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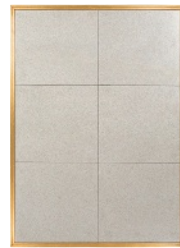


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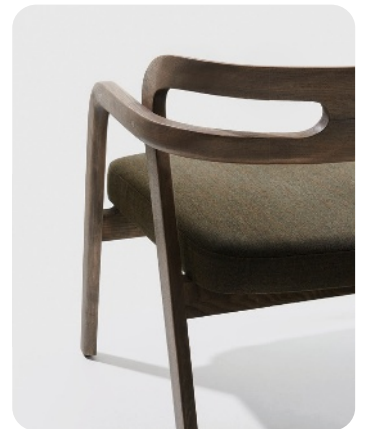
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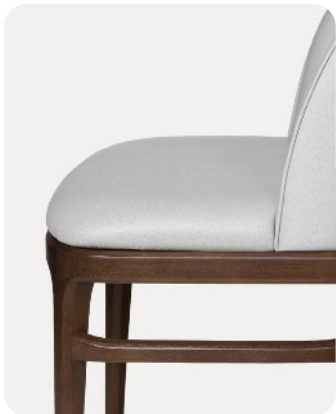


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January/February 2019

VOLUME 3/NUMBER 1
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the Interior Designers
of Canada

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DESIGNING SOLUTIONS

Designers and nonprofits alike are identifying needs in their communities and affecting change through their creative talents and influence.

BY ROBERT NIEMINEN



Image: Brandon Shigeta

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CONNECTING WITH KIDS

Inventive and resourceful programs—in and out of traditional schools—are sparking the interest and aptitude of future designers and architects.

BY DIANA MOSHER

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OF THOUGHT & PROCESS

Design thinking encompasses myriad methods and pathways to success, but the philosophy always is grounded in building a better world.

BY BRIAN J. BARTH




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Photo by Brandon Shigeta
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ICONIC PROFILE: FENWICK BONNELL & DAVID POWELL

Hard work, artistry, and humor have taken this Canadian duo from modest beginnings to international acclaim for their highly livable, but elegant, interiors and product lines.

BY AMBROSE CLANCY

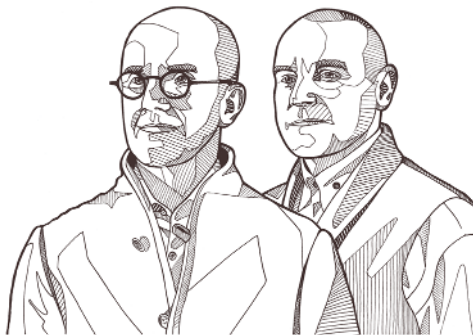


Image: Danilo Aguioli

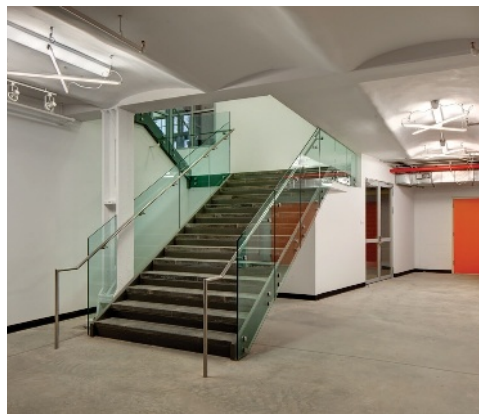


Image: James Shanks

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COMBATTING THE SOHO EFFECT

From derelict to flourishing to unaffordable neighborhoods: The cycle is frustrating and seems inevitable. Or, is it?

BY MICHELE KEITH

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ON THE COVER

Community, fantasy, and beauty meet at Coffee for Sasquatch, a Los Angeles coffee shop designed by Dan Brunn Architecture.



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EMPATHY. INTERVENTION. ITERATION.

The idea of design thinking first came on the scene in the late 1960s, but recent years have shown the progressive thought process rearing its conceptual head in industries far beyond the design professions. Fields including government, finance, and health and wellness, not to mention educational environments for all ages, have recognized the power of the design thought process, one that considers all elements of a scenario—from the emotional to the tactile to the overall experiential—to produce the most logical, useful, and enjoyable solution.

In this issue, we put the concept of design thinking under the microscope and show its promise at work in varying ways—from informing professionals on effective decision-making processes to inspiring current and future designers to take action and improve the world creatively. On the following pages, we dig into the ways in which design thinking is being taught to all and executed in daily practice (“Of Thought & Process,” p. 30), and we illustrate how kids today are making a connection with design

and design thinking and some of the amazing programs helping them to do so (“Connecting with Kids,” p. 36). We also explore organizations that are putting creative thought processes and talent to work for the betterment of marginalized communities (“Designing Solutions,” p. 20) and to keep creative citizens in the art- and design-infused neighborhoods they helped to improve (“Combatting the SoHo Effect,” p. 44).

If we can all see the world and its challenges through the constructive thought process of design, then designing a better future—for the built environment and for society at large—becomes a natural result. Progress, then, isn’t simply possible, it’s eminent and ongoing. And, the future looks a bit brighter by design. ●

Randy W. Fiser
ASID CEO



Tony Brenders
IDC CEO



Randy Fiser,
CEO, ASID, and
Tony Brenders,
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(Image: Lindsay
Cephas)

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PLATINUM PERFORMANCE

WHILE MORE TRADITIONALLY NOTED FOR THEIR PLAYERS AND THEIR ACADEMICS, RESPECTIVELY, THE LOS ANGELES LAKERS AND UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES (UCLA) WERE RECENTLY JOINTLY HONORED FOR THEIR EFFORTS IN SUSTAINABLE BUILDING AND DESIGN BY THE U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL-LOS ANGELES (USGBC-LA). THE RECIPIENTS OF USGBC-LA'S VISIONARY AWARD, THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS WERE HAILED FOR THEIR SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP IN DEVELOPING CUTTING-EDGE ATHLETIC FACILITIES THAT NOW CAN SERVE AS A MODEL FOR ATHLETIC FACILITIES AROUND THE GLOBE.

Designed by ROSSETTI and Perkins+Will, the Lakers' El Segundo facility—"UCLA Health Training Center, Home of the Los Angeles Lakers"—is a premier practice training center that is certified both LEED Platinum and Fitwel. Some of the center's sustainable attributes include the installation of Forest Stewardship Council- (FSC-) certified wood for the practice court and entry doors and the offset of approximately 15 percent of its energy use through photovoltaic panels.

The health and wellness of employees also has come into play for the facility. Employees enjoy a fully financed health and fitness program, including on-site group training classes, lunch and learns with health industry experts, and access to a professional dietician. The healthy focus already has yielded positive impact: Across one six-week program, results included weight loss, muscle gain, and elevated employee morale and camaraderie, with sick days dropping by more than 50 percent from the previous year.

In addition to receiving a Visionary Award from USGBC-LA, the UCLA Health Training Center also was named "Best Sustainable Project" in 2018 by the *Los Angeles Business Journal*.
(Image: James Steinkamp, © The Los Angeles Lakers, Inc. All rights reserved)





All landscaping for the facility is irrigated with reclaimed water, with all storm water being held in tanks under the parking lot for percolation into the ground.

(Image: James Steinkamp, © The Los Angeles Lakers, Inc. All rights reserved)

The facility's sustainable focus is in line with the university's larger goal of carbon neutrality by 2025. On campus at UCLA, the UCLA Wasserman Football Center and the Mo Ostin Basketball Center also have been certified LEED Platinum. The university-wide efforts are in support of its Sustainable LA Grand Challenge, an initiative focused on getting Los Angeles to 100 percent sustainability in energy, water, and biodiversity by 2050. ●



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STUDIOS Architecture, which has joined with Public Architecture in the 1+ program, put its expertise to work for the San Francisco-based nonprofit Kiva. To keep with Kiva's limited budget, STUDIOS provided its design and project management services on a pro bono basis and negotiated donations and discounts on materials, furnishings, fixtures, and services for the project.
(Image: Sharon Risedorph Photography)

DESIGNING SOLUTIONS

BY ROBERT NIEMINEN

Designers who volunteer their time and talents can transform the communities they serve

THE LATE CHARLES EAMES ONCE SAID, "RECOGNIZING THE NEED IS THE PRIMARY CONDITION FOR DESIGN." IF HIS ASSERTION IS TRUE, THEN IT FOLLOWS THAT DESIGN WILL NEVER BE RENDERED UNNECESSARY BECAUSE NEED IS A UNIVERSAL PART OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. AS SUCH, IT'S NO OVERSTATEMENT TO SUGGEST DESIGNERS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE LIVES, COMMUNITIES, AND THE WORLD AT LARGE.

A number of nonprofit organizations in the design industry are doing just that: leveraging the transformative power of design for the public good and enlisting designers to volunteer their time and creative talents in service to their communities (see "Organizations Making a Difference," p. 23). Beyond simply offering design services pro bono, a number of these groups also are looking at the bigger picture to identify systemic needs in their communities and developing creative solutions to address them.

