTURE

by Enoch Sears, AIA

The practice of architecture is changing quickly; firms that don't keep up with change will be unable to create the income and impact of other firms who embrace innovation and respond to the changing environment. In this article we discuss how three different architecture firms are increasing their economic success while having a greater impact on society and their local communities. You'll also learn how these firms are embracing business opportunities that extend beyond typical architectural services.

As building complexity has increased over the past century, so has the number of stakeholders required to manage a successful project. Modern building teams may include the traditional consultants such as mechanical engineers, structural engineers, electrical engineers, acoustical consultants, lighting consultants, owner's representatives, and construction managers. However, recent technologies and methods have introduced new team members such as BIM teams, sustainability consultants, security consultants, low-voltage consultants, shop-drawing specialists and consultants, interior designers, hardware consultants, transportation and traffic consultants, design-build contractors and subcontractors, geotechnical engineers, code consultants – and the list goes on and on. One way to look at this explosion of stakeholders is to say that the role of the architect has been diminished. An alternative way to look at this change is to see it as an opportunity for architects to take a leadership role, give more value to clients, and enjoy greater financial success.

As the host of the popular Business of Architecture podcast, one of my joys is to discover architecture firms that are pursuing innovative business models and share their "secrets" for other architects to learn from. Based on some of my past interviews on the podcast, here are three ways some architects are enjoying greater financial success and having a greater impact.

Develop Design Maintain: A New Entrepreneurial Practice Model with Roy Decker, AIA

Duvall Decker Architects, based in Jacksonville, Mississippi, is led by husband and wife team Anne Marie Decker, AIA, and Roy Decker, AIA. On episode 145 of the Business of Architecture podcast, Roy Decker describes how an expanded practice model has allowed his firm to have a greater impact in the local community, win better projects, and develop financial security. They go beyond the traditional limits of architectural services and develop, design, and maintain some of their projects.

"We realized that most of the innovation takes place in the first 10 percent of a project [timeline]," states Decker. "Architects become the decorators of decisions that have already been made....We wanted to get in front of that."

As a result, the firm has been able to not only create beautiful buildings but also affect the social fabric and economies of their community. To hear the entire interview, click HERE.

Selling Modern House Plans Online with Gregory La Vardera, Architect

One of the challenges of scaling your income and impact as an architect is that your compensation is directly tied to how many hours you put in working on a project.

What if there was a way to break free of this money-for-time model?

Architect Gregory La Vardera has done this by selling thoughtful, modern home plans online. During our interview, Greg reveals how he uses the Internet to sell his home designs, and how other architects can make extra income by selling home plans online. Watch the entire interview HERE.

Real Estate Development and Building Your Own House with Zeke Freeman, Architect

If there is one thing every architect dreams of doing, it is designing and building a house to live in. Inspired by the "architect as developer" model popularized by architect Jonathan Segal (see episode 005), Colorado architect Zeke Freeman designed and built his own house to jump-start his real estate development and building career. His firm, Root Architecture + Development, focuses on residential urban infill projects in Denver. After three years of hard work and determination, he's beginning to see the results and impact. In his interview, Freeman reveals how a focused effort in one neighborhood is giving his firm heightened visibility.

"People now recognize my firm and we've become the leading expert in this area," says Freeman.

During his interview on the Business of Architecture Podcast, he talks about what it takes to start from scratch and build a successful develop/design/build company. Catch the full interview HERE.

Each week I release a new podcast episode aimed at helping architects maximize their business potential and have a greater impact on the community and built environment. By learning these lessons early in your career, you'll have an edge that will carry you to a successful future. Ignore them at your peril. For more tips and strategies to increase your income and run a great business, subscribe to the Business of Architecture podcast by searching iTunes for "Business of Architecture" or visit BusinessofArchitecture.com/podcast. ■

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT
KATHLEEN LANE

by AJ Sustaita, AIA

Kathleen brings to AIABaltimore over twenty years of experience in architecture, education, nonprofit and professional association management. Previously, she served as Director of Knowledge Communities at AIA National, and has managed nonprofit architecture, arts and cultural education and academic programs in Washington, DC and San Francisco.

She has also worked in architectural design practice at Travis Price Architects in Washington, DC. With Travis Price, FAIA, Kathleen co-directs Spirit of Place-Spirit of Design, an international design-build course at The Catholic University School of Architecture & Planning which has been the recipient of numerous design awards, and the NCARB Prize for Creative Integration of Design and Practice in the Academy in 2010.

Kathleen holds an M.Arch from Catholic University, and also serves as a lecturer at CUA School of Architecture's Graduate Concentration in Cultural Studies and Sacred Space. She holds an M.A in American Studies, with a graduate certificate in Historic Preservation from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a B.A. in English and Studio Art from the University of California, Berkeley. She has participated in international urban design and historic preservation residencies at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation and the American Academy in Rome.

Can you give us your background on how you came to work as the Executive Director for AIA Baltimore?

I have been working with AIA since 2000 when I started at AIA National and became a director of knowledge communities (KCs). I had the opportunity to work with national leaders in the profession and learned a tremendous amount about the wide range of professional practice areas that our KCs represent. I had degrees in English/art and historic preservation, but I was inspired to obtain a professional degree in architecture to deepen my understanding of practice firsthand. I pursued an M.Arch at Catholic University while working full time at AIA National. I left the National staff to finish my thesis, and then worked with one of my professors and mentors, Travis Price, at his firm. I worked simultaneously on projects with the firm and taught and developed a unique international design/build cultural curriculum called the Spirit of Place – Spirit of Design.

In 2012, I heard about the opportunity at AIABaltimore, and I jumped at the chance to work directly with a local chapter and community. I am deeply invigorated when working with our board and membership to advance the profession in our region, and to promote to the public all the ways that architects and designers are making a tremendous difference in our communities in Baltimore.

You are one of the few executive directors for local AIA components who also falls into the emerging professional category. How does that influence your approach for managing AIABaltimore?

I certainly understand from my own experience the various challenges that EPs face, from the rigors of architecture school to making the transition to professional practice and from the path to licensure to finding one's niche in the profession. I help our board and EP Committee make sure that our chapter is making resources available to EPs in order to help them at each stage of their career. I am proud they are the fastest-growing segment of our membership. I also do what I can to encourage EPs to become leaders in our chapter's committees and to have a voice in our community programs and advocacy efforts.

A program run by our EPs that I have been particularly proud of is CivicLAB. Initiated in 2012, CivicLAB (Leadership. Architecture. Baltimore), is a series of participatory educational sessions that trains and mobilizes our chapter's EPs interested in taking on or expanding leadership roles in their communities, their professional lives, and in academia. The goals of CivicLAB are to promote opportunities and skills for civic engagement by architects and to build a network of leaders. The program explores core topics that affect our profession and the region within which we practice. During monthly sessions, participants learn about approaches to advocacy from proven leaders who have guided communities to achieve results at local and national scales.

What are some of the important issues young architects face in today's profession?

The profession continues to evolve, and it is a challenging and exciting time to be an architect. Today's profession is affected by the economic cycles, as it always has been, but recent economic conditions have created a consolidation of firms, and the need to develop innovative models of practice has never been greater. There is a generational gap in many firms, with Millennials and recent graduates entering practice alongside Baby Boomers, and thus great opportunities for mentorship. The rapid changes in technology in practice continue to be an important issue that EPs can help to manage. Global practice also continues to be a reality, as firms reach out far beyond the communities where they live and work. This requires considerable skill in cultural understanding and design response. With architectural training comes analytical skills and design thinking that prepares young architects to lead in a variety of contexts, with numerous alternative career paths available.

Is there any advice you can offer to young architects and Associates looking to get involved in with their local chapter?

Think about the skills and expertise you would like to gain, what your local community needs, and what you can contribute, and then get involved! Talk to members of your chapter's EP Committee, to the board and staff, and consider programs you're interested in. If they don't yet exist, invent them! Other chapters can offer good models to draw on. I know you'll find it immensely rewarding, you'll make lots of new friends in the process and you'll build leadership and grow as an architect! ■

VENTURE CAPITAL SEEKS THE VALUE OF DESIGN

A CONVERSATION WITH LUCAS GRAY, ASSOC. AIA

by Jeff Pastva, AIA, and Alex Alaimo, AIA

The profession of architecture, as a business proposition, has been in need of a positive catalyst for decades. Sure, there have been advances in technology and building systems over the years, but the business model itself would be recognizable to the contemporaries of Daniel Burnham. With the explosion of entrepreneurism, particularly the influx of venture capital, and innovative business model ecosystems taking hold in the tech space, architecture seems to be stuck in the 20th century (or worse). In an effort to highlight firms that are bucking that trend, CONNECTION *sat down with Lucas Gray of Propel Studio to learn about their relationship with an investment firm called Charrette Venture Group (CVG). They bill themselves as a company that makes strategic resource investments in design firms in the form of capital, technology, business advice, and/or mentoring. They also hold the annual* Architecture Business Plan Competition*, one of the only competitions of its kind. To kick off the conversation, we asked Lucas to elaborate on their business relationship and how it all started.*

LG: We entered the Architecture Business Plan Competition in 2013, the first year CVG held it. Even though we didn't win, CVG organized a "business accelerator" group of the top entrants. We had monthly GoToMeetings to share information and learn about various aspects of running a small firm. After participating in that for a year, CVG approached us about investment opportunities and we decided to move forward with a partnership.

CVG's proposal was interesting because they offered a wide range of experts in the aspects of running a business. They gave us advice on business development, marketing, financial management, research, publicity, office management, and so on. Rather than hiring people for each of those fields of expertise, we had access to a team of people we could call upon when needed. For instance, we recently redesigned our website, which was done by one of the CVG consultants. They also have taken some of the day-to-day tasks off our plate, allowing us to focus more on the design and client relations side of our work. For instance, they are doing our bookkeeping, payroll, web design, and business leads research, and developing our marketing content.

Since the term "Venture" appears in their name and CVG is in the business of making investments, we had to get further clarity on how the relationship was structured. In the tech world, for example, most companies exchange equity, or a percentage of their ownership, for operating cash flow. This helps a firm scale by allowing them to hire, buy inventory, invest in equipment, etc. But companies that invest in tech are also typically looking for an exit strategy that includes an acquisition or public offering. Neither of those options is typical for architectural firms. Lucas clarified that in this instance, CVG had provided advice and services in exchange for a percentage of revenue for a set period of time. CVG doesn't own any of the business and haven't invested any direct capital. To follow up, we asked whether any portion of Propel's practice model was the reason why CVG was attracted to them as an investment.

LG: My partners and I run our firm a little differently than the standard architectural offices we worked for in the past. For one, we pursue community projects, many of which don't have funding in place to cover architectural design services. We work with these community groups on a pro-bono basis, and have expanded our scope of services to include assistance in grant writing and fundraising. But, we are still finding our way in this area and working on strategies that can make this profitable while still doing good. We are also looking for opportunities to expand our services and start developing our own small projects. I think CVG is intrigued by our strong mission and our goal to grow; we want to expand from a four-person firm to a ten-person firm over the next five years. We have the longer-term goal of being a thirty-forty person firm that does a wide range of projects.

One thing that still didn't quite add up is that architectural firms, particularly start-ups, run on razor-thin margins or in the red their first few years. Traditionally that doesn't make for a great investment, unless the company can scale revenue up significantly. However, architecture isn't known for its explosive growth. Lucas had a pretty hopeful outlook on that point.

LG: One of the reasons that architecture firms run on razor-thin profit margins is that architects don't charge enough for their services. We also tend to make decisions based on design instead of solid business reasoning. CVG's model is to build their business by helping architects make their own businesses more financially sound by avoiding common mistakes. They talk to us about setting our fees and billing clients. They assist with financial planning, developing pro formas for our business operations, and calculating our earnings potential. We have a better understanding of our costs and revenue and thus we can better price our services to clients, hopefully asking for what we are actually worth. Further, by giving up a percentage of our revenue to an investment group we have to bring in more projects and charge higher fees.

Lucas intimated that the future of Propel and their relationship with CVG is set for the near term. Their current agreement is in place for four more years and they will revisit the goals of both at that time. It's quite possible that Propel will be in a position to bring some expertise in house, but he also sees a lot of value in the access to the team that CVG brings to the table.

LG: CVG is primarily focused on firms that are looking to grow; however, their business offerings might shift once the firms they invest in reach their growth goals. It will be interesting to see how our partnership grows as our firm does as well. I am sure that the future of Propel will see continued growth. We are slowly getting more exposure and more projects with the help of our growing portfolio and CVG's assistance. Specifically we just launched our new website, had a project selected for the AIA Emerging Professionals Exhibit, and have garnered some great local media attention.

Now that we had heard Lucas's story, we had to ask how he would advise other architecture firms to seek out this type of investment. For example, is there a particular firm structure that is better suited to bring on an investor? He also offered his advice for young firms, regardless of whether they take on an investor early.

LG: This sort of investment works best for new firms who need expert advice to tackle the challenges of starting a new business. We receive so little training in firm management that I'm sure most architects made the same mistakes we did when first starting out. This provides a structure to hopefully avoid some mistakes and set up a strong business foundation, although this sort of partnership only works if the firm is set up for growth. The return on investment for CVG only pencils out if their percentage of revenue expands year-to-year. The agreement is structured such that they lose money at the beginning because they are only getting a percentage of our relatively small revenue. Over time as our revenue increases, their investment eventually breaks even and turns profitable.

Starting a business is of a course a risk and it is always easier to take those risks earlier on in a career. I did it when I did because I realized there wouldn't be another time in my life where I could afford to fail. I have very few financial commitments, nor do I have kids. Now is the time in my life where I could try things, experiment, and if it didn't work it wouldn't really impact my long-term financial stability. So, just do it. There is no easy time to set out on your own. ■

Opposite Page: Silverman Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU).
Above Top: Lents Story Yard.
Middle Right: Bamboo Sushi street seat installation.
Bottom Right: Vestal School play shelter. All images courtesy Propel Studio.

AIA HONG KONG'S YAG

A CONVERSATION WITH VIKKI LEW, AIA AND KEN HAU, AIA

by Yu-Ngok Lo, AIA

The Young Architects Group (YAG) of AIA Hong Kong (AIAHK) was inaugurated in early 2015 to address specific needs of young architect and Associate AIA members in Hong Kong. Since then, the membership of the YAG has expanded to include emerging professionals, young U.S architects moving to Asia, and graduating architecture students entering the profession. Parallel to the mission of the AIA's Young Architects Forum, the AIA Hong Kong YAG is committed to facilitating the development of future leaders within the Hong Kong chapter. The CONNECTION team caught up with AIAHK chapter president, Kenneth Hau, and YAG chair, Vikki Lew, to talk about the mission of the committee and the programs they offer.

What inspired you to start a young architects/emerging professional group and what resources were available to you in order to do so?

AIAHK as a chapter has experienced steady growth in the number of young members participating in AIA events. So, in 2015, the Executive Committee (EXCO) decided to establish the YAG to advance and foster young members. Many of the social and networking events hosted by YAG were well received, so the EXCO decided to integrate the YAG more fully as part of the chapter's initiatives. The primary focus of the young architects program is to develop the unique skills vital to emerging professionals, including advanced technologies and processes, integrated digital tools, materials, construction methods, project delivery, and client presentation skills. Additionally, our EXCO and committees share news about scholarships and awards launched by AIA National or knowledge communities.

Many of the members of your chapter at one point worked in the US and received their education here. What are the reasons they decided to practice overseas? Does the design profession in Hong Kong have a demand for US architects?

The majority of the chapter members were educated in the United States' architecture programs and licensed in the US as well. Some of them are Chinese citizens who returned upon graduation, while others sought professional opportunities or challenges in a new milieu and ended up staying and practicing in Hong Kong. We also have US architects who have relocated to Hong Kong from major firms working on international assignments. Many firms appreciate architects with a US education due to their different background and overseas experiences, so there is definitely a demand for US architects in Hong Kong.

What do you think are the fundamental differences between practicing architecture in Hong Kong and in the US? How do people view young architects (or young design professionals) like yourself in Hong Kong?

This is a dialogue we are having with our young architect members. The differences are not so much cultural, but rather professional. They range from the definition of architect and required skill sets to standard of care and design control. Let's take the term "architect" as an example. In Hong Kong, university graduates from architecture programs recognized by the Architectural Registration Board Hong Kong (HKARB) become registered architects after passing HKARB/HKIA licensing examination, which is analogous to the ARE in the US. However, registered architects do not have the authority to legally "stamp" drawings. Registered architects have to take an additional exam to become an "authorized person" in order to do that in Hong Kong. The authorized person qualification is open to architects and engineers, as well as quantity surveyors. In other words, the majority of registered architects do not have the authority that we as licensed architects take for granted in the U.S. Therefore, the responsibility and liability that fundamentally define the professional are very different.

In terms of design execution, construction drawings are produced and issued in a slightly different manner. Depending on contract conditions, Hong Kong architects may rely on the contractor to take on more of a design-build role. Some construction details may be omitted from the bid drawings to expedite the bidding procedure. But of course the architects will issue the final set of construction drawings to 'lock in' the design intent, cost, and contract conditions before the award of the contract (project). This is different from our common practice of having a fully coordinated set of construction documents before bidding with the architect as the leader. When it comes to complex projects, I feel that architects may not have the same level of control over the final aesthetic of a building. It has been a bit challenging for those of us who were used to the U.S. system and it definitely took time to adjust to the Hong Kong way of practice.

What are some of the programs your chapter hosts specifically geared toward emerging professional members?

We believe young architects bring a new and unique perspective to the profession. During the inauguration of the new YAG officers, Caroline Chou, Kevin Lim, Andrew King, and Brian Bessannaire, we asked YAG committee members to present their works and journeys of their architecture career. A panel discussion was also held to facilitate dialogue between established architects and emerging professionals. Leaders Christine Bruckner, FAIA, William Lim, FAIA, Grover Dear, FAIA, and Sean Chiao, FAIA, all graciously shared their advice. The program was hugely popular and we look forward to hosting similar programs in the future.

In June 2015, a social and networking cocktail event with AIA President Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA, and CEO Robert Ivy, FAIA, was held specifically for Hong Kong young architects to discuss issues of particular concern. One of the questions raised was how young architects can be taken seriously when they are relatively young, yet highly competent. William Lim, FAIA and past president of AIA Hong Kong, shared that young architects can contribute what they know that the more experienced architects don't – for instance, the knowledge of new tools and building technologies that would be valuable to design process.

In April 2016, our chapter held a full-day forum, titled **Emerge! 2016 AIAHK Young Architects Forum**, which brought together six emerging firms from the region to presentation and discussion of their works.

Do you partner with other chapters in Asia or mainland US for these events? Does AIAHK collaborate with other architect organizations in Hong Kong? What value do you think AIA brings to the profession as a whole?

Our goal is to offer continuing education opportunities to our members through seminars and programs on topics related to the latest trends in the profession that are relevant to practitioners in Hong Kong. To that end, our chapter has a reciprocal agreement with the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) where CEUs that AIAHK offers are applicable to both organizations. Our YAG events are also open to members of HKIA, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and the Urban Land Institute (ULI). We believe we have a mission to reach out and share our passion in architecture.

For architects who decided to move to Hong Kong and start a new career, what are some of the things AIAHK offers to help their transition?

AIAHK provides a wide range of networking opportunities to new members to help their transition. We provide mentoring programs to help new members and understand the legality of practicing architecture in Hong Kong.

How does AIAHK help its emerging professional members become licensed? What are the architect licensing requirements in Hong Kong?

As mentioned earlier, our YAG membership includes those who are recently licensed or are pursuing licensure, young US architects living in or moving to Asia, and graduating architectural professionals entering the profession. Our chapter assists emerging professionals in achieving career milestones via IDP mentoring and ARE preparation. Hong Kong is one of the three international locations that offers candidates the opportunity to take the ARE exams through Prometric testing centers. In 2014, Hong Kong was selected by NCARB as the examination site in Asia, allowing candidates practicing globally the flexibility to achieve a US architectural license. An examination workshop, with NCARB CEO Michael Armstrong, was held in Hong Kong that was live streamed to AIA Shanghai. Our current chapter president, Kenneth Hau, AIA, is the architect licensing advisor to the NCARB board representing Hong Kong. Given its proximity to AIA Shanghai and AIA Tokyo, the chapter also serves as a resource for these chapters.

Our chapter hosts ARE study groups, which presently are self-organized by candidates. We are working on reorganizing these sessions into division seminars. We also established an ARE library in 2014 with an archive of ARE and HK registration exam study guides. We have digital copies of AIA documents available to candidates for reference. Through members' donations, we are expanding the collection to include more division-specific reference materials.

For those pursuing licensure in Hong Kong, there are two paths: (1) Apply and pass the HK ARB exam. The structure of the exam is similar to the ARE we have in the States. (2) Apply as a non-local professional. A US licensed architect with more than ten years of professional experience (local + overseas) can apply for an HK license via the ARB Professional Induction Workshop and Professional Interview process. Our chapter offers a half-day workshop tailored specifically for candidates with a US license that focuses on local practice, building laws, and regulations.

Our chapter also recognizes that site visits are great opportunities to expose members to local practice. We have a site visit program every other month. This year we have already conducted site visits for three buildings that have won the chapter's Honor Award. The designer/architect talked about the behind-the-scene stories during different phases of the project and shared their code experiences with the attendees.

Anything you would like to add for our young architect readers in the US?

The built environment and the architectural trends in this region (Hong Kong and Asia-Pacific) are challenging. We often see project proposals ranging from urban renewal and mega tall buildings to planning a new city. Any young architects with an imagination of creating a new frontier may consider looking to firms that are active in this part of the world. Some will find the experience quite exciting and awesome. ■

Opposite Page: Six firms from around Asia -- openUU, ESKYIU, Design Trademark, O-office Architects, Supermachine Studio, and OBBA -- presented at Emerge! 2016 AIA|HK Young Architects Forum. *Image courtesy Philip Tang.*
Above: AIA 2015 President Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA, and Chief Executive Officer Robert Ivy, FAIA, met with Young Architects Group in Hong Kong. The event was held at the office of Ronald Lu, FAIA. Image courtesy Philip Tang.

THE RISE OF DECENTRALIZED PRACTICE
VIA THE SHARING ECONOMY, COWORKING, AND CROWDFUNDING

by Alex Alaimo, AIA

One of the aspects that attracted me to the profession of architecture was the ability to practice as an individual or as a team member in a larger effort. This autonomy in architecture is unique and could be utilized to transform practice. At the very moment that architects are yearning for the possibility of new models, the sharing economy is coming into maturity, often in a disruptive manner in other industries. The percent for fee consultancy of a typical firm has endured, but may be challenged by an age of emerging business models. The inherent autonomy of the profession uniquely positions the profession to eliminate the firm as we know it by embracing a decentralized practice model. It may not be about finding the next business model, but about creating an entirely new ecosystem for design services based in the ideas of the sharing economy, coworking, and crowdfunding.

The sharing economy capitalizes on peer-to-peer interaction and creates a market where assets, either monetary or services, can be exchanged within a community. Its value lies in taking out the overhead and inefficiency of a larger formal company in exchange for a direct fill of a particular demand. The key to the Uber and AirBnB models is that they exist as trusted platforms to connect two parties. In service industries, including architecture, a form of this would be known as freelancing. This is a fairly common practice, especially for smaller firms, where temporary employees are hired to finish large projects on tight schedules with the help of recruiting firms like Aerotek. However, in an age of technological disruption, looking at a few "gig" hiring models could change how architects think about organization and production in practice.

First take a look at some technology startups of the sharing economy that are redefining the talent market as we know it. Fiverr is a platform that creates a market for very cheap, flat-rate services. The basic concept is to offer any service for $5: logos, copywriting, and other low-value production services. Here any freelancer must start selling services at a fixed cost, but can charge more as positive feedback accrues over time. Further, there are several examples of people making six figures by performing a simple task, such as resume checking, in large volume once credibility is established. This flat-rate model may emerge as a way to acquire drafting production. Next, look at Matchist, which relies on a project-based system to attract prospective team members within a community. Instead of competing for talent within the typical job market, Matchist advertises projects and attracts would be temporary team members to a project of their interest. This would-be an alternative to organizing talent in architecture. A third model for making a community into a market can be seen with Simbi, a site that touts a community with a “symbiotic ecosystem” where individual consultants barter services by using a proprietary point system. A yoga instructor could exchange an hour of training for a prorated hour of food preparation, for example. The power here is offering a multitude of services in a community with the demand. Each of these models may not warrant full-fledged adoption by architectural practice; however, if seen as existing in a new ecosystem of practice, they have potential. If the design industry can see itself as communities of designers instead of siloed firms, the power of today’s networked age can be unleashed.

Coworking is on the rise as a desirable option for younger employees seeking flexibility, and it has a greater potential for future practice. Many spaces are popping up in metropolitan areas, where starting a space only requires capital for the lease and the build-out of an existing office space. Coworking has proven an easy way for people to share the overhead costs of a large space. The key, however, is it gives a physical presence and model for the online peer-to-peer communities and ecosystems mentioned earlier. It would allow architecture to happen outside the siloed walls of firms in an open environment and enable the idea of a decentralized "firm" to flourish. Yet, coworking in itself will not be enough to change the way we practice. There needs to be an underlying mission to unite disparate people to achieve something like designing a building.

The current king of the coworking market is WeWork, who is redefining the real estate development model. Dolores O'Connor, VP of Real Estate Strategy & Operations at WeWork, spoke at a recent Built-In meetup in New York about how their model flips the role of the developer. Instead of owning property for long-term goals of profit, they aim to lease space, renovate according to their design product standards, and sublet to individuals. Currently, they are the nation's largest lessee of office space with over 4.6 million square feet and even more worldwide. WeWork develops a powerful in-house design team that dictates their product -- office space -- then curates and manages the space. By creating a magnet of culture, they have commodified office design, yet have been able to give each space a unique character. The key lesson from the WeWork business model is the culture that draws talent into the workplace and enables a flexibility and diversity in personnel that use the space. The successful decentralized firm could apply the WeWork collaborative and flexible culture magnet to attract and curate talent to fit the specific personnel of architecture practice.

There is another key lesson to draw from WeWork: become a software platform itself. In 2015 they acquired David Fano and his firm CASE, who pioneered business model innovation that integrated design and software. As head of "product" for WeWork, he maintains a BIM model of each office and records data of who is using what desks when. This data is used to lay out future spaces and potentially determine the price, thereby creating a smart space. This approach transforms the space through data collection and the analysis can be applied as a powerful tool for firms to evaluate production and performance and eventually could be applied to develop a platform for practice. They are proving that there can be people and collaboration behind the avatar in real space. What is powerful about drawing on the WeWork software model is that in order for a decentralized coworking model to work, it would require a central platform to hold all the disparate pieces together.

Finally, the emergence of crowdfunding and new developments around it could have huge implications for the profession in terms of starting projects and earning community approval. Some municipalities even require crowdfunded support, particularly for controversial projects. Most are familiar with platforms, like Kickstarter, which use a reward-crowdfunding model to provide financial support of a project. Several small-scale projects have been funded or seeded from this model, but Kickstarter has been much more successful in funding products where a contribution goes toward its preproduction, making it difficult to translate into architecture. However, "equity crowdfunding" has the potential to offer an ownership stake and could transform small projects. Equity crowdfunding could create owners out of everyday members of the community, which would have huge impact on public spaces and the development of cities. Additionally, crowdfunding could benefit the profession at large. The AIA put out a statement in 2013 stating crowdfunding could be used to restart projects on hold. Yet, there are only a few willing to develop the technology needed to make crowdfunding an effective tool for the architectural profession.

One such person is Ryan John King of FOAM, who is developing an equity crowdfunding platform for architectural projects that runs on blockchain, the technology that makes bitcoin work. He explained, “The emergence can give agency to architects to finance their projects securely via equity crowdfunding.” He further explained Title III of the JOBS Act (Jumpstart Our Business Startups) took effect in May 2016, allowing non-accredited investors or everyday people to potentially invest in a proposed project up to one million dollars. Currently, accreditation requirements mean that only brokers, controlling large amounts of capital upwards of $200,000 have the power to make investments. Opening this up means anyone could own a pre-investment stake of a particular project. This has the power to flip the architect-client relationship and empower the public with the ability to take a stake in the built environment and provide new potential for practice. Architects could begin to own stakes in projects instead of just charging a design fee.

Put the pieces of the sharing economy, coworking, and crowdfunding together and it begins to paint a picture of the future decentralized practice. A group of individuals could start a coworking space and instead of legally forming a firm entity and paying salaries, set up an ecosystem of individual talent exchange where payment would be made upon completing a specific task. Workflow and collaboration would take place on an online platform, either an open platform or closed to coworkers. The project-centric platform would provide the accounting, organize staffing, and determine compensation on a project by project basis. Coworking could create a new level of flexibility and a rich environment of knowledge sharing and production of architecture in the future. Next, crowdfunding could unleash another layer of client acquisition. Even further, equity crowdfunding could enable architects to work for equity as an alternative to cash compensation on a project, creating a diversity of income. In this future, licensure could be even more valuable as a credential and to set a standard of service.

The big picture is that out of a pool of distinct talents, a new ecosystem of design services would emerge using this decentralized model. In addition to architects, a diversity of special operators and consultants, including specialty designers, engineering consultants, and technical experts, would be able to participate within the decentralized model. In any scenario, the autonomy of the architect role is critical; it would allow a full or partial contribution to any particular project. It would take a lot of risk and innovation for these models to emerge, but if proven successful they may be able to compete with today's firms if they deliver a quality product in an efficient manner. The decentralized model brings a lot of promise for new models of practice to emerge; now we need practitioners ready to make the jump. ■


KULTURHUSET

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ARCHITECTURE PRACTICE

INTERVIEW WITH CARL BÄCKSTRAND OF WHITE ARKITEKTER

BY AJ SUSTAITA

White Arkitekter has a strong track record, with sixty years in practice. Can you give us a brief history of how the firm started and how it has evolved?

In 1951, Sidney White, an architect living in Gothenburg, won a major design competition for a new housing project in Örebro, a small university city in southern Sweden. That was how the practice started and, from the very beginning, he decided to have partners working with him. Very quickly the firm went on to win competitions for housing projects, masterplans, schools, and healthcare in the 1950s and 60s, a period when the Swedish welfare state was growing and there was a strong investment in infrastructure. One could say that the longevity of White as a firm mirrors this period of Swedish history. During this time, White contributed its competence to advances in quality of life in the country and, in return, we were strengthened by the consistent improvements on the collective well-being.

By the time we reached the 1970s, White Arkitekter had an extensive number of projects in developing countries – mostly in education and healthcare in Africa. Design competitions were the strategy to win projects, whether they were cultural buildings, public infrastructure or, by the 80s, office buildings.

Today we have sixteen offices in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the UK and have just under 900 employees. We cover many areas and core competencies, including urban design, landscape architecture, and interior design, all within a research-based organization. Throughout the years and changes, one thing remains the same: Sidney's vision. It was to have architecture at the service of society, where the quality of our work is measured by how it understands and improves the context it is a part of. That vision is still valid today.

White has a great philosophy to "avoid projects that lack the will to make life easier." Please tell us about a recent project that exemplifies that philosophy, including a few details on design and how the project was won or procured.

One example that embodies that philosophy is the new Psychiatric Clinic in Borås, Sweden. The design concept was based on our research into the healing properties of architecture ("Architecture as Medicine"). The building is characterized by an intimacy in its scale, freedom of movement, social participation, brightness of the spaces, and varying outdoor environments. As daylight is proven to have a positive healing effect, the design

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and orientation maximizes exposure to natural light. The interior spaces were designed to allow patients to choose – depending on their mood – between open social spaces and more secluded areas. Also, the clinic is surrounded by and interspersed with lush greenery, which offers sensory experiences and encourages people to go outside to exercise or interact with each other. The project is a result of a design competition White Arkitekter won in 2013. It went on to win the WAN Award for Best Future Health, which we're very proud of. It is now under construction.

Is White as equally selective in hiring talent as you are in project selection? What do you look for in potential hires?

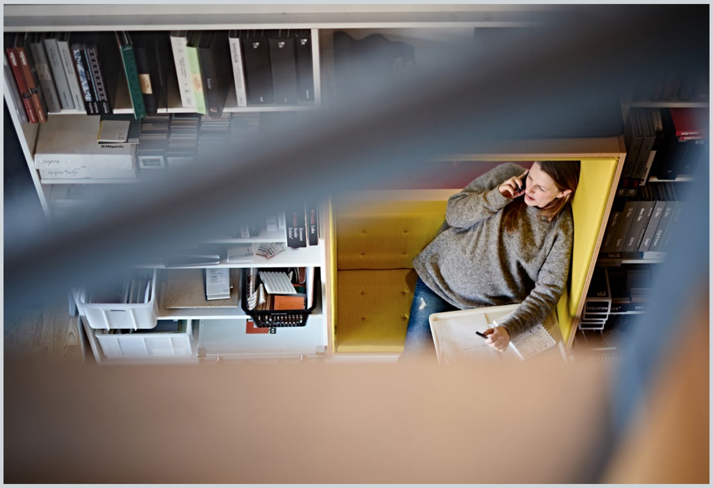
We're always on the outlook for competent, curious, and innovative talent. We're an exciting workplace for both people who are already very accomplished and ones who choose us to build their career. We're also very interested in having a diverse talent pool, made of not only architects but also anthropologists, biologists, environmental strategists, energy experts, political scientists, and people working in finance, for instance. Working in interdisciplinary teams, always asking questions, and keeping a holistic approach is fundamental to our practice.

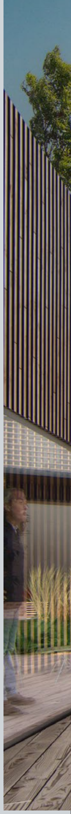
How has the shared ownership model impacted the direction and practice of the company? Was this always the case since the firm's establishment or was there a shift at some point during the firm's growth?

Sidney White had partners from the very beginning and, today, we offer all employees the opportunity to buy shares in the company as early as their first year. This shared ownership business model is essential for our culture. It has been an excellent way of aligning the goals, values, and, of course, growth of the company to the commitment of our employees.

What role does research and development play in the professional development of White's ideas and design philosophy? Can you please give us an example of a recent research project?

We need to harness new technologies and methodologies if we are to create spaces and places that people desire and feel inspired and empowered by. Our explorative culture is reflected in our investment in research and development. Every year, we redirect about 10 percent of our profit into R&D, allocating it into different areas, such as our own research foundation, our internal research network, digital design, and BIM. We also have several architecture and urban design researchers at different universities. Our research is developed through our projects and involves many employees. This gives us an edge in developing and implementing fresh ideas. It also keeps our employees stimulated and motivated!





Previous Page: Skellefteå Cultural Centre and Hotel. Courtesy of White Arkitekter.
Above Top: White's employees at work at 'Katsan'. Courtesy of Peter Brinck.
Above Middle: The timber staircase at the students' building at the UNiversity of Linköping). Courtesy of White Arkitekter.
Above Immediate: White's employee on the phone at 'Katsan'. Courtesy of Peter Brinck.
Opposite Page: Social housing project 'By the woods', where you see the lake and the child on the front. Courtesy of Beauty and the Bit.

When designing the new library and student building at the University of Linköping, we wanted to create an open and welcoming building that was both environmentally and socially sustainable. A very important part of that work was planning for re-use of the materials from the old student house. The design incorporated energy-efficient ventilation and solar shading using printed solar cells, was developed by researchers at the university, and reduced the amount of cooling required. The roof is designed for maximum production of solar electricity as well as stormwater management. A parametric design allowed windows to be sized and oriented to maximize natural light and reduce solar gain.

How does White promote and encourage creativity within the firm?

This is done in many different ways. The co-ownership structure, for instance, contributes to a strong engagement, our R&D funding promotes thinking outside of the box, and our vision to create human-centered architecture that inspires sustainable lifestyles permeates everything we do. In order to achieve this, we have three guiding principles that inform our work: we create architecture that people respond to, based on the unique context of its setting; we constantly challenge ourselves to improve the ways in which we work; and we explore the field of architecture with applied research based on interdisciplinary knowledge exchange.

What is the White Innovation Process and how does it fit into your firm culture and/or relationship with clients?

The White Innovation Process is the methodology activated in the very early stages of each project. This approach allows us to investigate the needs of a project. Sustainability is also a consideration from the outset and a driver from the design stage through to the final delivery. Our own experience has taught us that collaboration is a vital component of successful sustainable development. The key here is the dialogue and mobilization between all stakeholders across the industry and, ultimately, throughout the whole of society. Over the years, this has proven to be very successful in building relationships with new clients and for developing better solutions on existing projects.