Why Designers Matter

Any discussion about community-based work that results in positive social outcomes must begin with the acknowledgement that designers play a vital role in the process. That's because people's perception of their environment influences their behavior, performance, social interactions, and quality of life, according to Carmita Sanchez-Fong, professor and chairperson of the Interior Design Department at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). "Well-informed interior designers who have a deep knowledge and understanding of the physical and psychological human factors intuitively know the value of good design decisions and their impact on the human experiences," she says. "Thus, designers committed to improving the social fabric of our communities are key to the success of these projects."

John Peterson, curator of the Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University Graduate School of Design and founder of Public Architecture and its 1+ program, offers an anecdote to illustrate the point: A colleague's firm volunteered to renovate the offices for a suicide prevention organization, providing space planning services and leveraging industry connections to secure discounted furniture for the worn space. Afterwards, the client called in tears to express gratitude for their beautiful, new work environment.

"That's a sweet little story, but let's connect it to something that's really meaningful," Peterson explains. "If you can make two assumptions, which are not hard to make, there's an outcome to that story that's really important." The first assumption is that suicide hotlines save lives. The second assumption—which is supported by a growing body of research—is that a better work environment enables people to do their jobs more effectively.

As a result, Peterson concludes that "it's hard to argue that interior designers are not somehow contributing to saving people's lives. Whether it's directly connected to saving lives, or making sure a poor family gets access to healthy food, or any number of nonprofits out there, designers generally can participate in their mission outcome," he says.

Of course, the employees who carry out the daily work in nonprofits, social services agencies, and community groups are beneficiaries of well-designed environments as well. As such, Jennifer Sobecki, CEO of Designs for Dignity, suggests it's important they have access to spaces where they can decompress from the often weighty issues they face on a day-to-day basis, be it child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, etc. "For staff to have a place to escape to, whether that's a break room or a meditation room, or even if it's a table and chairs that are outside to look at trees and be with nature—that decompression area that recharges those batteries for a social worker or case manager to say, 'Okay, now I can relax and then be ready for the next client and be totally present with them'—is really important," she notes.

The effectiveness of respite spaces in the workplace also is backed by research. In fact, Gensler's 2018 Experience Index noted that "employees who take time to reflect or unplug during work are more satisfied and higher performing, inline with a significant body of existing research showing the importance of downtime for creativity, productivity, and happiness." And, designers play a key role in creating spaces that enable these positive outcomes.



A total of 165 pro bono hours went into the design of Youth & Opportunity United (Y.O.U.), a Designs for Dignity project in Evanston, Illinois.

(Image: Jill Buckner Photography)

Benefits to Volunteers

Social service workers and nonprofit employees and their clients aren't the only ones who gain from pro bono design services and projects. Oftentimes, it's the volunteers themselves who benefit most from the work they do.

Sobecki says pro bono projects allow designers, who often get caught up in the business side of the job with meetings, paperwork, and deadlines, to exercise their creativity more freely. "A lot of times we're asking the design team to be creative about how they can utilize [the furniture and materials] that have been donated and redeploy them in a design-driven way into these projects. So, I think there's that creative outlet that we provide," she states.

In the process of working with other volunteers on pro bono projects, designers also can cross-pollinate and network with peers who can benefit them in their careers. "Some of the most meaningful connections my students and I have made are with like-minded people whose lives have been changed by those we serve," Sanchez-Fong says. She adds that the skills and discipline that pro bono work demands also can help designers apply the same commitment and discipline to their own practices.

Most importantly, however, participating in community-based work feeds many designers' desire to give back in a meaningful way that aligns with their personal causes. For example, Designs for Dignity may offer services for children's charities or homeless shelters that enable designers to interact with clients and get involved in projects that matter to them personally. "We give volunteers the opportunity to be in that environment with that population, whether it might be a veterans home, or with the elderly, or a youth drop-in center; and, when the design teams are interacting with our clients, they're getting to see the kids firsthand when they might be moving back into their shelter, or [with] the opening of a youth center, or whatever it might be. I think that's a very rewarding experience," says Sobecki.

**Business
of Design
Pro Bono
Work**

New Approaches for Lasting Impact

While pro bono work provides unquestionable value to all stakeholders involved, it also faces certain limitations. By definition, pro bono means giving away professional services without charge for the common good. The problem is that, while it addresses a need, it doesn't necessarily help solve the problem that gave rise to the need in the first place.

"Pro bono work—it's a means to an end, and not an end in itself," Peterson suggests. He notes that the 1+ arm of Public Architecture, which connects nonprofits to architecture and design services, has a "higher mission to engage the design community with a deeper social agenda. So, the pro bono platform of 1+ is really just a tool to move the profession towards engaging in larger social issues through engaging with the social sector."

Likewise, Garrett Jacobs, executive director of Open Architecture Collaborative, suggests traditional pro bono work doesn't always go far enough in its impact on communities. He says much of pro bono work "doesn't actually address any root causes of the issue of what's going on or build really long-term, lasting relationships. I think it can, and I'm sure it does in some instances, but that's not the focus," he indicates.

Through pro bono planning and design services, ISG has provided more than five years of support to Feeding Our Communities Partners in North Mankato, Minnesota. In keeping with Public Architecture's 1+ program, ISG has pledged 500 annual hours of service. (Image: Dean Riggott)

On the other hand, Open Architecture Collaborative's model is centered around community engagement, building relationships, identifying needs, and then helping to secure funding for the architectural services provided in the end. "The focus of our work is just to find new ways of delivering architectural services, starting with the needs of community members and then finding ways to fund the services we deliver as professionals," he says. "You have to be ahead of the need."

To do that, Jacobs says designers need to participate in community organizing and building first, and then figure out how to fund the design services that will address the larger social issues facing a community. Because, in the end, a designer's or architect's greatest asset isn't necessarily their ability to do drafting or filing permits. "One of the most important things is that you have humility and an awareness of who you are, and then use your creative practice to help find solutions to challenges. That is really your biggest benefit," he concludes. ●



ROBERT NIEMINEN

is a freelance writer and regular contributor to retrofit and Retail Environments magazine, as well as the editor-at-large of interiors+sources. He also was a contributing author to the book, The State of the Interior Design Profession (Fairchild, 2010), which was placed on the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers' "50 Must Read, Must Have" list.



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A total of \$278,649 in pro bono design services and material donations went into Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center, a Designs for Dignity project in Skokie, Illinois. (Image: Jill Buckner Photography)

Organizations Making a Difference



All design work is impactful, but nonprofit organizations and design firms that offer pro bono services, or endeavor to find funding for needed projects, in many ways are ambassadors for the profession to underserved populations, many of which have never been exposed to the positive impact architectural and design services can provide. Following are a few organizations that are making an impact on communities across North America.

Designs for Dignity

Designs for Dignity was founded on the belief that every individual should have access to environments that support the wellness of the human spirit. The organization harnesses the combined power of pro bono design and construction talent and donated materials to breathe new life into existing nonprofit spaces, giving them the platform from which they can better serve individuals in their focus mission.

Since its founding in 2000, Designs for Dignity has logged more than 90,000 pro bono hours, valuing roughly \$12 million in design services. Through its vendor partners, it also has collected more than \$10 million in donated products that have been redeployed in the community through its various projects.

For more information, visit www.designs4dignity.org.

Public Architecture's 1+

1+ is the flagship program of Public Architecture, a nonprofit with a mission to provide the network and knowledge necessary to use design as a tool for social gain. 1+ connects nonprofits with pro bono architecture and design services, and remains the first and largest pro bono service network within the architecture and design professions. The program is the conduit through which more than \$58 million of design services are pledged annually.

1+ challenges the design community worldwide to dedicate 1 percent or more of working hours to pro bono service, a commitment that equates to 20 hours per year per participating employee. Its matching portal allows nonprofits in need of design services to post their projects and provides firms a venue to find potential pro bono projects. Firms also are encouraged to find projects within their own communities and document their work on the 1+ website.

For more information, visit www.theoneplus.org/content/faq-designers.

Open Architecture Collaborative

The Open Architecture Collaborative is a global learning network with 22 chapters in 11 countries. Its goal is to mobilize architects and designers with technical skills to build community capacity and serve as an intermediary between professional practitioners and systemically marginalized communities. The nonprofit also helps other nonprofits access capital, engage with their constituencies, and maximize the use of their space, with chapters providing free services and saving groups thousands of dollars.

Currently, Open Architecture Collaborative is recruiting for its pilot training program called Pathways to Equity, a design leadership experience for social equity in collaboration with the Association for Community Design. The program aims to build public interest design knowledge through interactive workshops and hands-on field experience. This program is grounded in the values of inclusion, access, co-creation, equity, diversity, justice, and reciprocity.

For more information, visit www.openarchcollab.org and www.pathwaystoequity.org.

FIT's Integrated Service-Learning Project

The Fashion Institute of Technology's Integrated Service-Learning Project (ISLP) is an expansion of the Interior Design Relief Project, which was founded in 2013 to serve the families in Long Beach, New York, devastated by Superstorm Sandy. The mission of ISLP is to expand the interior design academic fabric to include experiential learning and to foster appreciation for lifelong learning through impactful civic and social engagement in and with marginalized communities. Each client-organization served by ISLP provides unique opportunities for informed design interventions, based on on-site visits and understanding that a well-designed space will help improve the human experience.

Notable projects include addressing space planning, privacy, and acoustics for Restore NYC, an organization dedicated to releasing people from sexual slavery and exploitation; a renovation of St. Paul's House that serves marginalized children and adults; and a laundry room renovation of the Bowery Mission Women's Center.

For more information, visit www.fitnyc.edu/interior-design/service-learning/index.php.

RESILIENT STRATEGIES

In *Impact by Design 2018*, Gensler's third annual assessment of the performance and resilience of its own work, the firm introduced six strategies it believes have the greatest potential to improve the resilience of cities and the environment overall in the coming years.

The report examines the environmental, social, and economic impact of Gensler's work, making examples of specific projects that exemplify each of the six directives. Among them is the Associated Students (AS) Sustainability Center at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) in Northridge, California. This 8,000-square-foot, LEED Platinum-certified sustainability and recycling center is the first completed zero net energy building in the CSU system and uses its large rooftop and a 25 kw rooftop photovoltaic system, coupled with a glazed overhead window, to offset the building's entire energy needs. It also meets 100 percent of its hot water needs via solar thermal and a hybrid hot-water heat pump, saving 43,000 gallons of water per year in the process.

In highlighting the six topics, Gensler aims to demystify complex concepts and to expand the discussion of resilience beyond energy efficiency. Overall, Gensler's 1.25 billion square feet of work in 2017 was designed to save 11 million metric tons of CO₂ from being emitted each year. ●

Six Strategies for Resilience

FORM Affecting performance through design itself—from decisions on location and orientation to questions of size, proportion, and light.

ADAPTATION Reusing buildings, spaces, and materials that already exist, adapting them to meet new needs instead of building new.

WATER Mitigating water risks, like flooding and sea level rise, through design strategies with a long-term perspective.

MATERIALS Focusing on materials with a lower carbon impact and the reuse of recycling materials whenever possible.

ENERGY Minimizing energy usage, and therefore operational carbon impacts, as well as offsetting energy needs with renewable sources.

INTELLIGENCE Designing intelligent spaces, buildings, and cities that leverage real-time data to dynamically optimize performance and experience.

Source: Adapted from Impact by Design 2018, Gensler



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Contributors

A child’s curiosity and discovery are wonderful traits—especially when they uncover an affinity for, and appreciation of, interior design, as reflected in “Connecting with Kids” (p. 36). Our authors in this issue of *i+D* share their youthful memories about the impact of design in the past, as well as more-adult assessments on their experiences in writing their January/February articles in present day.

1. Diana Mosher, *Connecting with Kids*

In researching and writing “Connecting with Kids” (p. 36), Diana remembers the influence of interior design on her early years. She explains: “Interior design did make an impression on me. We toured many museums with decorative objects and furniture and also historic houses in the United States and abroad and stayed in all kinds of hotels, too. We had a running commentary on what we liked and what did not work visually. Also, I think my mother and father both have a great sense of style, which translates to interiors. As a child I watched many redesigns of our apartment homes, because we moved several times for my dad’s advertising career. Even when we lived in furnished housing in Mexico City, my mother transformed an average/nice apartment into a beautiful space with simple white custom slipcovers and curated accessories.” It’s no wonder then that Diana was particularly pleased when working on her article in this issue by Cooper Hewitt’s program that brings together every age group for design education.

2. Robert Nieminen, *Designing Solutions*

According to Robert, his family hails from Finland, so “Scandinavian design definitely had an influence on me as a child. To this day, I have a strong affinity for simple, clean forms and natural materials characteristic of Alvar Aalto’s work. Additionally, my father owned and operated a custom cabinet shop where I spent many summers learning the craft and going out on installations as his apprentice. It’s little wonder my writing career has centered around the design industry.” While researching his “Business of Design” article on pro bono work (p. 20), Robert indicates he was somewhat taken aback when Garrett Jacobs, executive director of Open Architecture Collaborative, said he didn’t believe in pro bono

work in the traditional sense. However, “what I came to understand during our conversation (and one with Public Architecture’s John Peterson as well) is that pro bono work is a means to an end, but is not an end unto itself. Rather, designers who want to make an impact in their communities need to be more fully engaged in building relationships, identifying systemic needs, and coming up with thoughtful solutions to address their root causes, as well as ways to creatively fund the design services they provide. In other words, pro bono work—noble as it may be—is part of an equation, not its sum.”

3. Ambrose Clancy, *ICONic Profile: Fenwick Bonnell & David Powell*

Ambrose continues to bring his interviewing style—relaxed, nonintrusive, but *always* revealing—to this installment of the “ICONic Profile” series on the two principals of Powell & Bonnell (p. 42). Once again, he found their views and personalities fascinating. “I was struck by David’s sense of duty to design for people with disabilities, to make additions to a plan that makes life easier for them, but doing his best to camouflage the support systems,” he says. “Also, Fenwick’s wit was spontaneous—and a strange mix of sharp and gentle.” Ambrose’s musing of his past perception of interior design is enlightening. “I grew up in a small town in southern Illinois and thought interior design was all one way—practical, cookie-cutter, and dull. Which is to say I didn’t notice it at all. But, then, I went to the house of the local doctor and his wife—she was French—and saw something subtle, colorful, sophisticated, and pleasing. It was an eye-opener.”

4. Michele Keith, *Combating the SoHo Effect*

Having lived in New York City most of her life, Michele could really identify with the “SoHo Effect”—the focus of her article (p. 44)—“and the damage done these many years. So, I was truly happy to learn of the numerous organizations and dedicated people fighting this, and succeeding on so many levels, in such creative ways. I do feel more hopeful now!” In contrast to her present home base, Michele grew up in a tiny town in Iowa and, according to her description, “lived in what can only be called a miniature castle, complete with billiard room. Luckily, my parents had great style and did it up in simple, yet rather (for the location) glam fashion, with white rugs and upholstery, and clean-lined furnishings, a few pops of color appearing where needed. Despite all this, there were no ‘off-limits’ areas for my sisters and me or even the dog. Living there was fun, friends loved visiting, and I’m sure the combination of beauty, comfort, and restraint helped to shape my design preferences today.”

5. Brian J. Barth, *Of Thought & Process*

The theory and practice of design thinking are very topical conversations among today’s interior designers; however, Brian, author of the subject matter in “Of Thought & Process” (p. 30), was surprised to learn that everyone he spoke to had a different interpretation of what design thinking meant to them. “But,” he adds, “empathy for the user was central to each person’s approach—an inspiring conclusion that gives me hope for the future.” Although a more familiar term, “interior design,” doesn’t appear to have been in his childhood vernacular. Brian recalls, “I certainly had no concept of interior design as a child, though I was always drawn to any space that was different. I grew up in somewhat of a cookie-cutter ranch home in the suburbs, so whenever I was exposed to something unique—whether historic or ultra-modern—I found myself absorbed in the space.” ●

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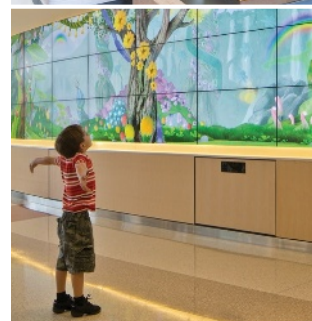


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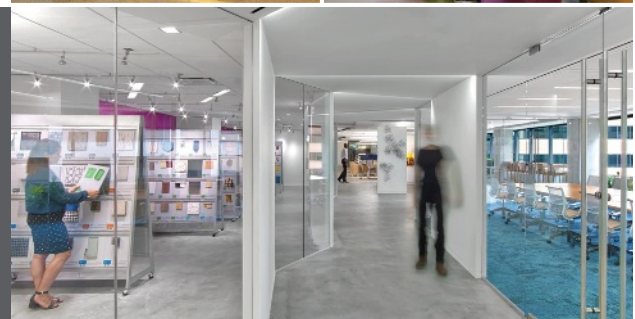
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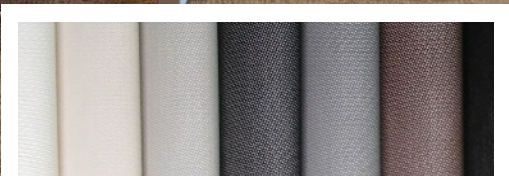


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Design elements in the Munich RE office in Toronto are inspired by the parks and gardens popular to Munich, Germany, where the company headquarters is located. (Image: Entro)

Of Thought & Process

Using the philosophy of design thinking to build a better world

At Entro, a global design firm focused on wayfinding systems and environmental graphics, research always has been a big part of the design process. Past research methods often consisted of things like user group surveys and stakeholder charrettes. But, recently, it's gotten a little more high tech.