White also acts as a developer on some projects. How does this method have advantages over the typical designer/client relationship?

When White acts as a developer, we have the opportunity to draw on a whole spectrum of our capabilities. The projects all have very ambitious sustainability goals and we tend to use them as test-beds for new solutions. One example of this is White's office in Stockholm – known as "Katsan" – which incorporates a highly sustainable cooling system. For us, these projects form an important part of our ongoing R&D strategy because we can innovate in the design process, analyze the outcomes, and evaluate the successes, undertaking post-occupancy research and collecting performance data.

What is one piece of advice that you would give to young architects today that may help them sustain a happy and successful career?

I always encourage them to work with other professions in an interdisciplinary way. Cross-pollination between different disciplines, sectors, and areas of knowledge can herald interesting outcomes. Also, it makes the job more fun and rewarding, and that's an important factor! ■

EMERGING HONG KONG FIRMS

INTERVIEW WITH

VICKY CHAN, AIA **AVOID OBVIOUS ARCHITECTS**
KEVIN LIM, ASSOC. AIA, & CAROLINE CHOU, ASSOC. AIA **OPENUU**
BY YU-NGOK LO, AIA

The architectural practice environment in the Asian Pacific region, particularly in Hong Kong, is very different from what we are familiar with here in the US. Firms face a very different set of challenges ranging from client relationships to documentation. Our editorial team caught up with a couple successful young practitioners, Avoid Obvious Architects and openUU, in Hong Kong to discuss the challenges they went through establishing their firms and the lessons they learned conducting businesses in Hong Kong and mainland China.

YL: Tell us a little bit about your firm's history. What inspired you to start your own practice?

Vicky Chan **(VC):** Mark Zuckerberg was our inspiration to start our own firm. He is my age and has already changed the world. We believe architects can learn from the way the technology industry thinks. Their model is based on identifying a problem, creating a solution, and pitching it to investors. If architects can adopt this mindset, instead of being reactive to a client's design brief, nothing can stop us from being successful.

Avoid Obvious Architects started four years ago in New York when I formed a partnership with another architect and a branding expert. We were doing mostly conceptual designs that challenged the traditional definition of architecture. This included interactive installations all over the world, from Copenhagen to Sydney. For instance, we created a digital cloud that people could physically manipulate through a cloud-like pillow. We also designed a handbag with New York fashion designer Cammie Hill. So far, we have completed projects in thirty-six cities and seventeen countries and have recently restructured our practice to focus on large-scale planning and architectural projects in Asia.

However, our interest in multi-disciplinary design hasn't completely faded away and our idea of "holistic design and sustainability" still remains. For instance, our last large-scale project had partners from different fields including engineering, lighting design, marketing, landscape design, and art. We believe that architecture is the combination of art and science and our projects reflect the interwoven relationship between different disciplines.

Kevin Lim and Caroline Chou **(KL&CC):** We graduated college in the US, right after the 2008 financial crisis, when the whole architecture industry suffered dramatically. We decided to move back to Asia and start our design practice in Hong Kong, hoping that the Asian market would have more opportunities to offer. Our firm started with smaller-scale projects that targeted art sector clients, where we designed galleries and private collector warehouses. As our firm grew, our focus shifted to commercial projects in the retail and office sector.

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YL: Tell us about the challenges you faced establishing your practice in HK. How did you land your first commission? Were you already established in HK or did the commission motivate you to relocate?

VC: Hong Kong is a very competitive market. Unlike China, the only opportunities for small architectural firms are with interior design projects. Since we didn't have a local reputation we partnered with Chinese firms who were also new to the Hong Kong market. We got our first Hong Kong interior project via a networking event hosted by the Entrepreneurs Club in Hong Kong, where many foreign entrepreneurs were looking for new design ideas. We worked with a Belgium beer maker, a French bakery, an English wine merchant, and an Australian jeweler. Those interior projects led us to win the Design: Retail 40 under 40 award.

KC&CC: Our first projects were installations for the Hong Kong Shenzhen biennale in 2009 and 2012. We received some great publicity and awards, so we decided to make the move from Boston, MA, to Hong Kong in December 2011. Our first permanent project was a warehouse renovation for a private art collector, who wanted to give us a shot at designing his space. Since then, we have continued pursuing projects in the art-related sector.

Our challenges have been to balance our workload, schedule, and office management. We spend most of our time during the day in meetings and do the work at night. Even though we work around the clock, there is virtually no time for us to properly manage the infrastructure, IT, and equipment of our office. We also just moved to a new office in a different city, where the language barrier presented some communication challenges.

YL: What do you think are the fundamental differences between practicing architecture in HK and the US? How do people view young architects (or young design professionals) like yourself in HK?

VC: I can only compare the Chinese market with the US's. Chinese projects are much faster paced compared to a typical project in the US. There are also a lot more opportunities in China. A young architect in his/her twenties might have already completed many buildings, which is typically not the case in the US.

Hong Kong has fewer architects compared to New York, so we feel kind of special; it is prestigious to be an architect in Hong Kong. We were invited by the Hong Kong Education Department to teach on a volunteer basis, introducing design to children under the age of twelve. I think the general public in Hong Kong views architecture as an occupation with prestige and there has been tremendous effort to attract young people to the profession.

KC&CC: The fundamental differences are the opportunities available to design professionals. In Hong Kong, clients and developers are eager to "invest" their money in young talent, providing many opportunities to young professionals. However, it also has attracted many newcomers to join the already competitive market. One of the biggest challenges is to stay competitive and relevant. This constant pressure forces us to innovate and provide better services to our clients.

YL: Does your firm go after projects in other areas of Asia (i.e., China)? How is it different from getting projects in HK or the US?

VC: Most of our firm's projects are commissioned by mainland Chinese clients. We visit different parts of China on a regular basis via the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, which promotes Hong Kong architects in China. We also tried getting projects in Thailand and the Philippines. However, the project fees in those countries are usually substantially lower and it would be hard to sustain our team in Hong Kong and New York.

Since we conduct business in both the US and China, we are still exploring ways to brand ourselves in two very different markets. One of the challenges we've faced is marketing the same website twice in Baidu and Google. The SEO doesn't make it easy because we aren't able to index content on both sites. Currently you will only find our project images on Google, but not Baidu. We're not alone either. Firms such as SOM have invalid links as well.

KC&CC: We currently don't actively pursue projects outside of HK. Most of our overseas and mainland Chinese projects are by referral, sometimes by a happy client or a trusted friend.

Previous page: East Williamsburg Development, Brooklyn, New York. Courtesy Avoid Obvious Architects
Above Left: platform (1x2) - a 5000sf warehouse conversion by openUU.
Image credit: Nirut Benjabanpot.
Above Right: Seun City Walk, Seunsangga, Seoul, South Korea. Courtesy Avoid Obvious Architects

YL: Do your clients appreciate the value you bring to the table as US-trained architects/professionals? Does it provide you with a competitive edge against other firms?

VC: Of course. In fact, we believe this is the reason we are hired by our Chinese clients. They admire US development, and many of the recent skyscraper projects being built in New York are funded by Chinese sources. This actually says a lot about the Chinese admiration toward the US. However, China is still a very competitive environment. Gigantic international firms such as SOM, KPF, and Gensler are well known in China and they have been doing businesses in China for many years. It is very hard to compete with them especially as a young US firm like ourselves.

KC&CC: Our clients are mostly intrigued by our western training and experience in the US. They also seem to appreciate the incorporation of local design elements we bring, which is heavily influenced by western-trained designers and architects. Our US architecture training and the designs we were exposed to over the years distinguish ourselves from HK-only educated designers.

YL: How is your firm involved with AIAHK? Are you engaged with other emerging professionals? Do they seek your advice as thought leaders within the industry?

VC: We are doing many graphic designs for AIAHK. My firm founded a volunteer studio called "Architecture for Children." Our goal is to engage more professionals via AIAHK to teach at local schools. We also seek advice from our peers and colleagues on some of the challenging issues in China; for example, how to protect our copyright in China.

KC&CC: We are both involved with AIAHK: Kevin is one of the communications co-chairs, and Caroline is one of the YAG co-chairs. Kevin has given many speeches, such as a TEDx talk, and participated in a panel discussion at AIA Convention 2016 in Philadelphia. In addition to AIAHK events, we also participate in HKIDA events regularly. We recently attended a design exchange in Taiwan with other architects and interior designers from HK, Taiwan, and Japan. ■

WEAVING THE COURTYARD

INTERVIEW WITH THE WINNERS OF THE YAP MOMA PS1 COMPETITION

BY PHILLIP ANZALONE, AIA

Phillip Anzalone, AIA, NYS Regional Director of the Young Architects Forum, interviews Andres Soliz Paz and Lazbent Pavel Escobedo Amaral of Studio Escobedo Soliz, winners of the YAP Program 2016 of MoMa Ps1 competition with the project “Weaving the Courtyard”.

Escobedo Soliz is a young architecture practice, based in Mexico city since 2011. Their practice is based on a continuous search in which various forms of experimentation and investigations of design processes are as important as the final product. Each of their projects addresses the particularities of every situation to develop a response that has very strong ties to its context. It is essential to truly experience and live in close proximity (or in) the site as it provides solutions that, although intuitive, begin to make an architecture that belongs to its place.

PA: As a new practice, can you explain how you got started?

ES: We got started before we could even open our own office. We were in architecture school at the time, around the fifth or sixth semester, and decided to start in the profession by working in local architecture offices. Parallel to this, we worked on private commissions that were presented to us by some friends and family. When we graduated from school, we worked for another two years in an office before we felt we could become 100 percent independent. We felt entering the PS1 competition was the best chance we had to start something on our own, so we did.

PA: How did you manage the transition from student to employee to running your own practice?

ES: We really don’t know, it just happened. These kind of situations usually happen when you least expect them, so there was no real premeditated plan that we had at the time. We improvised a lot in that sense. So far we are still exploring in order to find what we feel is the best way to run the studio and establish ourselves in the field.

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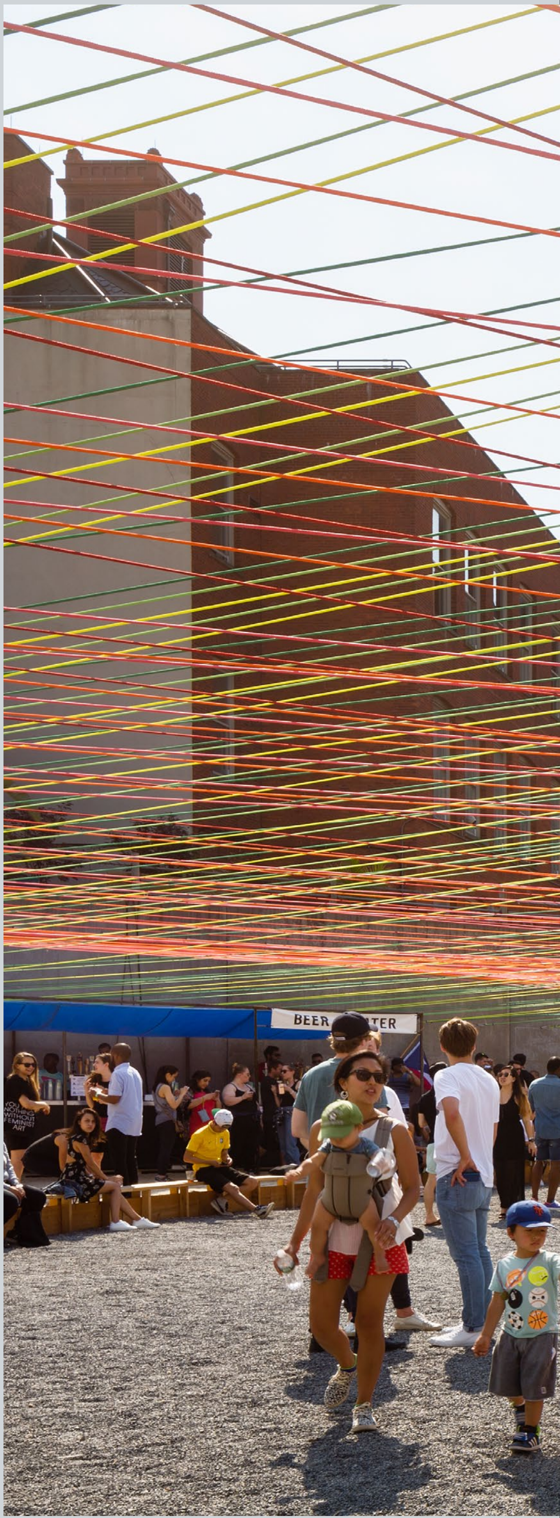



MoMA PS1

PA: How does an emerging office operate in Mexico?

ES: It is a hard question to answer due to the ambiguity and the possibilities that this country can offer when starting a practice. Firms have started at the large scale by doing big housing projects, while others have started with small projects and worked their way to larger projects over time. I think as an emerging office, the best way to start is by entering and winning some serious competitions and then focus on the growth of it.

PA: In regard to the PS1, how did you organize the construction from your remote office?

ES: We were in New York during the entire construction period and we actually did most of the labor personally on-site. We felt this was critical to the project. The team was three people and ourselves from our office and some volunteers from Yale, Columbia, and Syracuse University. Before starting the site work, we hired all the manufacturers from the US while we were in our office in Mexico City. All the logistics were planned in Mexico City to try to have everything ready before we arrived on-site. Also, we had a very good contractor in New York, who organized a lot of the work with us. Without him, we would have suffered quite a bit during the production. Everything from Mexico City that was done remotely was done through Skype meetings and email.

PA: What happened differently from your initial plan to the physical realization?

ES: There were not too many things that were different from the original plan. We predicted that some of the details or solutions could only be solved on-site, due to the particular conditions of the context as well as the materials and processes used. However, most of the things we planned and tested ended up being just as we wanted.

PA: What have you learned so far about the user experiences of the design?

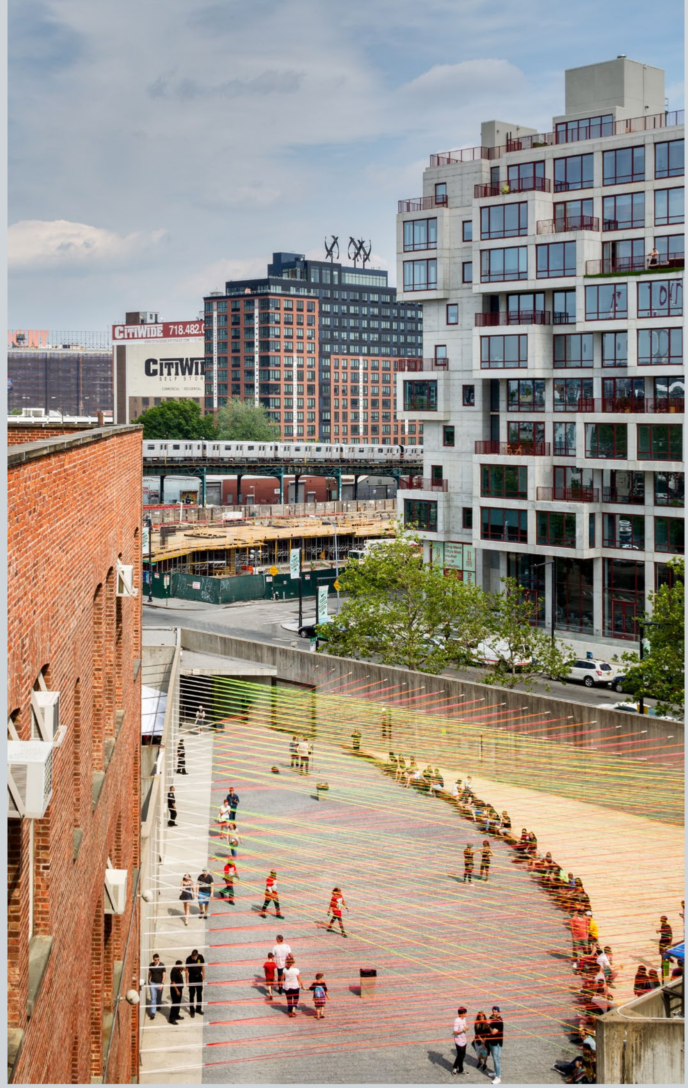
ES: When we finished the intervention, we were very happy. But the moment we saw people using and interacting with the space, it was amazing. We planned some activities that we felt would happen in the space, but we were surprised at how creative people were in terms of using the space.

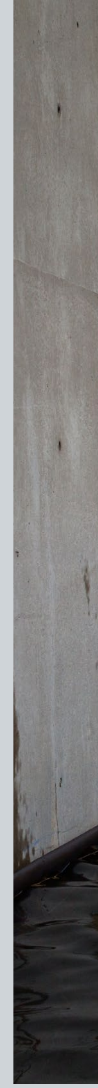
PA: What have you learned from the PS1 program to apply to (or not apply to) future projects?

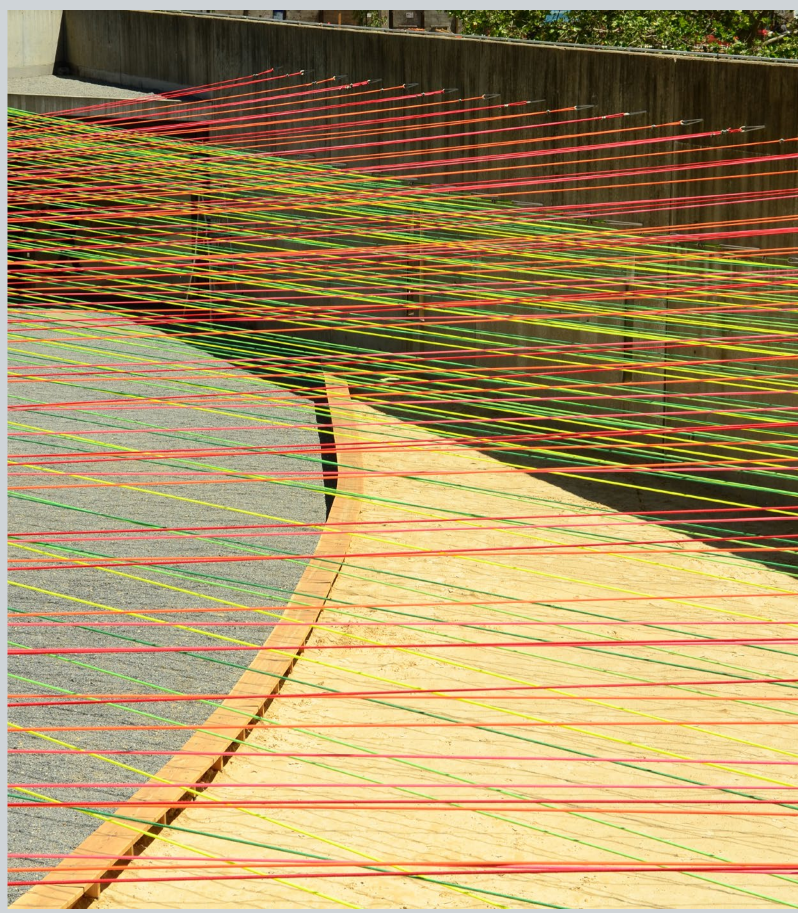
ES: When doing public spaces, the most important thing is not the architecture, but the users and their activities. If public spaces can help increase the activities and social interaction among people using them, then the project is successful. If the project looks good but doesn't allow these things to happen because it is not made for the users, then it doesn't matter how good it looks, people will not go. We feel the users are the most important part of public projects.

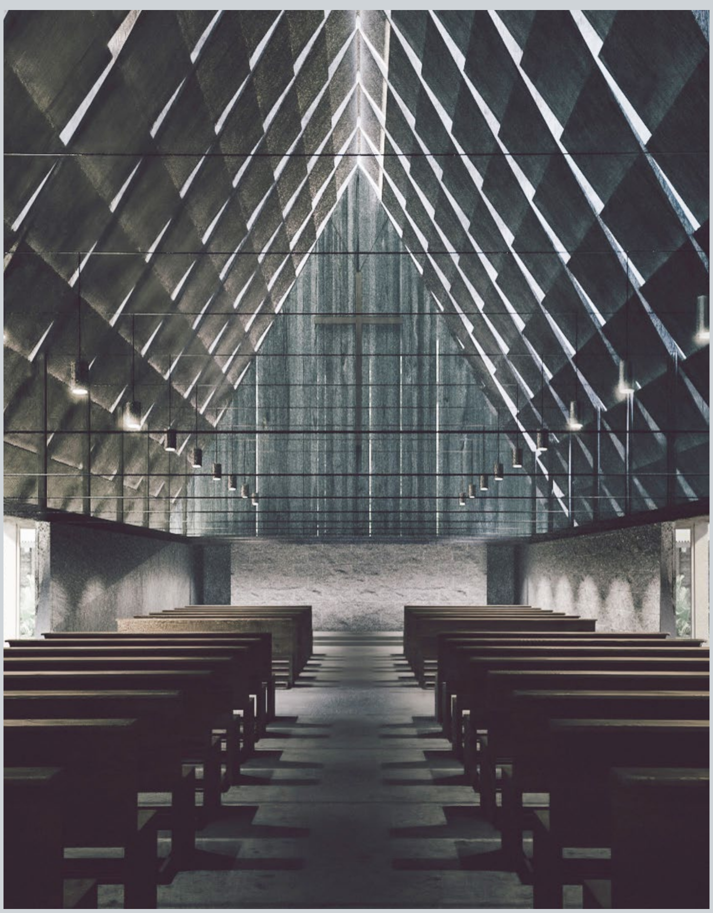
PA: What will happen to the materials at the end of the show?

ES: This question was present with us from day one of the competition. All the materials will have a second use. For example, the wooden embankments/benches are made up of a single de-









tachable module that works as an individual bench by itself. The idea is to sell them at the end of the Warm Up for a few bucks and allow people to have a piece of the pavilion at home. The ropes will be donated to a collective of weavers, called Weaving Hands, and they will make a communal weave to be donated to a public building in New York City. The sand goes back to the sand bank-and that's it; all of the material will have a new life.

PA: What advice would you have for other young practitioners who are looking to go on their own or enter competitions?

ES: Have a dream, have goals, and don't be afraid to fail. Just love what you do and have discipline to make it happen.

PA: What's next for you?

ES: We would like to keep the office and the projects small for a few years in order to gain experience and first learn how to run a small office and small projects efficiently. We don't know what kind of commissions can come in our future, but we are open to do anything and everything. ■

Previous Page: Image Courtesy of Rafel Gamo.
Above Left: Image Courtesy of Rafel Gamo.
Above Right: Image Courtesy of Rafel Gamo.
Opposite Left: Image Courtesy of Andres Salinas.
Immediate Left: Image Courtesy of Rafel Gamo.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE ASIAN-PACIFIC REGION
AN INTERVIEW WITH SEAN CHIAO, FAIA

by Yu-Ngok Lo, AIA

There are many U.S.-educated architects who have decided to pursue architecture careers overseas in the Asia-Pacific region due to the growing economy and better opportunities. However, many of them have found themselves in culture shock, even though English is spoken in places such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and the challenges they face everyday are quite different. CONNECTION caught up with newly elevated Fellow, Mr. Sean Chiao, FAIA, and Asia Pacific President of AECOM to share his experience working in Asia the past two decades as part of an international firm.

YL: You received your education in the US – a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from Harvard, and a Master of Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley – and you worked for Roma Design Group and HOK in San Francisco. What led you to relocate to Hong Kong in 1995?

SC: 1995 was the early stage of the Asian economic boom and I relocated to Hong Kong because I saw its potential and for the career development opportunities. HOK was an international architecture firm with an office in Hong Kong. Since the office in Hong Kong was quite small at that time, the company decided to send me to support the local team and help build the company's market share in Asia. I was born in Taiwan, attained my undergrad degree there, and went to the States for my graduate degree. Although Hong Kong was a new environment in terms of culture and language, my Chinese culture and background helped tremendously.

YL: You worked for both HOK San Francisco and HOK Hong Kong. Even though they're technically the same firm, could you describe the differences of practicing architecture in two different countries? What were the obstacles you faced?

SC: The most significant difference is the expectations of the clients we served in the two cities. In the United States, the project requirements - whether in the public or private sector - were usually predictable. In contrast, many marketplaces in Asia-Pacific – from China to the Philippines to Thailand – were not as mature and the professional standards were not so well-established at that time. We were constantly adjusting the way we engaged with clients and practice in order to adapt to the local approach. And even though we had a very strong team based in the United States, the time difference was a challenge and meant that the support we received from them was sometimes not as fast as we needed. As a result, we had to quickly grow our team in Hong Kong in order to meet our clients' demands. Recruiting and retaining good talent was a challenge due to the high-quality standard of care we committed to our clients.

YL: Did you typically hire US graduates or did you try to look for local architects?

SC: Both. HOK is an international brand and we needed to make sure the services we offered our clients met our firm's standards. We had to hire professionals who understood the language, local culture, and regulations. It was also important to have someone on our team who could effectively communicate with our clients.

YL: Could you tell us about the business model of your practice and the client-architect relationship in Asia? Do you spend a lot of time educating your client?

SC: I wouldn't use the term "educate" because we are learning through the process, too. International firms coming to Asia need to appreciate the differences in the markets, demands, cultures, and lifestyles. An American residential floor plan will not work in China, for example. As an international firm, HOK had its broad experience to offer, but at the same time we appreciated that we have to change the way we designed to fit the needs of the local market. It really is an interaction that goes both ways.

The business models were actually very similar. We offered our design vision through documentation and followed through with construction administration to make sure it got constructed correctly. However, the pace is much faster in Asia, so the professionals here often work under a lot of stress in order to meet the demands of the client, which in my time often meant longer hours, including weekends.

YL: Does your firm only provide design services, or do you provide design development and construction documents as well? One of the challenges for a U.S.-based design firm that does a Chinese design project is maintaining design quality. How does your firm achieve this?

SC: When I was with HOK we were often commissioned from concept schematic to part of the design development. In contrast AECOM, where I now lead the Asia Pacific business, is an integrated firm so we not only have the resources of licensed architects in China but we also can deliver the full service from concept design to documentation for our clients. The significant difference is AECOM's business model was built in order to control the quality of the building from beginning to end – from concept to delivery.

YL: Because China has very different construction methods, and your firm offers construction document services, do you create construction details with local construction methods in mind?

SC: Yes. There are several factors that impact our ability to maintain our design intent during construction. First is the construction industry in China. As more contractors have had the opportunity to work with foreign design firms, the building quality has improved dramatically over the years. Most contractors are now very familiar with imported materials and methods. Second, as I mentioned earlier, we rely on local talent. We hire both junior and senior staff who are really familiar with the local construction material and methods. That is critical to our success.

YL: Could you tell us a little bit about your role as a global trustee of the Urban Land Institute? What are the differences in urban planning policies between the US and Asia?

SC: ULI is a big, mature and influential organization with headquarters in the United States. It is keen to grow its membership in Asia. As a global trustee, my role is to help ULI establish its Asia organization – from China to Southeast Asia. I meet with the ULI team regularly in Singapore and Hong Kong. The role of the global trustee is to contribute his/her skills, experience and network to ULI to enable it to fulfill its mission - which is to continuously enhance the quality and contributions of the industry to the responsible and effective use of land.

YL: So what do you think are some of the fundamental differences between the US and Asia in terms of urban planning policy?

SC: There are many differences, such as the design process, the density of Asian cities, and the standard of living. Asia is also very big – from China to Southeast Asia. The diversity of cultures, languages, and market maturity all affect planning policies. The urban planning policies in Hong Kong and Singapore, for example, are quite mature. However, the urban planning policies for some countries such as Vietnam or Indonesia are still under development. The fundamental purpose of urban planning is to improve the quality of the living environment, the community, and of the city. In contrast to the US where economic growth is quite steady, the fast growth rates of Asia means that urban planning policies constantly need to be updated to address growing demands for a better quality of life.

YL: As the president of Asia-Pacific AECOM, what are some of the challenges of doing work in the region? How is it different from your experience working as an architect in the US?

SC: As an international company, it is not enough to just come in and tell our clients that we are better designers and will provide better-quality work and better-quality services. We have to build a strong relationship with the locals – from private to public clients – by understanding what they need and providing them with sustainable solutions. We do that by listening to them first rather than telling them what they need to do. International companies should not neglect how important it is to build a local team, understand the local culture, and understand the local economic and geopolitical situations.

YL: You have incredible involvement in the academic world – leading the Harvard Graduate School of Design AECOM China Studio. How does your experience practicing architecture overseas benefit students in understanding the global market?

SC: I think that's the reason Harvard is very interested in partnering with AECOM. It has a very clear intention to make its education relevant to global trends – issues of urbanization, density, environment, and sustainability. In order to enrich its academic training courses, Harvard needs to partner with a strong global network. We have a six-year agreement: the first three years were in China and the second three years in Southeast Asia.

The program had the studio in Jakarta this year. Since AECOM has a very good urban planning and urban design team in Jakarta, we helped link the students and faculty with relevant local government bodies. The governor of Jakarta was heavily engaged with the courses and the mayor of Bandung visited Harvard University to participate in the final reviews. This made the studio much more locally grounded so the students could really get to understand the needs of the local community, which made their design proposals much more relevant. This is more than an academic exercise. Although the studio is completed within a semester, the experience helps the students to provide better design solutions in their future career.

YL: You have been involved with many major complex and multidisciplinary projects across Asia-Pacific. How has the culture of sustainable architecture evolved in the past few decades in Asia, particularly in China?

SC: It's evolving gradually. There are various challenges such as the cost of green architecture, the local economy, and the education of the general public. These can be complex issues and all of the parties involved have to work together to make it happen.

YL: How did you get involved with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council as part of the Mainland Advisory Council? How does that impact the way you practice architecture?

SC: AECOM has a very significant team in mainland China, with more than 2,000 people across major cities. We have an even bigger team in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government sees the construction industry as very critical to the prospects of Hong Kong's economy. That's the reason I was appointed to be one of their team members. My involvement is to help the Hong Kong government understand the challenges and find opportunities to further open the market for Hong Kong professionals.

YL: I've heard rumors that the architecture market in Hong Kong is pretty well saturated. There aren't too many projects to build, but there are still many design firms. A lot of these firms end up pursuing work in China. Is that true?

SC: I wouldn't say "saturated." Hong Kong is a small, but continuously developing marketplace. One of the reasons we see so many architecture firms in Hong Kong is the growing market in China. It's not only providing opportunities for Hong Kong designers but also for designers in Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, and throughout the world. If you look at some of the major international firms, 30 – 50 percent of their work is in Asia or China. It's not because the Hong Kong market is saturated, but rather due to the fact that the market in China is significant and they need a lot of well-trained professionals.

YL: Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add for our young architect audience in the US?

SC: Yes. I would really encourage young architects in the US to find the opportunity to engage with international work. It will open up their perspective about the architecture profession. Ultimately everyone wants to build more sustainable buildings, a more sustainable community and a better world. Asia-Pacific is still a fast growing economy that needs a tremendous amount of contribution from diverse talents all over the world. ■

REFUGEE CAMPS
AN INTERVIEW WITH ILLYA AZAROFF, AIA

by AJ Sustaita, AIA

What initially inspired you to get into disaster relief and help refugees?

My father was a refugee. He was a Russian citizen whose village was occupied during World War II and he became a refugee at age seven in Nazi Germany. For two years of his life, he experienced appalling conditions in a labor camp until the war ended. After that time he remained in Germany, with the rest of his surviving family, where he lived in refugee camps and settlements. Because of that part of our family history, it has long been part of my DNA to be mindful of situations in which people need assistance to begin again.

Which types of refugees have you worked for – political refugees or those displaced by a natural disaster?

Both. I find that it is getting increasingly hard to distinguish ones that are getting pulled apart by war or natural disasters, the reason being that a refugee can be thought of as a client in need. As architects, we can provide solutions to help people in a very meaningful way.

Do you have any experience with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)?

While we don't have direct experience working with the UNHCR, we do follow them closely in order to be aware of how their policies affect those we serve. For example, a climate refugee has almost no rights outside the borders of their own country. However, a political refugee has governance regarding the type of displacement. The same goes for an individual or family who may be fleeing a war zone. This makes the question of why one is a refugee very important when it really shouldn't be. We do have experience working with relief agencies and the United Nations in a consultation capacity. To aid in the relief effort in Nepal, for example, we advised a collective team that directed resources in order to get hundreds of schools back up and running.

Part of the philosophy of the UNHCR is to help people help themselves. How would you design a refugee camp such that those in need can have the necessary resources to move on?

That's a great question. I completely agree with that philosophy for a number of reasons. In the past, the mistake has been to employ a prescriptive measure that is ubiquitous across any continent or place. Today, the idea is that an intelligent design needs to involve those who have been displaced. This would also inform relief agencies to be culturally aware of the people in need. Cultural awareness means valuable information, such as what types of buildings they're used to living in and what kinds of building materials they employ, as well as what type of collective skills a village or extended family may bring to the group. These are important parameters to embrace because the level of psychological comfort for refugees should become very high, or as high as it can be, when one is no longer in their own home. An inclusive process brings a sense of ownership to the effort of planning and building. Using this level of sensitivity is a great approach to help people help themselves and I am completely in-line with this philosophy as a means to moving away from being a refugee.

How involved do refugees become with the design process?

Refugees are very involved with the relief agencies and the people on the ground in a very profound way. Accounting for the culture and the people displaced, they must have a say in the design. Otherwise, they will completely reformat the site to their needs and desires. These types of disruptions in the process can only impede the relief effort.

You have a disaster relief prototype. Can you tell us more about the design and implementation of these prototypes?

Our office has done several, but I also include this in my teachings by presenting it as a design problem for my students. Over the years I've had numerous emerging scholars that I direct outside of their normal curriculum. If they've excelled in my program, I invite them to engage in the process of prototyping deployable disaster relief shelters. One great example can be seen from a group of really bright students from the New York City College of Technology where I teach. The shelter they designed is called the HIBAtat, which is actually named after one of the students leading the group. The design team included Hiba Hadeed, Long Ruan, and Erik Jester. They were very successful students of mine and we continued the collaborative effort to analyze what disaster relief modules could be. Our product was light-weight with all materials being up-cycled from the disaster relief shelter. Historically, shelters and shelter materials would arrive on location only to later become trash or debris years down the road. What we looked for were materials that could be used in the building process in a variety of different ways. The idea is that a deployable shelter can be taken apart and the materials used for irrigation, plumbing, and rainwater harvesting. The skin of the structure itself is a waterproofing membrane that can be used for roofing or rain protection clothing.

When we prototype in my office or at school we are very mindful to stay true to the life cycle that these shelters will endure. Ideally, the pieces that make up the shelter will be repurposed. Our hope is that this will leverage all of those materials into new building materials and new processes and that is what drives a lot of the prototypes.

You gave a TEDx talk in New York where you put forth the idea that resilience is about people, not buildings. Can you give us some insight on how you arrived at that conclusion?

There a couple of factors that have led me to feel this way. Buildings can be replaced, but people can't. Being well connected with a network will enable one to know what's coming and also know that one can rely on others for help. During Hurricane Sandy, there were people who could not get out of their houses due to a disability and neighbors came to their aid and helped with their evacuation. We also saw groups of neighbors organize the evacuation of multi-story buildings where the elevators couldn't be employed. This leadership model emerged from communities that knew one another. These types of examples are embedded in the culture in places like the Philippines and the Marianas Islands where I visited. Groups of families that had knowledge and skill in construction would step up and rebuild neighbors' houses. During this process, they would sleep on each other's floors and then move on to the next one. That kind of community resilience is essential to coping with shock and stresses.

Above: Tohoku region disaster refugee camp. Image courtesy of Illya Azaroff.

Your TEDx talk began with the mantra of "We are not alone." How important are mantras like that when people are facing the kinds of events that would cause them to become refugees?

This is a world-wide problem that is going to get worse; no one is immune. It's quite important for people to know that in New York, many still are waiting for their homes to be rebuilt post-Sandy and that people are still displaced from Katrina eleven years later. It's important that displaced people realize that they are not isolated and that there are people willing to help from all over the world. The other side is that the people that are not affected must realize that they have a major role to play in the relief as well, and that is not to forget the plight of their neighbors. That mantra of "We are not alone" also includes the existing knowledge base from places that have been hit hard by disasters. This includes locales like the Gulf Coast, the Carolinas, Florida, and Texas, because they can bring planning experience so we aren't constantly reinventing the wheel and are focusing our efforts where they are needed most. The last example of how important this idea is can be found in Japan. Since the Tohoku earthquake in 2011, the *Japanese Times* has published a front-page article about how the recovery is going, including the cost for the effort, every day. They do not let anyone forget that the region is still recovering from a disaster that happened over five years ago. They are making sure that every citizen knows they are in this together, that no one is alone. ■

YOUNG ARCHITECT AWARD SPOTLIGHT

A CONVERSATION WITH YU-NGOK LO

by Jeff Pastva, AIA

In our continuing coverage of winners of the Young Architect Award, this month I was able to catch up with one of our own. Yu-Ngok Lo, our subject, was one of this year's class and has been a mainstay on the CONNECTION editorial team for the better part of two years. However, his involvement runs much deeper than a single committee, commitment, or interest, all of which he does in between running a practice and working internationally.