These days, visitors to Entro's Toronto headquarters might be treated to a tour of the company's new research lab, run by Vedran Dzebic, who arrived at the company in 2017, fresh from a PhD in cognitive neuroscience from the University of Waterloo. Currently, Dzebic's lab amounts to little more than a cubicle with a desk, but the experiments he runs are breaking new ground in "design thinking," the philosophy of iterative invention behind fields ranging from architecture and engineering to user experience (UX) design in IT systems—and far beyond. If you're lucky, you'll arrive on a day when Dzebic has one of his coworkers, aka guinea pigs, strapped into an electroencephalography (EEG) headset, from which a dozen or so brainwave sensors extend around the skull like some sort of robotic octopus. Those sensors feed into software that produces a 3D visualization of the subject's brain, which lights up in different areas depending on the cognitive and emotional experience the individual has as Dzebic shows them images of various design solutions.

"It's always interesting when somebody puts on the headset and you show them their brainwave activity," notes Dzebic. "It's all these little squiggly lines."

Reading those squiggly little lines is a means of finding out if a proposed design solution succeeded in producing the desired effect. Dzebic says simply asking someone whether a rendering makes them feel, say, confused and anxious or alert and at ease, is not as reliable as reading their experience through their brainwave activity. In the most simplistic sense, "alpha" waves are produced when a person experiences their environment as clean and uncluttered, producing a pleasant, relaxed sensation. In contrast, an environment of great complexity and activity produces a preponderance of "beta" waves, resulting in a higher degree of cognitive stimulation and physiological arousal—sweating or an increased heart rate, for example. One-dimensional feelings like pleasure and arousal are building blocks that allow neuroscientists to decipher more complex emotional experiences, according to Dzebic.

“If you’re creating a hospital waiting room, you want that space to be calming and relaxing, so you hope to see an increase of alpha brainwave activity,” he explains. “But, if you’re designing a museum or an art gallery or some kind of entertainment space, then you want to see more beta wave activity, because this reflects people engaging with the space and wanting to explore it.”

Dzebic says his EEG experiments are still in a proof-of-concept stage, but the goal is to integrate the process with the firm’s daily design work. The availability of inexpensive, mass-market EEG technology—the headset Dzebic uses costs less than \$1,000—is putting a new spin on the concept of design thinking. In theory, designers could even employ these wireless devices in the field. Combined with other technologies now permeating the design world, like virtual reality goggles, one can imagine a very different design process developing in the not-too-distant future.

“The way we look at design thinking is to use research to inform the design process in an effort to get closer to the optimal design solution for whatever project we’re working on.”

—VEDRAN DZEBIC, ENTRO



At Entro, technology that assesses how spaces will be experienced is being tested for use in daily design work. (Image: Entro)

Another of Dzebic’s current experiments—one that uses artificial intelligence to assist in the design process—makes that future feel quite imminent. He’s developing a “predictive user experience tool,” which he calls Entro AQ, that employs computer vision and machine learning to assess how spaces will be experienced. “Plug a design into the software and the algorithms spit out a series of values that tell us how it expects that particular design to be experienced,” explains Dzebic. “It helps us to figure out whether we were on the right path and also to choose between various design options.” The technology, which assesses how a design will impact the brain (the algorithms rank things like complexity and order that influence states of pleasure and arousal), is closely tied to Dzebic’s EEG work.

Ultimately, states Dzebic, “The way we look at design thinking at Entro is to use research to inform the design process in an effort to get closer to the optimal design solution for whatever project we’re working on. Designers always have a narrative about how their spaces will be experienced: It will be calming or invigorating, the wayfinding...will be intuitive, they’ll say. My job is to ensure that the experience we talk about will actually be experienced in the way that is intended.”

Unexpected Inspiration

Nobel Prize laureate Herbert A. Simon is widely credited with first introducing the principles of design thinking in his 1969 book, *The Sciences of the Artificial*. In it, he identified a seven-stage cycle for arriving at design solutions: define, research, ideate, prototype, choose, implement, learn. This concept has been endlessly reformulated over the years. There's a five-stage version currently en vogue that emphasizes putting yourself in a user's shoes: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test. Some prefer to distill design thinking to three core concepts: empathy, intervention, and iteration. In fact, Interior Designers of Canada (IDC) built the programming for its recent Value of Design Thinking Symposium around these very principles. (IDC's 2019 Design Symposium will take place in September, in Vancouver.)

When it comes to this thought process, being prescriptive is not the point, says Sarah Stein Greenberg, executive director of the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University, popularly known as the d.school, the spiritual home of the design thinking movement in North America. "Design thinking encompasses a wide range of tools and methods, and there's no one formulaic way to apply it; it is essentially a way of moving back and forth between action and reflection in a highly iterative way. At the d.school, we help people learn that design thinking isn't just about problem solving, it's also about identifying and framing the most compelling or useful problem to work on. You have to go into it with an attitude of humility, knowing that your initial ideas for solutions—or even the problem itself—is going to be challenged and refined, based on developing a real understanding of what the humans you are designing for actually need and value."

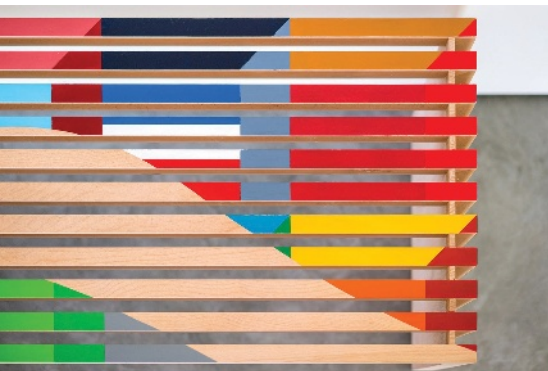
To that end, the d.school is not focused on any one branch of design—it doesn't bestow degrees in architecture or interior design, for example—so much as teaching design in a way that can apply to any field. Current offerings include programs geared for educators, business executives, and social advocates.

"One aspect of our approach that has developed over time is the shift that design has made from being squarely about artifacts, products, or services into more systems-level work that is aimed at having positive social impact."

—SARAH STEIN GREENBERG, d.school

David Kelley, founder of the legendary firm IDEO, which developed the designs for such iconic tech products as the Apple mouse and Palm digital assistant, graduated from Stanford with a master's degree in engineering and product design in 1978, and returned in 2004 to help establish the d.school. Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, the school quickly became influential in the tech world: "Innovation," it could be said, is the product of design thinking. At its heart, design thinking is about reconfiguring reality to elicit positive behavioral change in society and unlocking or creating value that did not previously exist, the essence of what tech visionaries call "disruption." For this reason, Kelley has long argued for the integration of design thinking as an epistemological pillar across both liberal arts- and science-based education.

Stein Greenberg says the school attracts students from across the Stanford campus with classes on designing a better criminal justice system, reimagining pediatric care, and developing new strategies for ocean conservation, alongside other topics you wouldn't expect to find at a design school. "One aspect of our approach that has developed over time is the shift that design has made from being squarely about artifacts, products, or services into more systems-level work that is aimed at having positive social impact," she explains. "We've seen the need to equip students with a new frame around design work that places less emphasis on a process-based approach, and more on the core abilities that they need to develop to tackle these kinds of challenges effectively."



Handpainted and individually numbered, the limited edition Hedy Bench by Dan Brunn Architecture was conceived to provide contrast to a blank architectural canvas. (Image: Dan Brunn Architecture)

Choosing Your Path

Put another way, design thinking is about designing the design process. Ultimately, all designers must find their own paths in doing so and, further illustrating the human element in design, those creative directions will vary greatly.

Los Angeles architect Dan Brunn, for example, has charted an unconventional path in developing his unique design process, with arresting—and, at times, quirky—results. While most designers show clients a menu of options before developing a final design, Brunn does all the iterative work behind the scenes and then goes all-in on a single design solution that is presented to the client.

“It’s a different type of design thinking than you find at a lot of other offices,” he acknowledges. “We listen and attune ourselves to what the client wants and then answer back in a really strong statement. Then, we marry ourselves to one solution and present that to the client with full passion, really believing it and being able to answer to why.” Brunn insists this is not an ego-driven impulse, but an effort to demand clarity from himself as a designer and to ensure that he is wholly committed to understanding and honoring a client’s needs. He calls his process, simply, “empathetic design.” It seems like a risky approach, but in 13 years of professional practice, he’s never had a design rejected by a client.

In addition to conventional architectural projects, Brunn designs interior furnishings, where empathy for the user is, of course, critical. A bathroom ensemble with a tub that actually corresponds to human proportions (including for tall people like him) is one of which he’s most proud. “We think about the choreography of the space and then the forms are born out of that. “It all comes down to the human body and a response to that,” he says. “That’s our design ethos.”