It should be no surprise that Yu-Ngok was a natural fit for an issue that focuses on international practice and has strong ties abroad, particularly to China. He was born in Macau and moved to the US in 1998 to pursue an undergraduate degree at Iowa State University. Shortly after graduation, he moved west to California and has been practicing there ever since. In his own words, "California is one of the most diverse and liberal states in the country and designing custom homes was something I wanted to do since I started college. The coastal areas in particular offered me tremendous opportunities to flex my muscle as an architect." Since he started practicing, he has worked on an array of housing prototypes and has witnessed the distinct difference in reaction between owners who choose a cookie cutter design and those who opt for ones with them in mind. If it wasn't clear, the latter are much happier with their final product.

Outside of practicing, he has made and continues to make substantial contributions to the AIA at all levels. But it took some time before he got involved post graduation. He admittedly wasn't interested in joining the AIA at first, but did so in order to take advantage of the complimentary registration to the 2009 AIA National Convention in San Francisco. He has since found tremendous value in the organization, what the AIA stands for, and advocating for fellow architects. A few years later he was encouraged by one of his firm principals to run for the AIA Long Beach | South Bay Board of Directors and was elected to serve a two-year term from 2013-2014. From that moment on, he has only deepened his engagement. The following years he served on the AIA California Council (AIACC) Advocacy Advisory Committee, the AIACC Committee on the Environment (COTE), the AIA National Diversity Council and the Construction Contract Administration (CCA) Advisory Group. In his spare time, he is involved in the USGBC-CA advocacy committee, co-chairs the 2016 GreenBuild volunteer committee and edits NOMA and AIBD magazines.

Since he crossed over a number of seemingly separate interests, I was curious if he had found any natural overlap between the goals of each group. The answer, predictably, was yes and no. He said, "The work we do in the CCA and Diversity Council have very distinct purposes. For example, the mission of CCA is to inform architects of the importance of construction phase services, while the mission of the Diversity Council is to embrace diversity within the profession. However, I think publications such as CONNECTION and NOMA Magazine play a role in bringing different issues together and making them available to our members and architects in the profession." Since there was more potential for collaboration on our publications, I followed up by asking him the specific content he has pursued. He said, "The common denominator between both NOMA Magazine and CONNECTION are that they report issues and topics that are relevant to architects. They are just for different audiences. CONNECTION focuses on young architects and emerging professionals, while NOMA Magazine is geared specifically toward minority architects. For example, our last issue focused on the topics of Equity in Architecture and Social Justice by Design. Articles such as Overcoming Unconscious Bias at Work and case studies of community engagement and social justice through the design process were selected, illustrating the struggles many minority architects face everyday. My goal is to forge a stronger partnership between NOMA Magazine and CONNECTION and create more content that is relevant to both young architects and minority architects."

Between all his other commitments and goals, he has developed an expertise in international practice and is one of the few small-firm operators who has been able to go after international work that is often reserved for larger corporations. Like any other start-up company, though, he had to start small. His first "real" international project, as he put it, was an interior restaurant fitout in Macau, China. It was hard for him to land that first project, but the client was referred to him by a childhood friend from Macau. The budget was relatively small, US $40,000, which had to cover a new commercial kitchen, a new bathroom, new HVAC units, an electrical system, and furniture. Despite the challenges, he learned a lot about the availability of local materials, their costs, and construction methods. He went into a little more detail about the contractor experience as well. "The contractor had never worked with a U.S.-based architect before and was not familiar with gypsum board or stud wall construction. So the interior walls were instead constructed out of unreinforced brick." The project went on to be covered in a number of local media outlets and helped Yu-Ngok and his firm pursue their next gig.

Just hearing a few anecdotes wasn't enough to satisfy my interest in his international experience, so I asked him to elaborate more on the lessons learned. For starters, most of the work he does is only up to Schematic Design. But here are a few more observations:

- Chinese projects are typically very fast paced and the schedules are very demanding. Due to time differences, he would often work until midnight in order to meet with the client through Skype. Since in-person site meetings aren't a big-budget line item (if at all), he cited telecommunications and a good Internet connection as crucial to his workflow.

- He often partners with a local architect for some of the bigger projects. They help create the Owner/Architect contracts and handle the fee negotiation. However, for smaller projects, the client was reluctant to sign a formal agreement. This occurred with the restaurant in Macau, and added to his risk, since he was not certain how enforceable a verbal or email agreement would be in the local jurisdiction. Fortunately, that particular project was a success and he received payment in full.

- He is often hired to only do work up to Conceptual Design. Since construction documents are typically handled by local architects, it is virtually impossible to ensure the design intent is maintained during the documentation and/or construction phase. Code, cost, availability of material, etc., are some of the factors that could potentially modify the design, and changes are often made without the acknowledgment of the design team.

- Collecting fees has been a tiresome challenge on the Chinese projects. For instance, he was only able to collect 75 percent of the fees for a recent interior design project he did. The client simply refused to pay without any reason, going so far as to not even respond to the last payment request. Even with good clients, it typically takes months before he receives payments due to the complicated transaction process for funds leaving the country.

Above Middle: Image courtesy of Patrick Bertolino.
Above: Image courtesy of Sergio Merêces.
Right: Image courtesy Yu-Ngok Lo.

Now that he has a toehold in the China market, Yu-Ngok says that his firm is looking for opportunities to grow his firm. He has recently set up a contact in Hong Kong, is hoping to pull in some local projects, and is also looking to do more work in Macau. Additionally, he is focusing marketing efforts on both the US and mainland Chinese markets. Despite the fact that his birthplace feels somewhat foreign to him, he has relished the opportunity to reconnect with the culture he was once very familiar with and re-establish his network there. ■

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

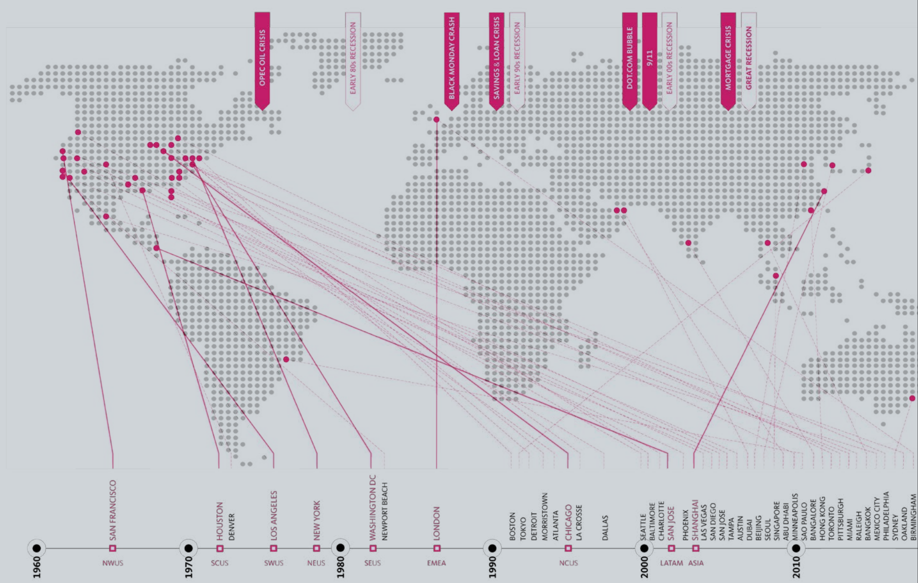
A LIVE WEBINAR BY WYATT FRANTOM, MATT DUMICH, AND ALISON LAAS

BY JEFF PASTVA, AIA

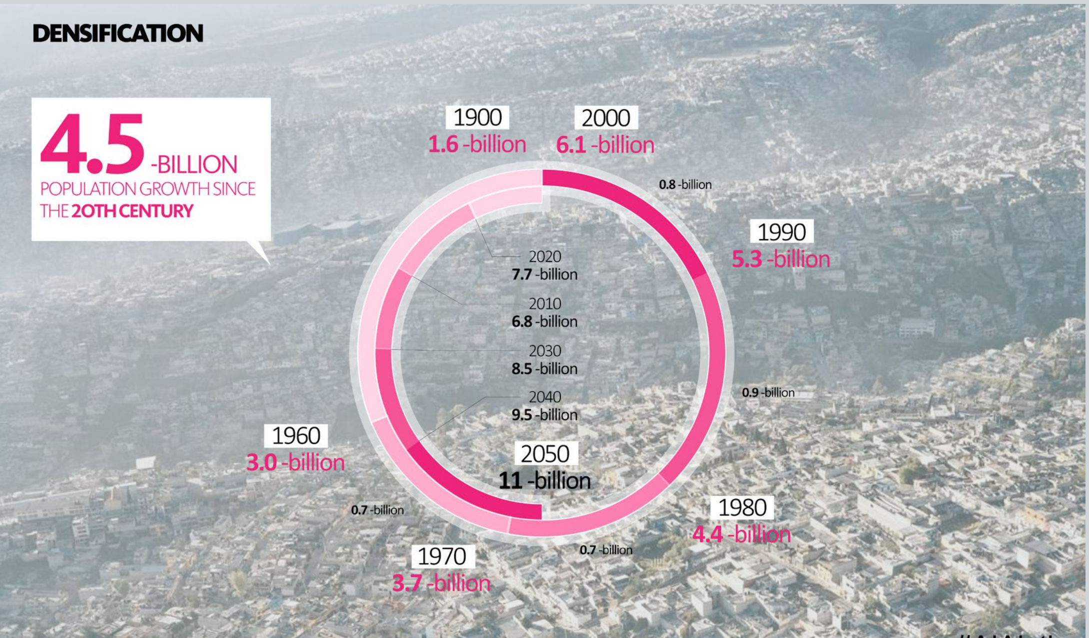
Densification
We are all aware that our global population has recently surpassed 7 billion people and is projected to reach nearly 10 billion by 2050. The most telling fact about world population growth is that populations had grown very slowly until recent centuries when they increased dramatically. Between 1900 and 2000, as the most conspicuous century, the increase in world population was three times greater than the entire previous history of humanity – an increase from 1.5 to 6.1 billion in just 100 years.

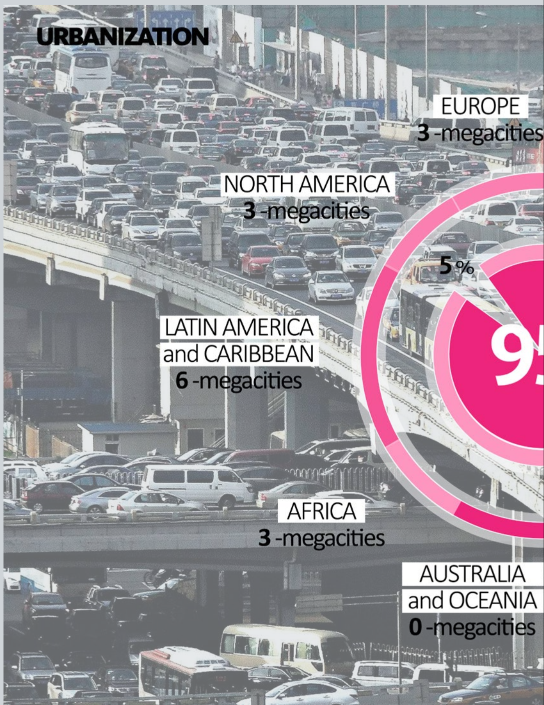
Globalization
There has, over the course of decades if not centuries, been a leveling-out and homogenization of our individual international cultures into a singular world culture prompted by the import/export of respective cultures and societal values. This is made most evident by our increasing connectivity. Where once we had trade routes by land and then sea, now we have satellite-fed virtual interactions a world away that will continue to "flatten" our global experience.

Urbanization
For the first time in human history, the majority of our global population is now residing in cities. By 2030, a mere fourteen years away, 70 percent of our population will live in urban conditions. In terms of where that population occurs, twenty-two of the megacities (defined as cities or metropolitan areas with greater than 10 million in population) will be located in Asia as opposed to those few megacities located in the western hemisphere – with only three in North America currently. All of that is to say that 95 percent of all global development currently occurs outside the US and is a trend that will persist.



Above: The opening of Genler's offices around the world. Image courtesy Wyatt Frantom & Gensler.
Below: Visual depictions of Densification, Urbanization, and Globalization with descriptions in the sidebar to the left.
All images courtesy Wyatt Frantom.





During the AIA Convention in Philadelphia, a panel on International Practice was assembled that featured three Young Architects, Wyatt Frantom, Matt Dumich, and Alison Laas, who are all friends of the YAF. Since we have a focus in this month's CONNECTION *on International Practice, we caught up with them to revisit their presentation and to take questions from a virtual audience. The following is an abridged version of the presentation, complete with live Q&A at the end from those in attendance. To start things off, Wyatt recapped the introduction that was offered by moderator James Wright.*

WF: James Wright, former Chair of the AIA International Practice Committee Advisory Group and moderator of the session at Convention, provided a brief overview of the various macro-level considerations – political, social, cultural, and economic – that a firm or individual architect should assess when determining whether to practice internationally, providing a broad context for the panelists to present more specific, even anecdotal, examples from their own project experiences.

With that as a framework, Wyatt kicked off the virtual panel discussion with an opening slide to preface the discussion by asking "Why" Practice Internationally?

WF: I wanted to start very broadly by asking ourselves "why" architects practice internationally and explore some of the forces that push architects to operate at the global scale. It goes without saying that architects practice where there is business. Another way of saying this, and playing off of Louis Sullivan's well-known idiom, is that "Form Follows Finance" … we go where the work is and the work occurs typically where markets are hot. Now more than ever, we realize that we live in a global economy; we only need to reference the fallout of the recent Great Recession to understand the impact that Greece or the UK can have on our own domestic markets. In terms of project development, there are three meta-trends that are significantly impacting our global economy – Densification, Globalization, and Urbanization.

Collectively, these concepts form the notion of Connectography that Parag Khanna has coined to reimagine how the world is viewed; that is, we see the world less in socio-political terms or defined by traditional geopolitical borders. Now, more than ever, we are seeing the world in terms of "how it works" – from global supply chains and connective media to how we conduct business logistically.

To more fully grasp the concept of Connectography, I looked at the global span of Gensler through the opening of its forty-seven offices over the past fifty years. Along the bottom of the graphic, you can see the year that each office opened (see image opposite page). Each marking in pink designates a regional office, which tends to be front-loaded to our early history. The opening of our international offices, conversely, occurred mostly during the decade between 2004 and 2014, which corresponds, not coincidentally, with the global recession. That led me to believe, that we broadened our portfolio, and thus where we worked, based on the lack of availability of work domestically. Just as one diversifies a retirement account or stock portfolio, firms diversified how they got work … and that meant, where they do business. Conducting a similar overlay for my own relatively brief career in the profession – spanning from 1997 to the present – I noticed that while my early career work occurred entirely in the US, the projects of international scope occurred largely during that same decade between 2004 - 2014 and included projects in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, China, and India – a veritable heat map of developing markets.

Given these global meta-trends and the critically connected world in which we live, it becomes necessary for architects to understand the ever-changing global conditions under which they choose to practice internationally. More than that, however, I would argue given these trends, that for most architects there will be little choice but to practice internationally.

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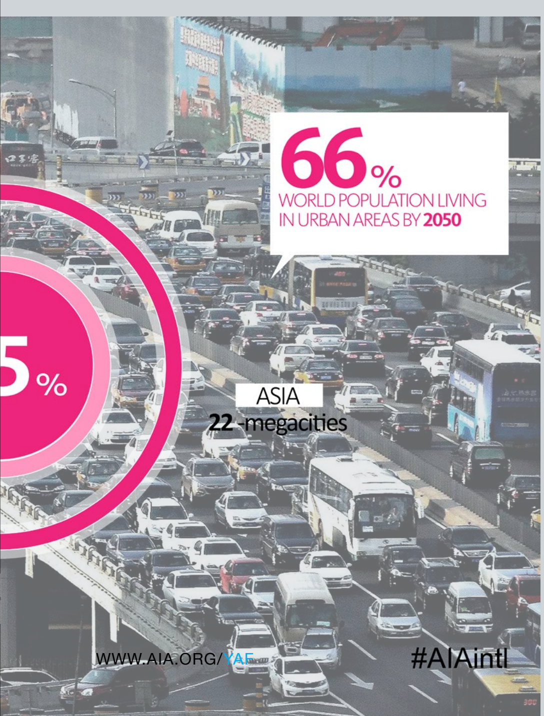

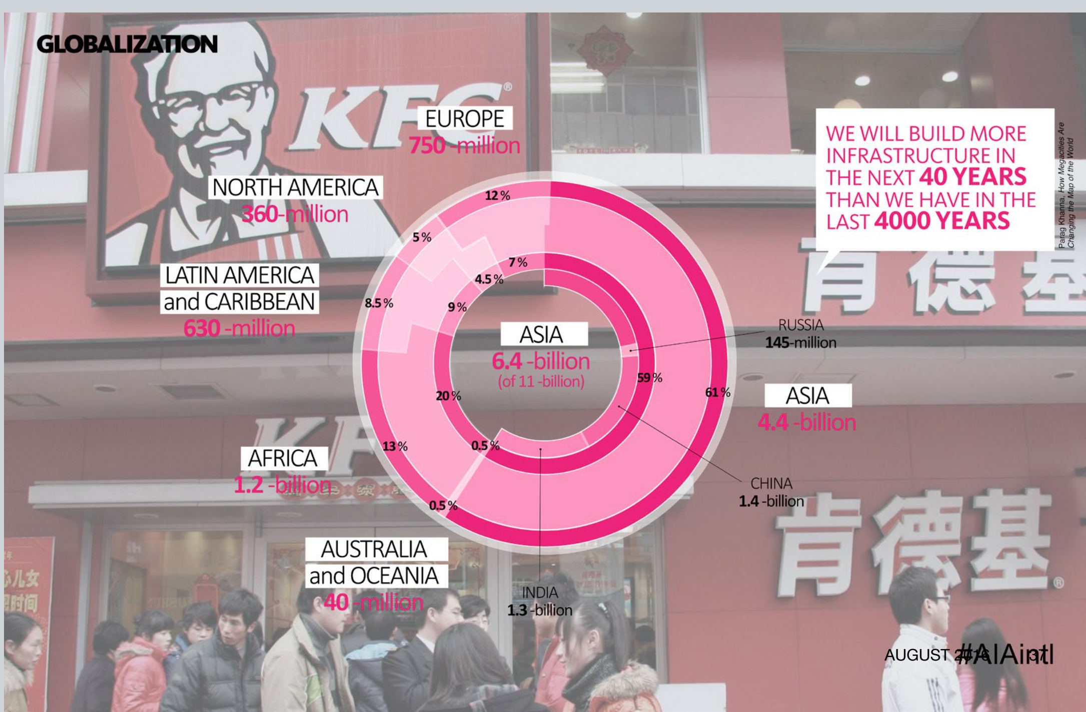

With that, Wyatt turned the presentation over to Matt Dumich, a project manager with Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture. AS+GG is a 100 person global architecture and planning practice based in Chicago. The focus on overseas work was a departure from Matt's experience in his previous firms. He went on to explain some more of his background and gave us a project specific example.