Brunn’s recent design for the interior of a Los Angeles coffee shop epitomizes the bold and playful style at the heart of his work, as well as the practice of clearly defining a client’s desires and intervening with a creative solution. Visitors to Coffee for Sasquatch (the owner is a very tall person) are greeted by a large and cartoonish snow-beast image that is formed by the negative space carved out of a living green wall. Other visual motifs in the mostly snow-white space include wisps of foliage, curling mist, and tree branches “as though you’re seeing sasquatch through the forest,” says Brunn. “It’s an Alice in Wonderland kind of a feeling.”



Negative space, positive results: Architect Dan Brunn imagined a playful and impactful entry for Coffee for Sasquatch in Los Angeles. (Image: Brandon Shigeta)

But, this is only one aspect of the user experience at Coffee for Sasquatch. Brunn lived in Italy for a time, where coffee shop culture is quite different. “In Milan when you get a coffee, it’s kind of like getting a drink at a bar,” he says, adding it’s very social; everyone stands along a tall, long counter and chats with the barista and each other. Italian coffee shops feel very small compared to American ones, and short on places to sit, but the close quarters are part of what encourages interaction with other people and with the design of the space as well. Brunn’s design attempts to bridge the two cultures. The bar is extra-long, with part of it at standing height and a part where it steps down into an integrated bench. This was Brunn’s answer to his client’s top priority: “What she really wanted was a community space.”

“We think about the choreography of the space and then the forms are born out of that. It all comes down to the human body and a response to that. That’s our design ethos.”

—DAN BRUNN, DAN BRUNN ARCHITECTURE

Collaborative Efforts

Interior designer Beverly Horii, managing director and principal at the Toronto office of IA Interior Architects, says her firm uses almost the exact opposite approach as Brunn: “We don’t like to have the big unveil presentation. More and more these days, we are collaborating with our clients, as well as with vendors and contractors, in workshopping sessions, so that they are all part of the process. Clients often can’t define exactly what they need right away, so I believe it’s only in the process of collaborative iteration that you can uncover these things.”

Horii explains this perspective, for her personally, is born in part out of a career spent working across a variety of disciplines. She started out as an architect, worked for the furniture company Teknion, as the manager of design at the Ontario Science Centre, and eventually discovered her passion for interior design. Along the way, she ran a few businesses of her own, each of which employed her design thinking skills in radically different ways. She had a business for a time that made bracelets that doubled as hairbands marketed to yoga lovers. Her cookie company, called Jinja Ninja, produced custom baked goods with colorful messages. “My cookie business was about finding an innovative way to combine graphic design with something edible.” The message cookies—Horii marketed them as “mookies”—were a hit. But, she eventually made her way back to designing interiors.

“I haven’t had a very linear career path, which in a way resembles the idea of design thinking—it’s been very iterative,” she admits. “In each role, I’ve learned something new about what was important to people and how other designers work. It’s taught me to empathize. You have to let down your guard a bit to truly collaborate and produce something that no one designer can do on their own.”

Along the serpentine path that has been Horii’s career, she picked up training in the art of *feng shui*. This empathetic practice of guiding the flow of energy in a space for the benefit of those who will experience it proved useful recently, when her firm decided to design a new office space for its Toronto staff. The space they moved into was in a building constructed in 1914 that was formerly occupied by the Royal Bank of Canada. The brick walls and oversized beams were charming, but parts were a bit dark and dreary. Horii’s *feng shui* analysis aimed at enhancing areas of “positive energy,” while counteracting areas with “negative energy.” The entrance sequence, deemed a “wood and water area,” incorporated vertical wood paneling and black paint (a color associated with water in *feng shui*) to cover the enormous metal beams, helping them to recede visually in the space. “We like to think of *feng shui* as an ancient form of evidence-based design,” notes Horii.

The entire office community was involved in the design process. At one point, a ceremony was held to clear old, negative energies in the space, which involved smudging with sage, loud clapping, ringing bells, and lighting candles. “Energies are sticky—they can stick to places, they can stick to people,” says Horii. “We wanted to dispel the old, stuck energies in the corners and other parts of the space.”

Elements of play also were part of the intervention for IA’s new space. Staff were invited to contribute an item to the “totem wall,” which was designed for one side of a lunch and gathering space. Here, you will find items ranging from a Rubik’s cube and a videogame controller to a rock climber’s carabiner and a can of Guinness.

A contest was even held to name the meeting rooms scattered about the office. While the Toronto group has a tradition in which a staff member produces a different signature cocktail served at each office social gathering, not everyone in the office drinks. As a result, the contest rules were expanded to include the names of cannabis varieties. Canada, after all, had just legalized recreational marijuana. One meeting room is now known as “Space Queen”; another is called “Northern Lights.” The latter, notes Horii, with a chuckle, “refers to both a cocktail and a cannabis strain. We had fun doing that. It’s part of our culture to not take ourselves too seriously. It builds community.”

Those factors of community and personal experience are at the heart of all good design, regardless of the path taken. And so, that first step in designing a better design process is perhaps to step back and consider every possible path—from ancient ideas about energy and flow to the most modern scientific interventions and, certainly, all the human elements in between. ●



For the Toronto office of IA Interior Architects, design was a collaborative effort, combining aspects of *feng shui* with contributions to a totem wall, among other efforts. (Image: Ben Rahn / A-Frame)

BRIAN J. BARTH
is a freelance writer with a background in environmental planning and design. He has written for a range of publications, from *Landscape Architecture Magazine* to *NewYorker.com*.

Connect with

**The creative paths
future designers and
architects are following
to their professions**

In an era when arts programs are not a priority in elementary and high schools, it can be difficult for kids to connect with design—or even realize they have an affinity. This can lead to missed opportunities and a lifetime of frustration. However, a growing number of programs are popping up to supplement well-intentioned STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) curriculums and fill in gaps created by a lack of funding for the arts.

Design museums frequently are tasked with closing this learning loop through family programs, school programs, educator resources, and lesson plans. According to Nina Boccia, interim creative director, Design Exchange (DX) Canada's Design Museum in Toronto, a 2018 report by People for Education, an independent Canadian organization, found that only 4 percent of Ontario, Canada, elementary schools that responded to a survey have an annual arts budget of more than \$5,000 and 27 percent have a budget of less than \$500 for arts per year.

"Recently, the United States Congress passed a bill that recognizes architecture as a STEM subject," adds Boccia. "This will allow state governments to modernize their curriculums and increase the resources available for architecture education at a high school level. It's a promising step forward for many organizations that provide K-12 programs—in and out of the traditional learning environment—like DX." Currently, the museum offers programs for kids, educators, and home schoolers with rich and diverse topics like biomimicry, accessibility, urban planning, robotics, and sustainable fashion.

"Whether the participants end up in design practice or a completely different industry, the fundamentals of creative thinking and problem solving that are taught through visuals, lectures, and hands-on activities provide a deeper understanding of how projects, products, services, and systems evolve from concept to realization," explains Boccia.

At DX Canada's Design Museum, creative thinking and problem solving are taught via visuals, lectures, and hands-on activities. (Image: Design Exchange)

ing Kids



Mixing Generations and Demographics

As more schools are looking at interdisciplinary education with STEM and STEAM—the “A” stands for arts—design thinking serves as a common vocabulary for all the fields. That’s why Ruki Neuhold-Ravikumar, director of education at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, thinks it’s important to influence the curriculum early. “To be able to think critically and solve problems creatively is no longer a special skill set—it’s a new life skill,” she says. “So, making the transition to thinking on your feet and being able to relate to users of the solutions that you design—all of those concepts are taught best through design. This is why we, as a museum, are working on this with schools, the general public, and various organizations to help kids relate to a topic that they don’t typically get a lot of exposure to.”

While many museums take an age-based approach to education that assumes the kid is the beginner and the adult is the advanced learner, Neuhold-Ravikumar observes that in the case of design, that’s not always true. Some adults, even though they’re surrounded by design every day, could not articulate what it is and could not speak to it at a level where they’re comfortable. So, almost every weekend, Cooper Hewitt has programs open to audiences of all ages. “If you bring a child, four is a good age to start,” notes Neuhold-Ravikumar, “but two-year-olds are mesmerized and have done pretty well in our programs. Some of our older audiences are in their 90s and still very engaged. All ages are learning at the same time. It really creates a great public conversation about design.”

The free Hip Hop Architecture Camp—a one-week intensive experience, designed to introduce under-represented youth to architecture, urban planning, creative placemaking, and economic development—is based on the “4C’s”: creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking.

In New York, during National Design Week in October, the museum’s Teen Design Fair typically attracts more than 400 teenagers from all over the city; teachers have bussed kids in from as far away as Kansas City, too. “It really connects us with a very, very diverse population,” says Neuhold-Ravikumar. “We have 40 designers in our tent and students go from table to table speaking to them about their career path and getting advice.” In addition, university representatives are on hand to answer questions about cost and admissions criteria.

When Hip Hop Meets Architecture

There are many programs across the country that introduce design to kids, but, according to architect Michael Ford, those programs still result in low numbers when it comes to increasing diversity in the design professions. “Less than 3 percent of architects are African-American. That’s why I brought this culturally relevant idea of hip hop into the equation,” he explains.