MD: I had never worked on an international project, worked in metric, or in a different language. Personally, it was a cultural change to understand the dynamics of international practice. My presentation today is a case study of a major project I've been working on for almost three years. EXPO 2017, the next world's fair, is located in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. The project, twenty-eight structures in all, includes exhibition and cultural buildings all based on the theme of future energy. The buildings are designed for use after the Expo and fit out temporarily for the three-month exhibition period. The complex is centered by the Kazakhstan national pavilion, an eighty meter diameter glass sphere. The Sphere is quite technically complex, including one of the world's largest installations of double-curved, insulating glass. All the buildings embody the theme of future energy, so this building incorporates integrated photovoltaics and has wind turbines in it. The surrounding buildings were shaped and optimized to maximize their performance and energy-generating potential. The buildings were designed to generate a majority of their energy used during and after the Expo.

Unlike most of my past projects, where we worked directly for the user, a developer or institutional client, our client was the Kazakh government. Once the President of Kazakhstan selected our competition design, the layout and concept were approved to proceed. His endorsement was key to the project success and the design integrity has been maintained in the project under construction.

Everyone who does international work has a crazy story about unique cultural experiences. One of my most distinct memories is a lunch where our client persistently "encouraged" us to drink fermented mare's milk, which was one of the most awful things I had ever tasted before, but I still tried it to be polite. Working internationally, you need to be open minded, ready for new experiences, and respectful of cultural differences. My experience taught me that not everyone does business the same way we do, so you need to be flexible and open to the way things work in other places.

A big project doesn't happen without a great team. There were consultants from ten different countries on three different continents. Working remotely has its own challenges. The design team was in Chicago, with seventy architects at the peak, and the client and contractor were in Kazakhstan, a twelve hour time difference. We had one architect based in Astana, who was a liaison and translator for our office.

Another unique challenge was the extreme climate. In Astana, the temperatures get down to -45F degrees and construction continues throughout the winter in order to meet an extremely aggressive schedule. They were pouring concrete in below-zero temperatures, building rebar cages in heated tents. The soil was frozen down two meters (six feet), so they had to auger out the frozen soil to get below the frost line before driving pile foundations.

In addition to the complexities of working remotely and overcoming a harsh climate, we had to contend with the "hyper-track" construction schedule. Our team set all column grids and fixed the final location for all foundations during the Schematic Design phase in order to meet the schedule. We had to establish a workflow to quickly study and commit to decisions before further developing the design.

Working internationally is a fascinating and rewarding opportunity. It can be both challenging and exciting. I encourage anyone interested to go in with an open mind and enjoy the experience.

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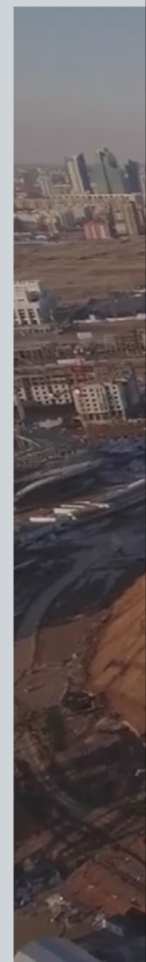


Opposite Page, Top Right: View of the Sphere under construction. Image © Skyscrapercity.com.
Immediate Right: Rendering of the Sphere. Image © Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture.
Opposite Page, Below Right: Construction of the EXPO during the winter months. Image © Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture.

Following the EXPO 2017 example, Matt turned the presentation over to Alison Laas, an architect at Payette in Boston. Payette is a 140 person firm that specializes primarily in healthcare and science research laboratories. She's been with the firm for nine years, half of which has been spent on international projects in China, Pakistan, Kenya, and Tanzania. Her goal for the presentation was to touch on her path into international practices and the advances she's seen in her growth as an architect.

AL: I didn't plan on going into international practice when I started working in architecture. I came to it through a master planning project in the office. We had a master plan for a hospital in Pakistan that I was added to the team for. Since then, I have sought out international work because I find it so rewarding and challenging as a designer.

Buildings, particularly hospitals, in international contexts are design projects in which we have to question our assumptions as designers. I'm working on a 2,500-bed hospital in Changsha, China that is in schematic design right now. They deliver healthcare much differently than we do in the US, which is true of many healthcare systems around the world. For example, this hospital sees 10,000 outpatients a day. Since I will probably not find myself in that situation, my quest as a designer is to create spaces and architecture that respond to needs that I am not intimately aware of. We have to think about the importance of designing at the human scale and designing spaces for individuals that still evoke the same kinds of values and principles that apply to all of our projects. These types of human-scaled spaces become more important in these increasingly complex and large-scale projects where details can get lost.

Working internationally has also pushed me technically as an architect. In a project in Tanzania, for example, utilities are not reliable or even available. We also have to think about how to apply architectural and design strategies that technically work in different climates. The same project in Tanzania relies extensively on natural ventilation because the HVAC systems are not that reliable. While natural ventilation is a bonus to buildings in the US or not allowed in hospitals due to codes, in places like Tanzania we have to figure out how to make it work. We need the patients and staff to be both comfortable and safe. They need to get enough air changes per hour to move enough air through the spaces, so that it is still hygienic.

Working on international projects has also helped me grow my softer skills, such as communication. It is especially important because I was working with people for four years before I met them face to face. Being able to develop skills in graphic, verbal, and written communication was crucial to our ability to collaborate with our colleagues without the advantage of regular in-person meetings. I've seen so many benefits for myself to grow as a designer, to grow technically, and to grow professionally through international work that I would encourage everyone to see how international work could be a way to not only participate in amazing projects in amazing places, but also to help you push and grow yourself as an architect and designer.

Attendee Ryan McEnroe opened up the Q&A session with a short anecdote that framed his first two questions.

RM: A mentor of mine, Glenn Murcutt, has not accepted international work on the premise that he doesn't feel it's ethical for architects to go outside their boundaries of what they know as opposed to what they say they know.

1a. Do you as designers feel that you are the most capable and competent to do the work, particularly when you run into cultural issues?

1b. How are the jobs procured and do the governments or developers actually want western firms? Are they bidding jobs out equally throughout the world or is there a short list of the folks who do a lot of international work?

MD: The responsibility of working in a different context and different culture isn't taken lightly. It requires research and immersion to really understand that culture, climate, and historical context. We really try to do our best to interpret the local conditions, starting a project with boots on the ground. Some places where we are working do not have mature construction markets or design capabilities, so they are asking us to share our expertise. One thing that we are seeing in China is that market is maturing and the Chinese are starting to do more architectural design and planning in-country.

WF: To add to that, we almost always work with an architect of record (AOR) who practices locally to our project locations. Ultimately, they will be the ones to stamp drawings and submit for permitting. So through that partnership, with our clients, and sometimes consultants, we are able to immerse ourselves into the culture. Both sides bring qualities to the project – serving as ambassadors in a way – so that it can be a learning experience for all involved.

AL: Since my experience has been in healthcare, this is a particularly pertinent question. The types of experiences that one has in a hospital are those of life and death. There are cultural implications that happen in those spaces; we have to make a concerted effort to make sure that we are aware of our own biases and where we are coming from. That way, we can approach projects with our eyes wide open and learn the places and people for whom we are building. On the other hand, many of our international projects come through the Aga Khan Development Network, whose mission is to bring state- of-the-art healthcare to developing nations. That's the reason they reach out to us as experts. There are always compromise and adjustments that need to be made based on equipment, technology, and cultural and regulatory norms. It's a kind of meeting the middle of bringing our expertise and listening to our clients and partners.

Opposite Page, Far Left: In Tanzania, designing for natural ventilation creates a comfortable and healthy environment for patients and staff even when utilities are unreliable. Image ©Payette.
Opposite Page, Above: Patient room design for a hospital in China with space for family to help care for the patient. Image ©Payette.
Opposite Page, Below: The window box in the patient room provides space for quiet and individual space. Designing for the individual scale is important on large, complex projects. Image ©Payette.

RM: Do you feel that international work will continue to progress forward or will other firms within the home countries pick that work up?

WF: There will be a leveling-off at some point of the technical knowledge and design capabilities of countries like China and India that are, to a degree, currently seeking out western expertise. But there will always be emerging markets in need of that type of deep project experience.

MD: I agree. We will continue to find new emerging places that we just haven't talked about today, like Africa, South America, or Russia. At least in our career span, there will always be opportunities to share our expertise in international markets.

Attendee Kurt Neiswender jumped in after Ryan asked his follow up questions..

KN: What are your thoughts on the contractual parts of the project?

WF: In any project, there is a level of risk and exposure, especially when practicing internationally because of the cultural, legal, and contractual differences from those that we are accustomed to in the US. I've been fortunate in that my international project experiences have been conducted through large global firms that have protocols in place to govern contracts and manage exposure.

MD: As a project manager, I deal with and protect against these issues very regularly. On many of our projects, we require a mobilization or advance payment to get the team started. We also insist on holding the copyright to protect our concepts and ideas. Those are important issues for our firm. Having good advisors is also key. We had to set up a legal entity and office in Kazakhstan, get insurance, establish a bank account, and work with our lawyers and financial advisors who had in-country experience to get set up.

AL: I agree. My work has been similar to Wyatt's in that we've been working with clients who are either large, known institutions or are international themselves. They have experience and understand the complexities of working with someone not based in the same country. With other clients, we have had delays due to things such as conversion of currency. ■

THE DIVIDE BETWEEN
DESIGN PROFESSIONALS AND BUILDING USERS IN EMERGING AFRICAN CITIES

by HK Mokwete, RIBA

African cities are growing at a phenomenal pace fueled by a growing middle-income population, rapid urbanization, and improving political stability across the continent. Some 40 percent (400 million) of the African population now live in cities and this is expected to grow to 57 percent by the year 2020 (*UN World Urbanization Prospects, 2014*).

This growth presents some critical challenges to the aging post-colonial urban infrastructure across much of Africa, especially the sub-Saharan region. Demand for space and new buildings, both public and private, means the built environment is seeing both growth and pressure alike, making this an interesting emerging market for international developers, architects, and engineers. Multiple countries are investing in new city expansions, innovation hubs, housing projects, and other ambitious urban development initiatives. This has attracted international firms such as New York City based SHoP architects, who have been pursuing projects in Kenya's and Botswana's new Innovation Hubs. Other firms, such as AECOM, have long been slowly opening opportunities using its multidisciplinary approach. AECOM acquired one of Africa's leading quantity surveying outfits (2010), Davis Langdon, giving it unique access to further opportunities in the market.

Despite the above positive potential of industry growth, there remains a growing divide between industry professional services and its appreciation, reach, and/or implied added value to the majority of Africa's populations. This increasing divide is evident in the number of people living in large informal settlements and lacking basic amenities to shelter across sub-Saharan cities, which are now home to about half of urban dwellers. With so many living on the fringes of urban developments, this divide and disconnect between designers and building users is at a critical state.

Although there are many aspects contributing to this situation, the following points encompass the historical challenges of this disconnect.

The conflict of commercialized design services with traditional/ vernacular building systems and methods

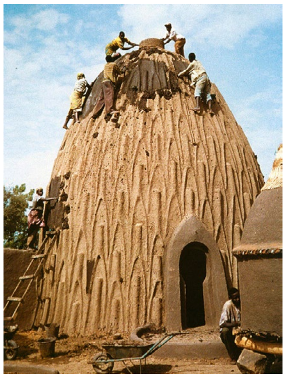
Traditionally, across much of sub-Saharan African communities, building design is both a community activity and a ritual process that connects place, building, and the inhabitant. The process of building a house/home, although varying across cultures, shares core processes that are underlined by a collaborative and participatory spirit. This has always been the anchoring relationship between one's home, its design/building, and the neighboring community. This process typically involved variations of the following activities:

Home place finding and neighborhood building

In villages, and much of rural Africa, land is tribally owned and managed. Therefore the process of identifying your land/place for your new home is a collective process involving the village's traditional leaders and potential neighbors. Most importantly, you not only chose your neighbors, but they have to choose you, too. The consultative process of choosing a location means your neighbors had to approve of you being their neighbor and hence part of the community. This process that ensured neighborhoods maintained close relationships that went beyond just sharing boundaries. These groupings, for example in Botswana, formed *patlelos* which could be equated to neighborhood blocks. A collection of these blocks would form a *kglotla*, which has certain governance, identity, and a sense of place. These hierarchies of spatial and place relations are what developed into villages and townships, built around community relationships and collective living.

The post-colonial planning systems adopted by all African systems largely ignored and abolished these traditional place making practices. The standardized urban planning and design done by "professionals" excluded communities from participating and collectively deciding the growth of their neighborhoods and depended on foreign planning concepts with no relationship to how people actually live and use land.

Urban designers laying out new urban neighborhoods did so in isolation from the communities and as commercialized practice, a system owing to, in large part, the increased disconnect between communities, building users, and the urban neighborhoods.



Collective traditional house-building process

Many of the traditional houses across African villages are a result of a collective and participatory process involving male/female identifiable roles, neighbors, and local skilled individuals who provide specific services. The result is a house/home that embodies traces of multiplicity in building as a shared activity such as the Erbore community house building activity; neighbors formed the core of the labor activity involved in building the hut. Other advantages of collective building included community bonding and integration of the new settler into their new neighborhood. The shift from this fluid, collective, and participatory process to a commercialized and professional-led system means that the social bonding of the community through building is lost. Paid professionals will largely give their concern to the paying client, rather than neighborhood building. On top of this, whereas traditionally one did not have to hire a professional (architect/designer, contractors) to build a home, now building consumers need to afford the costs associated and must also understand and be informed of the roles and responsibilities of professionals involved in making buildings.

Above Left: Collective Building process; Image: Designboom & cité des science et de l'industrie, paris
Above Right: Thatched House building, South Sudan; Image: Jan's Jottings-Snippets and Snaps of Life in South Sudan
Opposite Page: Kibera Slum, Nairobi, Kenya.

African cities as experiments of European utopian urban planning/ development

Most modern cities in sub-Saharan African countries were either planned and/or built up during the colonial era or the era ending in the late 1960s. Traditional cities that existed before colonialism, such as Kumasi, of the Asanti Kingdom (Ghana) and Katsina City of the Hausa (Nigeria), underwent fundamental transformations and challenges during their colonial years, which started in the early 1800s and ended in the 1960s. While cities such as Mozambique's Maputo and Madagascar's Antananarivo resembled typical colonizer's cities, (French and Portuguese respectively), cities built post-independence, such as Botswana's capital Gaborone, were planned and built as experiments of utopian ideas. Gaborone was designed and built from scratch and completed in 1966 based on Ebenezer Howard's Garden city. The concepts and ideals underpinning its masterplan DNA completely ignored any lessons from local vernacular place making rituals and was only built for limited growth of not more than 30,000 inhabitants. From its completion, the city struggled to house low-income earners and migrants, resulting in the city's largest and overcrowded informal settlement of Old Naledi. Similarly failed European-styled cities resulting in large, sprawling informal settlements and slums, include Kenya's Nairobi, home to one of Africa's most infamous slums, Kibera.

Urban exclusion and lack of equitable resources distribution:

The majority of urban dwellers across sub-Saharan cities (some 65 percent according to African Development Bank) live in slums or informal settlements with no access to urban amenities and services. These urban dwellers, with no means to procure design services and living in overcrowded shelters, are often on the fringes of urban development.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme defines slums as "*contiguous settlements where inhabitants are characterized as having, insecure residential status; inadequate access to safe water; inadequate access to sanitation and other basic infrastructure and services; poor structural quality of housing and overcrowding.*"

For such populations, such as Kibera slum dwellers, this divide between architecture/design and building consumer is so critical and a matter of life and death. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the lack of adequate sanitation, potable water, and electricity, in addition to substandard housing and overcrowding, aggravates the spread of diseases and avoidable deaths.

As governments across Africa struggle to contain and improve these problems, the question remains, *how can design provide real life changing solutions to such problems?* The current design procurement system, based on money upfront for services, means that ALL slum dwellers and informal settlers are not consumers of design. The growing distance between the products and services of designers to these majority of urban settlers remains an elusive thing.

Conclusion

At the governmental level, the McKinsey Global Institute, *A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge* (2014), proposes that one of the steps to be taken to alleviate the challenges of lack of affordable housing is to deploy an industrial approach to housing development. This process would look towards prefabrication and industrial-scaled production to both reduce costs and meet the rapid growing demand of housing. Design creativity in this case would be needed to ensure that quality of creating homes is preserved. Participation and involvement of end users would also critically ensure that users not only help shape the end product but are players, as they traditionally have been, in the process of house building. Examples such as Botswana Innovation Hub's Better Shelter Units, miss the mark on this collective and participatory part, and it shows. Designed and built by IKEA, these prototype units lack any local authenticity and appear alien to the intended communities. Other added benefits of this industrial approach would be the creation of skills development in manufacturing this infrastructure, which can ultimately create positive economic sustainability of such a system. Such a strategy presents opportunities for designers to take the front seat in working with users to solve critical societal problems alongside users and in the end reduce the ever-growing gap between designers and users. In addition to the above, the design profession needs to develop a new set of processes that can tackle these problems head on. ■

EMPLOYEE STOCK OWNERSHIP PROGRAMS

THE BENEFITS OF SKIN IN THE GAME

by Ian Merker, AIA

The traditional path of ownership transition in an architecture firm may take decades. Without a program of investment set in place, employees that expect to be ready to take on ownership get sticker shock when it's time to buy in. Unless you have significant savings or the desire to leverage a great amount of debt, the traditional path can be a challenging and burdensome process. Employee Stock Ownership Programs (ESOPs) are kicking the trend of a tough ownership transition by letting employees put "skin in the game" early in the process. ESOPs give an opportunity for all employees to reap the benefits of ownership with investment early in their careers and increasing equity over time, with direct profit from the success of the company.

Benefits of an ESOP

The AIA Compensation Report (The American Institute of Architects, 2015) notes that bonuses and profit sharing are common benefits among survey respondents. The difference with an ESOP is that with stocks, employees have the opportunity to influence growth and earn the dividends. As a business model, the ESOP plan's efficacy in establishing business succession is key.

In standard practice, business valuation may occur only when there is a potential change in ownership. With an ESOP, valuation becomes a regular occurrence as part of determining the value of stock. Growth is shared on an annual basis, with the regularly assessed value of the stock.

The financial benefits to companies are that contributions to the ESOP are tax deductible, and cash from retirement plans can be used to fund the purchase of stock by the ESOP. Companies can also leverage the value of the ESOP for financing, assuming it is for the primary benefit of ESOP participants.

Long-term comparative studies by Rutgers University and University of Pennsylvania (Blasi and Kruse, 2000) (Freeman and Knoll, 2008) indicate ESOP companies outperform their non-ESOP peers in sales, profitability, job growth and longevity.

S-corporation ESOP vs C-corporation ESOP

A C corporation is taxed separately from its owners. In an S corporation, the entity is taxed singly, so that profit or loss is passed directly to shareholders. A 100% ESOP owned S corporation pays no federal income taxes. S corporations typically have less than 100 shareholders.

Because C corporations are separately taxed, it is not advantageous, or in some cases legal for international or non-US citizen employees to be employee stock owners.

Potential Drawbacks

For firms that have offices outside of the US, foreign laws may prohibit or complicate membership in an ESOP. In order to maintain equity, other contributions may need to be increased to find a balance. Small firms may find it challenging to establish an ESOP. According to the National Center for Employee Ownership, there are costs associated with attorneys drawing up documents and annual fees for business valuation and plan maintenance. The plan administration costs typically require staff to handle the ESOP, and there are economies of scale for larger firms. We talked to firms that have 4,800 employees (Gensler) and 500 employees (DLR Group).

Gensler

Art Gensler started his company in 1965. In his book Art's Principles, he attributes his successful transition plan to setting up an ESOP and transferring his own stock to future leadership:

People thought I was crazy when I first gave out my stock, but if you want a family culture, everyone must be in it together. In the end, the remaining stock I have has become far more valuable than if I had kept it all for myself.

Gensler's ESOP was started in 1988. It was established with four primary goals- to provide equity for all employees, build a retirement account for architects that tend to focus on design and not the monetary aspects of life, encourage employee retention, and transfer ownership. That initial process of transfer is complete, as Art is no longer a primary shareholder of the company.

Scott Dunlap, AIA, LEED AP BD+C is the Managing Principal for the Northwest Region. He has been a participant in Gensler's ESOP plan since its inception 28 years ago. "The secret to building a healthy retirement account is a combination of firm growth, financial success and longevity." ESOP shares are distributed annually to Gensler team members on the U.S. payroll. The shares are just one component of Gensler's overall retirement plan benefit. The amount of the annual contribution to the retirement plan is determined by the Board of Directors and is based on a number of factors including the shared success of the Firm. "We are a one-firm firm, and we distribute our profits in bonuses and retirement account contributions based on the overall firm's success, not just the performance of a particular office or region."

Gensler's ESOP includes an initial vesting period for new team members. After the first five years of employment, the full value of shares in a team member's account are realized. Shares can only be redeemed when an individual leaves the Firm – hopefully, not before retirement. For those professionals with a long-term career vision at Gensler, the ESOP can be a valuable component of an overall investment and retirement strategy, regardless of title or role. Scott added, "We've had a number of our non-principal staff comfortably retire recently because they were long time employees who had the benefit of year-over-year compounded growth in both the profit sharing and ESOP programs." Gensler also offers a 401k program for voluntary contributions above and beyond the retirement plan. Although Gensler does not contribute directly to an individual's 401k account, it does cover the management expense associated with the program. Scott clarified that compensation at Gensler is made up of multiple components including ESOP, profit sharing, base salary and bonuses.

Gray Dougherty, AIA, LEED AP started work at Gensler this year. He had previously been a managing partner of Dougherty + Dougherty, in partnership with his parents. "One of the main reasons I came to Gensler, beside the brand and type of work, is that I had heard a lot about the way that Gensler is structured as a business." "They have created systems that makes business easier." Previously, as a part of a small firm, Gray sometimes felt that he was "reinventing the wheel" when he was working to set up systems and processes. The way that the incentive package is structured at Gensler had great appeal. "Your compensation is based both on your performance and the firm's performance. It's an integrated set of tools that come together and send that message." Looking around the office, he sees people that find the work to be a good fit and stick around for a long time. "A good compensation package is a necessary, but not sufficient reason to work somewhere."

Staffing projects, communicating profitability, and sharing costs and overhead issues is not just for leadership. Scott remarked "We're not a firm that is particularly focused on titles. I think of myself as a colleague who may have a different role or responsibility, depending on the project. It's much more about how you're contributing and who you're working with." That mentality transfers to the organization of the company's board of directors as well. "The board of directors is comprised of roughly twelve members, a portion of which are rotating members. Part of our transition strategy [with the board] is to teach and provide experience to leaders within the firm who may be poised to lead in an important way. It doesn't have anything to do with the number of shares you have, but more about how you are contributing."

DLR Group

DLR Group, founded in 1966, started its first ESOP in 1978 to bring employees an opportunity for ownership. In the minds of the founders, it was not just an exit strategy, but part of a shared set of ideals on how to conduct a business. Ownership transition is part of the company's history. The founding of DLR is recounted by some as this: Three employees of Leo A. Daly, disenfranchised with the ownership structure there, took their employee bonuses as seed money to set up shop across the street. Accurate or not, it describes the early intent of the founders' commitment to ownership. In 2005, the firm became an S-ESOP and now 100 percent of employees have equity in the firm.

Virginia Marquardt, AIA, LEED AP BD+C is a Senior Associate and has worked with DLR since 2007. She began accumulating shares right away. "Since I started at DLR, I have been on the path to leadership. An established training program is part of that, along with the stock bonuses we receive for performance." The path to leadership and a pay-it-forward approach is part of the founding principles. Jim French, FAIA, Senior Principal gave Virginia some advice early in her career at DLR. Virginia recounts "Jim said, 'I'm going to give you an opportunity and I expect you to do the same for someone else.'"

DLR group has set up their leadership structure so that employees from all regions and sectors have "skin in the game". Members of the executive team are dispersed across eight of its 24 offices. The Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operating Officer go on an annual "roadshow" to the offices and share company-wide accomplishments and financial issues. Investment of stock at tiered levels is required for appointment to leadership positions, but employees don't have to be a leader to give input on the direction of the company. Virginia said "We have a great program where everyone, from office assistant to Senior Principal gives feedback on the company across all offices. Your voice is really heard." DLR commits to evaluating the direction of the company every five years-using consensus building skills to look at the future of the practice, identify strengths and weaknesses, and continually go back to their brand promise to "elevate the human experience through design." Each office goes through the exercise and generates a report that is brought to a summit with firm representatives. Then a company-wide report is distributed to all employees for further feedback to see if anything was missed.

The periodic visioning process is something that can happen at non-employee owned businesses, but at DLR, this system facilitates direct feedback from its owners, and is realized in short order. One of the outcomes of the recent visioning exercise is a refining of talent acquisition. "We're looking for knowledge and expertise at a level beyond the typical resume. For example, we have an education innovation team that is using research from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. They go from office to office and provide support to the education studios."

The other main outcome of visioning is addressing a changing workplace. Virginia credits the open visioning approach to giving the next generation of leaders a voice within the company to bring this issue forward. Virginia noted that there is currently a discussion going on that will affect the use of titles and further align the leadership structure, regardless of region. "We are looking at everyone's job descriptions across the board." This restructuring is the product of employee owners giving feedback within the visioning process.

ESOPs as a Paradigm Shift

In the case of both Gensler and DLR group, the themes of all employees having "skin in the game" and a decentralized focus on titles is consistent. Employee owned firms have the ability to introduce a new level of equity in architecture, not only through opportunity for leadership by those who perform well, but a system of compensation that rewards all employees for profitable work. Finances are transparent.

For young professionals trying to make ends meet with a high cost of living, their focus is primarily on base compensation. Scott Dunlap's impression is that "The notion of retiring in thirty years is a distant prospect [for our employees]." The value of a retirement program or ESOP is embraced among employees that are getting closer to that threshold. ESOPs in profitable businesses with sustained growth have the potential to treat their employees well for a lifetime.

As with any significant business decision, consulting with your attorney about setting up an ESOP is a good idea. In addition, the National Center for Employee Ownership is a resource to learn the basics. Go to NCEO.org for more information. ■

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S Corp ESOP Legislation Benefits and Costs: Public Policy and Tax Analysis, University of Pennsylvania, Steven F. Freeman and Michael Knoll, July 2008.

#yafchat

AIA YAF
@AIAYAF
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Q1: What does “traditional practice” mean to you? #YAFchat
2:04 PM - 20 Jul 2016
1 1

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
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A1. A conventional way of thinking and practicing, typically with design-bid-build delivery models & simple communication tactics #yafchat
2:10 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States
1

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
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A1: more separation of employees' roles. I do my job, now it's your turn.Tasks are specialized/repetitive #YAFchat twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…
2:08 PM - 20 Jul 2016
1

AIA YAF
@AIAYAF
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Q2: What drives this model? Is it changing? #YAFchat
2:12 PM - 20 Jul 2016
1

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
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A2. Conventional thinking is easy because it's linear and well-understood. Like all industries, we must adapt with changing needs. #yafchat
2:17 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States
2 3

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
Follow

A2: As tech. changes we design in new ways, involve team members that at one time we wouldn't have. #yafchat twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…
2:17 PM - 20 Jul 2016
2

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
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A2 driving force:tendency to do things like we've always done; not being able to restructure the hierarchy #yafchat twitter.com/pja_arch/statu…
2:20 PM - 20 Jul 2016
2

MyBluprint
@My_BluPrint
Follow

@AIAYAF A2: practice is ever changing to meet scale & flexibility demands, but it would be wrong to say one method ceases to exist #YAFchat
2:20 PM - 20 Jul 2016
1 1

Moderated by the 2016-2017 AIA YAF Public Relations Director Lora Teagarden and hosted by the AIA **Young Architects Forum** (YAF). The yafchat for the month of July focused on **#StateofPractice.**

3,530 Twitter Followers

AIA YAF Monthly Tweet-up
20 July, 2-3:00pm Eastern Time

Theme: **State of Practice**
Hashtag: #YAFChat

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Q3: Are there other practice models or other professions we should look to in operating an architecture business? #YAFchat
2:19 PM - 20 Jul 2016

MyBluprint
@My_BluPrint
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@AIAYAF A3: Web design industry is a comparable model - there is an engineering element that must be balanced with aesthetic design #YAFchat
2:23 PM - 20 Jul 2016
2 3

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
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A3: a true design-build model is a start. programming, motivational speaking #YAFchat @AIAYAF twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…
2:26 PM - 20 Jul 2016
1

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
Follow

A3. The expectation from clients is trending to faster, better, & cheaper all at once. We should study industries that do this. #yafchat
2:26 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States

AIA YAF
@AIAYAF
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Q4: Many practices say they're multi-disciplinary. What does that mean to you? #YAFchat
2:27 PM - 20 Jul 2016

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
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A4: all-inclusive, one-stop shop. run a project start-to-finish without going outside the firm #YAFchat @AIAYAF twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…
2:30 PM - 20 Jul 2016
2

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
Follow

A4. Multi-disciplinary work styles improve upon linear thought process by bringing all parties into the conversation at ideal times #yafchat
2:32 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States
1 2

MyBluprint
@My_BluPrint
Follow

@AIAYAF Tough call. Multi-disciplinary can often be the natural direction for seeing a vision through from concept to completion. #YAFchat
2:34 PM - 20 Jul 2016
1 1

#yafchat

AIA YAF
@AIAYAF
Follow

Q5: Should we each continue to be multi-disciplinary or focus on a specific section of architecture? (Generalist vs specialist) #YAFchat

2:30 PM - 20 Jul 2016

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
Follow

A5:as firm or individ? We'll only cont 2get more specialized as stakes get higher, info. becomes more avail #YAFchat twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…

2:34 PM - 20 Jul 2016

1

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
Follow

A5. I think architects should continue to be generalists, but leverage specialists and technology to improve our process #yafchat

2:46 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States

1 1

AIA YAF
@AIAYAF
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Q6: How has practice evolved in good ways? What do we still need to work on? #YAFchat

2:38 PM - 20 Jul 2016

1

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
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A6: communicating value of architecture to public is of utmost importance. #YAFchat @AIAYAF twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…

2:41 PM - 20 Jul 2016

2 2

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
Follow

A6. We're making strides towards integrating technology and new processes for efficiency, but we're still undervaluing our services #yafchat

2:49 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States

1 1

Joseph Lai
@ThisIsJLai
Follow

A6 #YAFchat more flexible & fluid company structures. expanding our services. going beyond the building. twitter.com/aiayaf/status/…

2:49 PM - 11 May 2016

1 2

YAF New England
@YAFNewEngland
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A6: What if architects owned the process & cut GCs out? Could we fabricate & direct construction? (via @JimCollinsFAIA) #yafchat @aiayaf

2:52 PM - 11 May 2016

About the Moderator
Lora Teagarden AIA

Teagarden is a Project Architect at RATIO Architects in Indianapolis, IN, is the Public Relations Director for YAF AdCom and serves on the Equity Alliance web leadership team. She also serves on her local AIA Indianapolis and YAF board, is the creator of #AREsketches, and owns a small business.

AIA YAF
@AIAYAF
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Q7: What areas of Architecture Practice would you like to learn more about? (We are planning submissions for #AIAcon17) #YAFchat
2:48 PM - 20 Jul 2016
2 2

Stephanie Silkwood
@StephSilkwood
Follow

A7. Business courses! I hope to participate in next year's Mini-MBA at #AIAcon17 #yafchat
2:51 PM - 20 Jul 2016 · San Jose, CA, United States
1 2

PJA Architecture
@pja_arch
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A7: the business of architecture, ie. strategic planning #YAFchat @AIAYAF twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…
2:52 PM - 20 Jul 2016
3

David Cole
@DavidColeAIA
Follow

A7: Project management, leadership, business development. These never get covered in school, rarely in IDP. #YAFchat twitter.com/AIAYAF/status/…
2:53 PM - 20 Jul 2016
2 3

DESIGNING FOR SOCIAL IMPACT
AN INTERVIEW WITH MIA SCHARPHIE

by Beth R. Mosenthal, AIA

Mia Scharphie took the leap and started a social impact design firm, Creative Agency, shortly after graduate school. With a diverse skill set ranging from facilitation and community building to landscape architecture and design, Scharphie shares her experience as a young professional that is balancing a business, research projects, women empowerment workshops, and most importantly, pursuing her many passions on a daily basis. CONNNECTION *editor, Beth Mosenthal, caught up with her to here her story.*

BRM: What is your background, academically and professionally, and how did it lead you to your role as the founder of Creative Agency and as a self-described "social designer"?

MS: I would say that my skill sets fall into two distinct buckets. The first is as a creative urbanist/designer. I am a landscape architect by training, and have always been a creative and maker. This is the lens through which I see the world. The second bucket is as community facilitator, which goes back to before I was born – my mom is a social worker who worked with abused children and their families. Having a strong personal ethic toward other people is a big part of how I was raised. I went to a special high school where I was trained to facilitate racial dialogues and was able to pursue an independent study in gender – who gets to do that in high school? Facilitation and community building was a skill I continued to pursue while completing my undergraduate degree at Brown as well as at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where I studied landscape architecture. These different skill sets helped me put together a practice that combined creative and design skills with other changemaking tools to work on social issues.

Between college and graduate school, around the time of the recession, I landed an amazing job at Public Architecture, a public-interest design firm. During this time I was able to work with John Peterson, current curator of the Loeb Fellowship; Liz Ogbu, who runs her own social impact design agency called Studio O; and John Cary, who founded PublicInterestDesign.org. This job came at a time where I thought I'd have to pull the things I was interested in together [urbanism/design and facilitation/community building] on my own. However, people were already doing this at Public Architecture. For example, they were responsible for *The 1%* (now branded as The 1+), a system that institutionalized pro bono design while demonstrating how designers might engage in social issues.

When I graduated [from graduate school] I didn't go directly into a full-time job. There was something about the intensity at the GSD that made me not want to work for someone full-time. So I worked on *Proactive Practices*, a research collaborative investigating business models of social impact design that I founded the year before with Nick McClintock and Gilad Meron; I freelanced; and I worked for a wonderful landscape architecture firm in Somerville, MA. Over time, I increased my hours at the landscape firm and had a lot of side projects. A year or so after I graduated, however, I was laid off from the firm.

When this happened, I realized I had ideas about how to form a social impact design practice. I formalized some of the side projects and methodologies I developed while freelancing and started Creative Agency. Because much of the research I was doing related to issues of urbanism, planning, cities, public space, and advocacy, it was a pretty fluid process to make that transition.

Instead of going straight into someone else's practice full-time, I used the six months before loans kicked in as a [professional] testing ground. Then, instead of going into a traditional landscape practice, I found a direct way to work through the lens of social impact design.

BRM: Much of Creative Agency's work creates connection through the creation of visual and experiential content. Can you speak to how visual and experiential media might be used as tools for creating change within organizations?

MS: One of the things that I often remind design professionals of is that we have sophisticated thinking tools that are transformative in their ability to create visual mapping and analysis, to process complex information, and to develop frameworks. Many fields do this, but designers do this in a deeply visual way; it's intuitive for us and serves as a means of helping other people quickly understand information.