The self-described “Hip Hop Architect” began drawing connections between hip hop and architecture with his graduate thesis, titled “Hip Hop Inspired Architecture and Design,” for the Masters of Architecture degree he earned from the University of Detroit Mercy. Ford was born and raised in the city of Detroit and currently resides in Madison, Wisconsin, where he owns BrandNu Design.

The Hip Hop Architecture Camp is a one-week intensive experience, designed to introduce under-represented youth to architecture, urban planning, creative placemaking, and economic development through the lens of hip hop culture. Launched in 2017, the free camp is based on the “4C’s,” which are creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. Autodesk has signed on as national sponsor.

Campers are paired with architects, urban planners, designers, community activists, and hip hop artists to create unique visions for their communities that yield physical models, digital models, a Hip Hop Architecture track, and a music video summarizing their designs. Young people print—and read (not just listen to)—lyrics from their favorite tracks in order to identify patterns and the structure of that song. From there, they design cities and buildings that have the same patterns discovered in the music.

“If the music is talking about abandoned buildings, drugs, or poverty, we challenge young people to create a program in space that solves the issue within the song, and the aesthetics of that space is based on the rhythm and patterns that we extract visually from the music,” says Ford. “That’s the premise for the camp.”



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1. Cooper Hewitt offers hands-on creative programs for kids of all ages. (Image: Cooper Hewitt)

2. Hip Hop Architecture campers are paired with architects, urban planners, designers, community activists, and hip hop artists to create unique visions for their communities. (Image: The Hip Hop Architecture Camp)

3. Each subject at Design Thinking Academy is infused with project-based learning. (Image: Design Thinking Academy)

4. The Hip Hop Architecture Camp challenges kids to solve issues addressed in lyrics—like poverty and abandoned buildings—with their original design. (Image: The Hip Hop Architecture Camp)

5. Student creativity is at work in the halls of Design Thinking Academy. (Image: Design Thinking Academy)

6. Design Thinking Academy's instructional model leverages the power of creativity to build students' confidence. (Image: Design Thinking Academy)

“To be able to think critically and solve problems creatively is no longer a special skill set—it’s a new life skill.”

—**RUKI NEUHOLD-RAVIKUMAR, COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM**



Design Education Is About Building Things

The Architecture Foundation of British Columbia (AFBC) has an overall mandate to educate the general public about matters of the built environment. This passion is behind its plans to integrate architecture programming into the kindergarten and primary school curriculum throughout British Columbia, Canada.

“Having architects, designers, and landscape designers come into the classroom creates an awareness of what it takes to do that kind of work and it teaches them about all kinds of options, opportunities, and choices,” says Sehr Bokhari-Latif, from the Department of Interior Design at The Art Institute of Vancouver (part of LaSalle College Vancouver), as well as partner of StudioTrio Design and director of AFBC.

According to Bokhari-Latif, “The sooner you start the children to become aware of their context of the built environment, the sooner they are able to engage in these matters and able to facilitate, in many cases, what needs to be done to make the built environment better.”

AFBC’s architecture curriculum, which will be available for educators to use in and out of the classroom, is currently in the planning stages. “Kids absorb so quickly—they are like sponges,” observes Bokhari-Latif. “So, I think it’s really a question of content rather than time.”

One thing is sure: “We will be engaging students to make things with their hands! Hands-on training has kind of disappeared from curriculums all over the world,” she adds. “It’s become very technologically oriented, and my personal view is that we are losing creative thinking and thinking outside the box when we are doing more computer-based learning. Design education is all about building things.”

Teaching Confidence and Autonomy

Mastering the art of design thinking provides students from all neighborhoods with advantages they will enjoy for a lifetime. The Design Thinking Academy was founded in 2015 with the goal of creating an educational experience that prepares students with these 21st century skills. “Many of our students are from under-served populations and they experience socioeconomic hardship,” says Stephanie C. Silverman, head of school and principal at the Design Thinking Academy in Newark, Delaware. The school’s instructional model provides them with an extra boost, leveraging the power of imagination and creativity to build their confidence and autonomy.

Students choose one of five creative career “pathways”: computer science, entrepreneurship, art & design, media, or architectural engineering. Two additional career pathways will be added in the future: game design and audio engineering. Educators apply design thinking to core subject areas and also use it as an interdisciplinary “glue” that frames the overall teaching approach. “Our curriculum is embedded with design thinking,” explains Silverman. “Each subject is infused with project-based learning and creative problem solving to make learning authentic, fun, and experiential.”

A standalone school, the Design Thinking Academy (DTA) is not a CPO (charter proliferation organization). However, it is clearly thriving on its own and has been awarded a \$10 million grant from the XQ Institute. “We are one of the original 10 XQ Superschools,” states Silverman. The list of colleges that DTA students have been accepted to is growing. “We are very proud to add MIT to the list.” She adds, “Many of our students go on to pursue creative careers in the pathway they chose here at DTA.”

Paint sample strips become high fashion in the hands of students at Design Thinking Academy.
(Image: Design Thinking Academy)



Executing Ideas

LEGO toys have been sparking the imagination of future designers for nearly 80 years. Playing with LEGO has always been fun. In fact, the name LEGO is actually an abbreviation of the two Danish words “leg godt,” meaning “play well.” Now, thanks to The LEGO Group’s commitment to use sustainable materials in core products and packaging by 2030, it also provides educators and parents with a teachable moment about sustainability and social responsibility. Production has started on a range of sustainable LEGO elements made from plant-based plastic sourced from sugarcane. The new sustainable LEGO “botanical” elements will come in varieties, including leaves, bushes, and trees.

Despite fears that we’re headed toward a digital-only world, the modular LEGO brick launched in 1958 continues to thrive and provide a tactile experience for children. Today, the company’s mission “to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow” includes the introduction of products designed to open up early math, science, and language skills for young children. LEGO has even introduced Coding Express, a fun and tactile way to inspire early learners to explore coding concepts.

And, when young minds begin taking investigative steps toward creative career options, there are still more resources to help guide their curiosity. The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) is among the professional organizations participating in Careers Building Communities, a platform designed for students, educators, and other individuals to explore career paths in all facets of the real estate industry—from architecture and interior design to construction, engineering, management, and finance. The platform was created to provide future talent with information on education and employment within each sector and to connect them with participating organizations, which can help identify opportunities and next steps that can lead to a rewarding career.

Whether in the classroom or at the museum, group activities that expose kids to the arts help develop confidence, creativity, and collaboration with lasting benefits. Connecting with design professionals early in life broadens horizons and helps the future designers and architects of the world find their way to their professions. These same connections also benefit kids who go into other fields. Having an understanding of the world through a design lens can only enhance one’s professional experience, regardless of the industry they enter. ●

DIANA MOSHER, Allied ASID, is a New York-based interior designer and media consultant. She also is the 2017-2019 communications director for the ASID New York Metro chapter.

Getting Involved



The Hip Hop Architecture Camp

Designers, architects, real estate developers, educators, hip hop artists representing all the elements, (Graffiti, Djing, MCing, Bboy/BGirl), urban planners, and community leaders are invited to assist. After applicants complete the form on the website they will be contacted when a camp is scheduled near their city. www.hiphoparchitecture.com/volunteer

DX Canada’s Design Museum

DX regularly works with creatives, including designers, architects, technologists, and artists. Some, including Jason Logan, Libs Elliott, and little dada, have served as guest speakers and teachers for classes. Others have entirely led workshops and activities, including Swave Studios for a partnership with World Industrial Design Day (from the World Design Organization), Kids Learning Code (from Canada Learning Code), and more. Get in touch via email at info@dx.org.

Design Thinking Academy

DTA welcomes involvement with programming and opportunities for students to interface with creative professionals as they plan for college and careers. Also, DTA seeks relationships with local companies that would like students’ help in solving their business or organization’s design challenges. To establish a community partnership, program, or relationship with the school, contact Noelle Picara, community partnerships & programs director, at noelle.picara@dtak12.de.us, or call 302-292-5450.

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

Volunteers are encouraged to get in touch about local and national programs, such as the Teen Design Fair during National Design Week in October. More than 400 teens come from New York and beyond to meet designers and gain career inspiration and advice. www.cooperhewitt.org

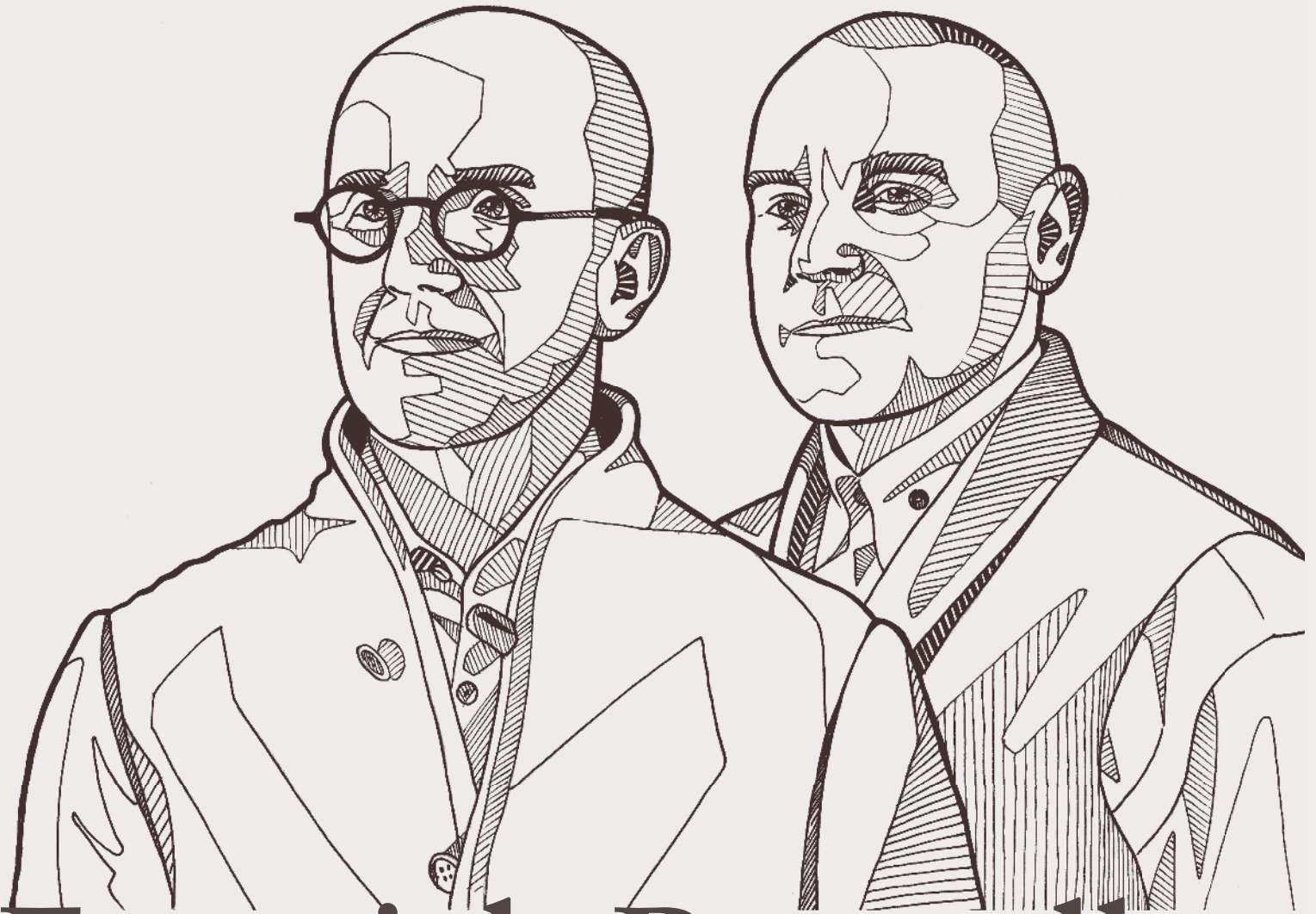
Architecture Foundation of British Columbia

AFBC is on a renewed path of inclusion, education, and engagement and will periodically seek new board members from the architecture and design community. Contact Jim Toy, AFBC board chair, at board@architecturefoundationbc.ca.

Careers Building Communities

Learn about student membership opportunities at participating organizations and more at www.careersbuildingcommunities.org.

ICONic Profile



Fenwick Bonnell & David Powell

David Powell and Fenwick Bonnell started their firm in 1990 on a shoestring, and, as Powell has said, did everything from party planning to designing stuffed toys in an effort to stay afloat. But, talent, artistry, dedication, and hard work have since made Toronto-based Powell & Bonnell an international player, with an ongoing legacy of sumptuous, elegant, and extremely livable residential designs.

The firm also has a much sought after line of furniture, lighting, and textiles, which showcases the signature Powell & Bonnell talent for combining chic, practical, warm, and beautiful.

The firm has received multinational accolades for interior and product designs in Canada, the United States, and Britain, taking numerous ASID “Best in Competition” awards over the years.

Both men are from the Canadian provinces—Powell from a small town in Ontario and Bonnell from the Maritimes—and met in Toronto, where they both live.

i+D: Fenwick, how often do people mispronounce your name?

Bonnell: It has to be spelled and re-spelled all the time. I won’t tell you what I’ve been called because people will call me that again.

i+D: When taking on projects, you’re aware of people with disabilities.

Powell: My mother was quite handicapped, particularly later in life, which made me aware of the complications involved in daily tasks. Creating beautiful, sophisticated interiors that belie the fact that they’ve been done for someone with a handicap have, over the years, been the most gratifying projects we’ve worked on.

i+D: Examples?

Powell: Bathrooms are tricky. We had a client who didn’t want people to perceive that his environment had been overly adjusted for his disability, so we put in grab bars as part of the architecture, so they appear to be floor-to-ceiling stainless steel posts. We designed a toilet paper holder that is also a handgrip.

i+D: How did you two meet?

Bonnell: David was sharing studio space with an interior design professor of mine and she hired me in my second year at Ryerson University. David was working as a rendering artist, sitting at a desk, which I shared. He took me under his wing and showed me the ropes and all the things I wasn’t learning in school.

i+D: Did you immediately hit it off?

Bonnell: I’m a difficult person. It took forever. Well, several months. We both had a strong liking for scotch. That helped cement the relationship.

Powell: (Laughing) Interesting to hear Fenwick say I took him under my wing. I had no schooling whatsoever, barely a high school education, but I had the ability to draw from the time I was a child. I was an illustrator of interiors. We taught each other.

i+D: You still share a desk. Can you describe what you see when you look up?

Bonnell: Each other. We’ve always been across from each other, to discuss everything. There are no secrets.

i+D: Do people say you work too hard?

Powell: Most people say that, but I don’t feel that way at all. I’m doing something I yearn to do. I grew up on a farm and loathed it. I left when I was 15. It didn’t suit me. I just wanted to draw or arrange flowers. As a child, I’d stand at a row that needed to be hoed or picked and think: What is going to become of me? To live in a world of design and beauty has been a dream.

i+D: What was the first thing you designed?

Bonnell: The family rec room when I was 14. I grew up in a middle-class environment and was lucky—my mother and father gave me free rein. Everything came from Sears and everyone loved it. It was spectacular. Thinking about it now—it was horrible.

Powell: (Laughing)

Bonnell: But, it was a success.

i+D: When you interview someone to join your team, what is the key question you ask?

Bonnell: We ask them to do a little project for us. We also ask them to describe their living room, to see how they live. It’s a way of understanding how they relate to design.

Powell: On occasion we’ve had individuals who refused to do it. We pointed out to them, that it’s only the Meryl Streeps of the world who don’t have to audition.

i+D: What will you overlook in a colleague? If a person is extremely talented, for example, but always late, is that a concern?

Bonnell: It’s never bothered me because that’s the way I behave. I’m always late. I practically was wearing pajamas to work.

Powell: (Laughing) It got really bad.

Bonnell: My weirdness was overlooked. We don’t judge people on anything like that.

i+D: What are you reading?

Powell: *Florence: A Delicate Case* by David Leavitt. I lived there for a year in the mid-80s.

Bonnell: Three books currently. *The Secret Lives of Trees, Fear, and The Complete Guide to Running.*

i+D: You’re a runner?

Bonnell: I’m supposed to say yes. I’m doing a half-marathon next month. So, yes.

i+D: You’re known and celebrated for residential design. What about commercial work?

Powell: We’ve done some. Residential clients have involved us in their business projects—some large offices. I was involved in the design of funeral homes for a client. We’ve all had experiences in funeral homes—I had more than my share in the ’90s. I thought there was a potential for change. It’s a very difficult industry, very organized and protectionist. I felt the experience should be akin to a five-star hotel, where whatever you wanted could be accomplished with ease in a beautiful environment. We created funeral homes that have changed the industry. It’s about light and lighting, textures, a manipulation of emotions to create a calm place.

i+D: How do you diplomatically disagree with a client’s choices and opinions?

Bonnell: It doesn’t come up that often. We’ve had clients we just didn’t feel we were making progress with because they were resistant to any concepts. We’ve had to say we can’t work with them anymore.

i+D: Did you do it as often when you were starting out as you do now?

Bonnell: The first seven years of our business we barely did any work at all. It wasn’t because we were uncompromising. In the beginning, we definitely felt that clients took advantage of us, creatively and monetarily. It never makes sense to try to make your clients happy when you know it’s not going to work.

i+D: Would a client be surprised to see your Toronto apartments?

Bonnell: More so with David’s place.

Powell: I live quite modestly, but stylish and organized, in 400 square feet in the city.

i+D: Are either of you collectors?