I've been interested in social systems and mapping the messiness of social forces and business models. For example, if something is a "system," I think about what the components are and how they relate. A big part of what I do for clients is conduct interviews, research, and discovery and to make the outcomes visual. Utile, a Boston-based planning and architecture firm, does this really well – they create simple graphics that drive decision-making and make information less complicated. I think this is something designers could do so much more of.

Somewhere along the line I realized that landscape and architecture are really forms of user experience design. In school I experimented with drawing time sequences and with how people interacted with space. I was interested not only in what you see, but what you feel, and the overlapping experiences one might share with other people. I would say that space as a model of user experience has been something I bring into the work that I do. I sometimes design events, so I'm constantly thinking about user experience as it relates to my clientele. How does someone walk into a room – how does this happen emotionally and psychologically? How does designed collateral change the game in terms of their perspective?

During my time between grad school and Creative Agency, I started a pop-up restaurant. In designing the space, I thought about the way people turned the corner and walked into the room. I wanted to give people that "wow" moment, but I was also thinking about the experience when they walk in. Who greets them? Who introduces them to the person sitting next to them? I thought about how social experience layers onto the physical experience; optimally I believe these should layer on top of one another.

BRM: What is your strategy to discover a new client's needs? Do you create a unique model of consultation depending on the specific project goals/needs of an organization? If so, what is your process for doing so?

MS: During the discovery phase, interviewing is a very important tool for me. Learning how to ask a question and when to probe is an important tool no matter what type of architecture you are doing. I try to think about what the client is trying to accomplish, and who else needs to be involved. I think about questions of audience and community and ways in which content and experience generate stronger relationships and move people to a certain type of action.

I'm currently working on a report redesign and I'm pushing the project to understand how to get it to more people. It's on a very complex development topic, one in which community changemakers need to have a lot of balls in the air to achieve their community goals, and it's hard for them to even know where to start. I'm generating a user map that helps them navigate both the report and the process; my first step is to employ the principles of design thinking, observation, and ethnography, which allows me to ask, "What prevents the audience from getting from A to B?" This interview-based research is my lens; it's helpful for me to use evaluations and storytelling to think about the audience and how information will be used and operationalized. In this way, I'm less of a big-data cruncher. I prefer communications, graphics, storytelling, event and spatial design. I'm at a time in my practice where I've done things that are outside of my wheelhouse and have had chances to experiment. I've also learned it's best to focus on what you do best and then partner to supplement your skills in order to learn how to work together.

One thing I've been thinking a lot about is the importance of a methodology. As part of the creative process, designers often want to create a new one for each project. This brings us to the two things designers need to manage. Internally, we must manage our ability to run projects efficiently so we're not getting lost in the weeds. Externally, from the perspective of our clients, design is not a straightforward process. Having a process that works and doesn't feel invented on the fly can instill confidence in your clients—it demonstrates expertise and builds trust that you are seeking out the right content, and that you are capable of converting that content into an elegant design solution.

When you have a methodology, you become known for what you produce or how you produce it. Sometimes the methodology isn't visible from the outside, but if you want business to come to you, it's easier to do this when you have a strong, cohesive brand that demonstrates thought leadership and a specific way of doing things.

BRM: You are currently involved in a research project, Proactive Practices, that is investigating emerging models of social impact design as it relates to how designers might develop and sustain successful community-based practices.

a) What were your initial criteria for identifying a "proactive practice"?

b) Anecdotally, is there a specific firm or designer that stands out as an exemplary model, and if so, what are some of the key differentiators in their business models from a traditional architecture or design firm?

MS: The title *Proactive Practices* was coined by John Peterson, founder of Public Architecture. He founded the organization after recognizing that when firms have extra time on their hands, they often enter design competitions. He felt this was a waste of design's changemaking potential because many designers pour their energy into a project when only one scheme gets chosen, and half of the time, it's not even built. Instead, during down time at his architectural firm, he had his employees identify a problem in their neighborhood and propose how to solve it. In his mind this is a proactive practice: recognizing a problem and being proactive in proposing a solution.

In conducting our *Proactive Practices* research, Nick McClintock, Gilad Meron, and I looked for firms and organizations that are pursuing social, environmental, and/or economic development impact. It can be difficult to differentiate firms that might have a value system or mission that relates to these concepts but aren't directly acting on them. What we tried to do in terms of the research is to see each practice as an ecosystem unto itself as well as a collection of strategies that might be pulled out of that practice to serve another practice (i.e., could be mixed and matched.) Our hope is that other firms might not just adopt business models from other firms, but rather mix and match various strategies other firms have used in ways that might make each unique practice more sustainable and impactful.

When we selected our case studies we asked, "What does this case study express, demonstrate, and/or add to the various strategies that people can use to shift their practices?" We've looked at firms from IDEO.org to Mass Design and Utile.

One firm that is particularly interesting is Latent Design, run by Katherine Darnstadt. There are so many innovations in Darnstadt's business model. For example, Latent Design has worked on many non-profit design projects that fall under a $250,000 construction budget. For projects this small, it is often difficult to find contractors to bid. To counteract this, the firm got a general contractor's license and have become design-build. They are a tiny firm, but they have vertically integrated to meet the needs of their nonprofit clients and fill a hole in the construction market. They have since moved up to work on projects with larger scope and budgets of up to $2 mil and counting.

BRM: "Design thinking," as popularized by Tim Brown of IDEO and others, has become a term that is being appropriated across a wide range of business sectors as a tool for re-thinking existing issues or initiatives by engaging users directly and prototyping potential solutions.

a) What are your thoughts regarding the value of design thinking as it relates to problem-solving in the corporate sector?

b) How does the term "design thinking" apply to the concept of "social impact design"?

MS: There can be two responses to this question. The first is that they [the corporate sector] stole our words! If you look at the role of the designer in society, you'll see the way in which we have let our role become a small part of the process; architects are not responsible for the majority of things that end up in the built environment.

But the second way to look at it, the one I stand by, is that design can seem like a mysterious process. Anything that makes it more acceptable and accessible to the outside world is great in my book. Part of what design does is provide a means of problem solving that is open-ended, and can overlap solutions to find wins and synergies. The design process allows for uncertainty and creativity, which is deeply optimistic and imaginative. To see examples of that being valued in the world outside of design is something I feel great about. Design thinking as the marriage of ethnography and open-ended problem solving (including prototyping,) is a great process that can produce great things. I'm happy to see it roll out in our wider culture.

With that said, I can also see design thinking as a new form of brainstorming where people don't go very deep into the issues. For example, hackathons might encourage people to look at what is happening, but at a superficial level. In four hours you have a solution; the problem with these types of events is that you can't really engage in a deep process. It works better when you engage in the process to produce something beyond the conversation itself – a product, a system, a behavior change, etc. – "Will it move from ideas on a Post-it to something that makes change?" That is the question that I would say can hold the standard. Ultimately the questions of outcome, process, and impact keep the design thinking approach accountable.

As far as how social impact design and design thinking overlap, I think often architects tend to have an "average" user in mind--one that often defaults to white, middle class, and male. It has a lot to do with the way we are educated – we're not given ethnographic tools, or social tools like facilitation and political savvy to understand and navigate issues of power in our projects. The city of Toronto worked with a business research firm to crunch their demographic data and turn it into various archetypes of people who represent populations and needs in the city. While these archetypes might not describe specific people, the idea was that if planners are going to make decisions for the city, they can't just think about the average person. They should build empathy with their target populations by identifying with them as real human beings rather than as abstract masses. Their archetypes reflect more than just populations in normative positions of power. A planning or design process that doesn't start with the question of "who?" is suspect to me. You should work with people, not for people.

BRM: In addition to your extensive design work and research, you currently lead empowerment workshops for women in design. What necessitated these workshops, and what does the curriculum entail?

MS: To me, it feels interconnected with what I do with Creative Agency, even though it's a separate customer base. I've been doing feminist work most of my life. I happened to see, up close and personal, the Pritzker Prize petition to retroactively recognize Denise Scott Brown a few years ago, which Metropolis Magazine referred to as architecture's "Lean In" moment. It was wonderful to see pressure put on architecture's institutions to evaluate and address their structural sexism, but I felt that we were missing a part of the conversation – that of how women experience these challenges in a day-to-day sense, and how we internalize the barriers that hold us back and keep us from leaning in.

At the GSD, I had unofficially become "the feminist tough love" cheerleader of my class. There were so many talented women in my class, and I remember some of them saying, "I would love to work at this [high-profile landscape architecture] firm but they won't hire me." I ran around that year exhorting my friends: "Don't reject yourself by not even applying!" I felt like their talent was going down the drain.

The Pritzker Prize petition demonstrated there was something missing from the conversation: a space where women could talk about this, and support each other in building new thought patterns. As a response I created *Build Yourself*, an empowerment workshop for women in design that I teach at the Boston Society of Architects and online to women across the country. The basic formula is that the class goes through a range of topics that give women frameworks and strategies for issues they might face, such as negotiation, advocating for yourself, growth into the leadership level, mentorship, and not having to choose either work or life.

Understanding viable strategies is the first component. The second is that every week, each woman is charged with doing something related to a skill or strategy we learn that is relevant in her actual day-to-day life, like renegotiating or pitching something. The third component is that all workshop attendees are participating in the context of the other women. It's like Vegas – what happens in the workshop stays in the workshop. It creates a safe space because a lot of these issues are difficult to talk about in regular life.

It's been amazing to watch the workshop culture grow and flourish. After people take the six week workshop, they are invited to join an online community that has spawned book clubs, support groups, and strategy swapping to advocate for flex-time policies, and more. It's been very cool to see this develop because we need to both work at the individual level and push at the structural level – we need to change mindsets, and cultures. I've worked with over 100 women, many in the city of Boston, and see the city is now filled with women in various stages of their career on a journey of empowerment individually and together.

BRM: What is your advice to recent graduates from design programs looking to pursue careers that directly relate to social impact design in lieu of a more traditional architectural firm apprenticeship and trajectory? Are the two mutually exclusive?

MS: I think that the world we are living in is shifting. Triple bottom-line thinking is becoming important across industries, and architecture should be fluent in that conversation.

If you are thinking, "I want a career in social impact design; how do I get there?", I have to make a pitch for the Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship. It provides great opportunities for architects to develop an understanding of the community development field, and recognize their value add within community development. One of the Fellows, Jae Shin, just wrote a great article on NextCity on why designers should work in public agencies. It covers the challenges and opportunities of working as a designer in a large bureaucratic organization - albeit one whose sole purpose is to house those that can't afford to house themselves. The fellowship is an incredible way to have support, and community while making a shift into the community-impact sector.

Sometimes the question is, "Should you move into social impact-focused work at the beginning of your career or later?" Some people choose to gain more experience in the private sector first, with the intent that it will give them more to contribute in the social sector. Some people know they want to be working on these issues shortly after they receive their training.

If you're going to go that route [the early-career route] you need a lot of grit, entrepreneurialism, a lot of optimism and a can-do attitude. It's important to recognize it's not always easy, but very exhilarating. For me personally, I'm happy that I am not waiting ten years to do the work I believe has impact.■

CONNECTION
THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN JOURNAL OF THE YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM

2016 EDITORIAL CALENDAR

FEBRUARY
MEDIUM

This issue focuses on the theme of BROADCAST and how architecture is and will be consumed by architects, clients and the public.

CONTENT DUE 1/21
PUBLICATION MID FEBRUARY

APRIL
POLITICO

This issue focuses on the themes of POLITICS AND ADVOCACY and on architects who are in or pursuing public office through election or appointment.

CONTENT DUE 3/24
PUBLICATION MID APRIL

JUNE
WORKFORCE

This issue focuses on the theme of EMPLOYMENT TRENDS and on addressing the needs and job categories that support recruitment, retention and retraining initiatives that meet common firm and organizational objectives.

CONTENT DUE 5/26
PUBLICATION MID JUNE

AUGUST
STATE OF PRACTICE

This issue focuses on the theme of EVOLVING BUSINESS MODELS, on that state of the current profession and how it will evolve to meet future needs.

CONTENT DUE 7/21
PUBLICATION MID AUGUST

OCTOBER
DATA DRIVEN

This issue focuses on the theme of METRICS and how big data and parameters are changing how we do business.

CONTENT DUE 9/22
PUBLICATION MID OCTOBER

DECEMBER
EDIFICATION

This issue focuses on the theme of SCHOLARSHIP and how architecture is a career of lifelong learning.

CONTENT DUE 11/17
PUBLICATION MID DECEMBER

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

WE ARE CURRENTLY SOLICITING CONTENT

CONNECTION welcomes the submission of ARTICLES, PROJECTS, PHOTOGRAPHY and other design content. Submitted materials are subject to editorial review and selected for publication in eMagazine format based on relevance to the theme of a particular issue.

If you are interested in contributing to CONNECTION, please contact the Editor-In-Chief at **jpastva@gmail.com**

CLICK HERE for past issues of **CONNECTION**

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

All submissions are required to have the attachments noted below.

Text
Submit the body of your text in a single, separate Word document with a total word count between 500-1000 words.

Format the file name as such:
[yourlastname_article title.doc]

Images
Submit all images in JPEG format at a minimum resolution of 300 dpi RGB mode. Include captions to all images in the body of your e-mail transmittal.

All images must be authentic to the person submitting. Do not submit images with which you do not hold the rights.

Format the file name(s), sequentially, as such:
[yourlastname_image1.jpg]

Author Bio
Submit a brief, two-sentence bio in the following format:

[yourlastname] [AIA or Associate AIA or RA] is a [your title] at [your company] in [city, state]. [yourlastname] is also [one sentence describing primary credentials or recent accomplishments].

Format the file name as such:
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Author Photo
Submit a recent headshot in JPEG format at a minimum resolution of 300 dpi grayscale in RGB mode.

Format the file name as such:
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WHAT IS THE YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM?

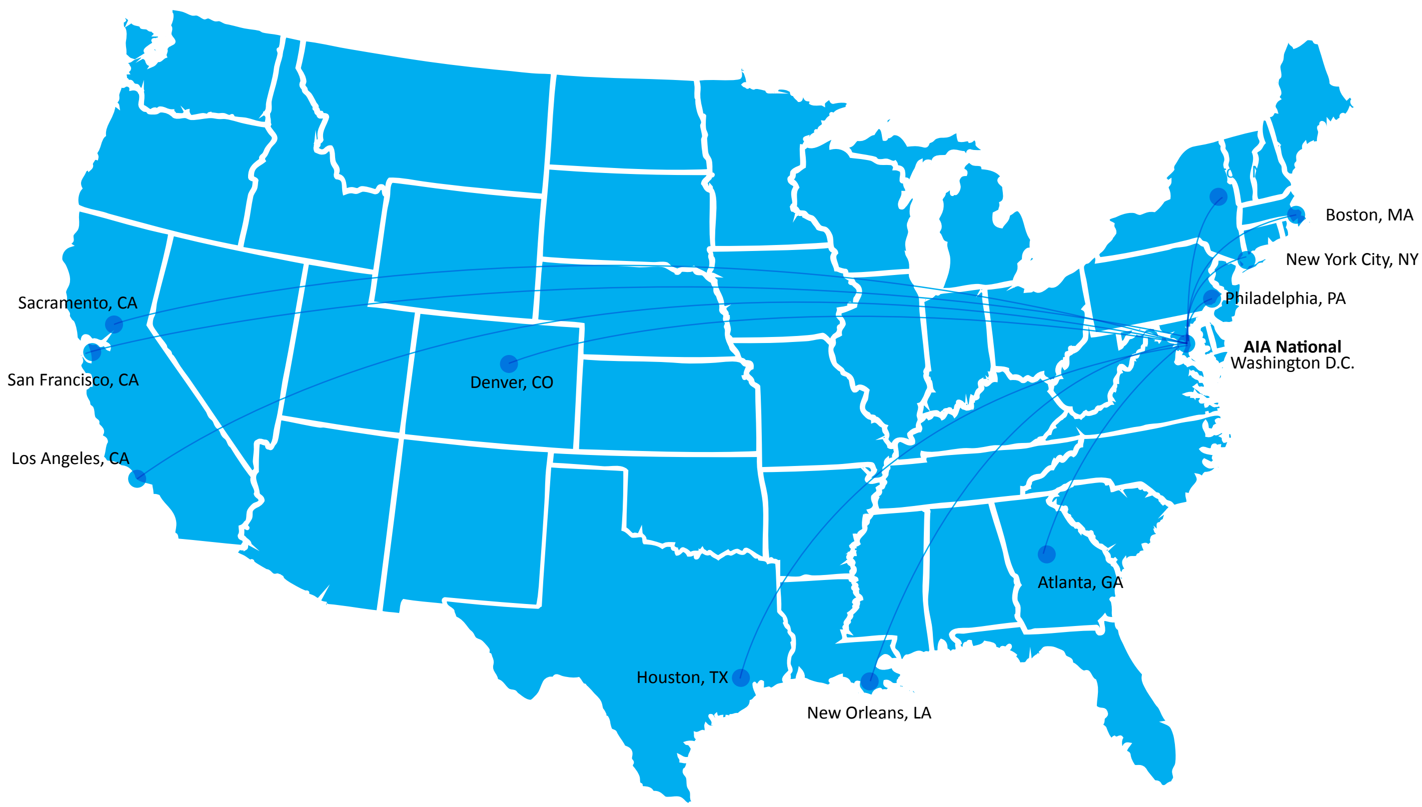
The Young Architects Forum is the voice of architects in the early stages of their career and the catalyst for change within the profession and our communities. Working closely with the AIA College of Fellows and the American Institute of Architects as a whole, the YAF is leading the future of the profession with a focus on architects licensed less than 10 years. The national YAF Advisory Committee is charged with encouraging the development of national and regional programs of interest to young architects and supporting the creation of YAF groups within local chapters. Approximately 23,000 AIA members are represented by the YAF. YAF programs, activities, and resources serve young architects by providing information and leadership; promoting excellence through fellowship with other professionals; and encouraging mentoring to enhance individual, community, and professional development.

GOALS OF THE YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM

To encourage professional growth and leadership development among recently licensed architects through interaction and collaboration within the AIA and allied groups.

To build a national network and serve as a collective voice for young architects by working to ensure that issues of particular relevance to young architects are appropriately addressed by the Institute.

To make AIA membership valuable to young architects and to develop the future leadership of the profession.



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THIS ISSUE FEATURES CONTRIBUTING ARTICLES FROM THESE MAPPED LOCATIONS.

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YOUNG ARCHITECTS FORUM
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF ADVANCING THE CAREERS OF YOUNG ARCHITECTS