Powell: I was a collector—I collected beautiful objects and art. But, I got to a certain age and thought: I don’t need anything more in my life. ●

AMBROSE CLANCY
is the editor of the Shelter Island Reporter and a novelist, nonfiction author, and journalist. His work has appeared in GQ, The Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times.

Combattling the SoHo Effect

By
Michele Keith

**Designing opportunities
for creatives to remain
permanent residents
in the communities they
help to revive**

Anyone who's visited a city's "cool" neighborhood over a number of years knows about the SoHo Effect, even if they are unfamiliar with the term.

At the beginning, the neighborhood is grungy, maybe dangerous, rents are ridiculously low, squatters abound. Then, word gets out among creative types—artists, sculptors, and designers of all stripes—that one can find affordable lodging here; cavernous lofts can be transformed into live/work studios here. In brief, it may seem unusual, but it's a perfectly okay place to call home.

Over the years, more creatives arrive, their very presence prompting the sprucing of the area as galleries open, restaurants appear, and—no surprise—rents start rising. Finally, and seemingly inevitably, luxury retailers and big-box stores pop up. The neighborhood loses its unique flavor. The first tenants, who actually transformed the area into a draw for both locals *and* tourists, can no longer afford to live there and the diaspora begins. They are, in effect, pushed out by economics and forced to move to other neighborhoods, sometimes even other cities, where a similar cycle will indubitably take place.

Is there a foreseeable end to the cycle? An affordable way for those who spark creative revitalization to be able to stick around and enjoy it? Groups dedicated to the cause say yes, but it's no small undertaking.

A modern skyscraper rises above the historic buildings of SoHo in New York City.
(Image: debarrr, iStock by Getty Images)





Artspace is among the groups creating affordable live/work spaces for the creatives who bring art and culture to their communities. (Image: James Shanks)

The organization's 2015 *Creative New York* report, which detailed the growing importance of the city's creative economy, addressed these affordability challenges and suggested a variety of solutions. "It has already borne fruit," Dvorkin explains. "To Mayor [Bill] de Blasio's credit, his administration has taken some steps that we recommended, including new proposals, to develop affordable workspaces for artists and more funding for smaller cultural organizations. But, we're a long way from stabilizing the grassroots arts communities [that] are really feeling the pinch."

One idea CUF put on the table is to take state-owned or state-controlled buildings and use them creatively, citing "empty psychiatric hospitals that we could repurpose as affordable work and performance spaces. City schools, used only three-quarters of the year for maybe eight hours a day, could also be used to ease the space crunch. Schools have hundreds of art rooms, music rooms, theater spaces, dance studios, and video production facilities—so many areas that could be opened up to artists when school isn't in session."

Among the organization's many concepts regarding affordability is to specifically set aside housing for artists and creatives, forming hubs in the city with a diverse mix of tenants and live-and-work spaces. "If we don't help nurture emerging artists," Dvorkin cautions, "they'll leave. Sustaining arts and culture is key to the health and vitality of New York's economy and to our identity as a global city. For creative professionals like interior designers and architects, a vibrant and diverse arts ecosystem is a daily source of inspiration. Everyone's connected, bolstering each other, sharing ideas, creating opportunities. The cost of losing our edge as the creative capital of the world far outweighs the financial investment required to ensure affordable places for artists to live and work."

"Creativity has defined New York as a beacon to the world. We'd be foolish to let that beacon dim," Dvorkin says.

Progress Begins with Ideas

"It's difficult for people to remember," says Eli Dvorkin, editorial & policy director of the Center for an Urban Future (CUF), a nonprofit, public policy think tank based in Manhattan, that describes itself as a catalyst for smart and sustainable policies that reduce inequality, increase economic mobility, and grow the economy in New York City. "But, over the last 20 years, we've seen many positives in the city: a booming economy, record job growth, and increasing numbers of tech and creative industries."

"However," Dvorkin continues, "New York is starting to become a victim of its own prosperity in certain ways. Most challenging is the affordability issue. It's clear that people feel mounting pressure, not only with housing costs, but in finding a range of affordable spaces in which to work, perform, and create. It's harder to get started now. And, it's had a disproportionate effect on small businesses and New Yorkers living in low-income communities."

Creating Lasting Change

Established as an advocate for artists' unique space needs in 1979, Minneapolis-based Artspace made the leap to developer in the late 1980s. Since then, the scope of the nonprofit's activities has grown dramatically; today, it is a national leader in developing affordable spaces for creative businesses, artists, and cultural organizations through the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and new construction across the United States.

Will Law, the current chief operating officer at Artspace, who has been with the group for nearly 28 years, spoke about how this is being accomplished, beginning with a bit of background information and reflecting on Artspace's early rental housing developments. "Initially, Artspace was invited by the city of Saint Paul, Minnesota, to redevelop two buildings as a way to encourage more artists to move into the downtown area, and it was successful. Seeing the impact of our work early on as an economic driver, a group of private citizens and government leaders decided to recreate Artspace as a 501©(3), and changed our mission to take on the challenge of doing more permanent things, so that residents would no longer get caught in this trap of getting priced out and pushed into a transient lifestyle."

A Global Issue

Today, Artspace has 50 projects around the country, comprising everything from office spaces to performance halls, rehearsal studios to live/work buildings, rentals, town homes, and cooperatives. “Our intent is long-term affordability,” says Law, “and, so far, we’ve been able to achieve this.”

How has this happened with little or no pushback from the various communities with which they’re involved? Law explains: “Our framework is to respond to communities that have invited us in. We don’t find our projects, they find us. City workers or a local foundation or arts advocacy group will reach out to us, saying, ‘We have a building that could be resuscitated or we have a group that needs such-and-such. We are, by design, responsive and help these various peoples and organizations to attain *their* goals. That’s the key to our success.”

In addition, Artspace encourages the “broader community” to engage in things, such as art classes and gallery shows, becoming part of the project. “We create positive places to raise children, as well as to answer creatives’ needs,” notes Law.

Financed in a variety of ways—via affordable housing tax credits, historic preservation tax credits, private individuals, foundations, and conventional bank loans—Law says, “We view ourselves as a community developer, not just to advance the arts, but the community’s goals, and do that by immersing ourselves in the community and being respectful of their desires.

“We support the arts,” he adds, “because we think the arts can be a binding influence on society. The bottom line is we are an agent for social change and justice.”

Similarly, Artscape was founded in 1986 in Toronto, in response to an affordability crisis that threatened to price creatives out of the city. Today, Artscape is one of approximately 180 members of the Creative Cities Network, a group established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to promote cooperation with, and among, cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

Made up of a group of not-for-profit organizations with a mission to “make space for creativity and transform communities,” Artscape has become a global leader in what it calls “creative placemaking.” Defined as the practice of embedding arts, culture, and creativity into community building, its projects reflect the shared interests of multiple stakeholders, thereby generating value for all.

As with Artspace and CUF, the group recognizes the growing challenge that creatives, which today include many middle-income professionals, have in earning a living from their work. To deal with this, the major focus of its work over the next five years will be shifting creative placemaking from the margins to the mainstream of urban development.

Thus, with a greater focus on cultural clusters outside Toronto’s core and affordable housing for creative-led families, Artscape is committed to building a world that engages artists, culture, and creativity as catalysts for community vibrancy, sustainability, prosperity, and inclusiveness.

The challenges facing the creative industries’ ability to not only find but *keep* affordable spaces to live and work will continue to ebb and flow. However, the constructive attention from dedicated groups working in concert with local communities and governments, as well as design professionals, to affect positive and lasting change is moving forward in focus. There is opportunity to affect the future of creative communities large and small. As Artspace’s Law says, “We have a chance to make a difference.” ●

“If we don’t help nurture emerging artists, they’ll leave. ... Creativity has defined New York as a beacon to the world. We’d be foolish to let that beacon dim.”

—ELI DVORKIN, CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE

El Barrio’s Artspace PS109 opened in September 2015, offering 89 units of affordable live/work housing for artists and their families. The once abandoned public school in East Harlem also now provides 3,000 square feet of gallery and exhibition space for residents, as well as 10,000 square feet of non-residential commercial space shared by three local arts and cultural organizations.

(Image: James Shanks)



MICHELE KEITH

is a New York-based writer whose work has appeared in The New York Times, ASPIRE Design and Home, Luxury Listings NYC, and DESIGN, among other magazines. She also has written two coffee table books for The Monacelli Press: Designers Here and There and Designers Abroad.

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Jim Toy, RID, LEED AP, False Creek Design Group and Architecture Foundation of British Columbia



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designers d'intérieur du canada



Located in Tampa, Florida, Surterra Wellness holds one of only a handful of medical marijuana licenses in the state. The company turned to Toronto-based figure3 to create a space suited to the mindset of a new kind of shopper. The resultant design intends not only to spark curiosity, but to redefine the category in the process.
(Image: Chad Keffer)

SPARKING SALES

With Canada's recent ruling to legalize recreational marijuana and an increasing number of U.S. states passing legislation with regard to medicinal cannabis, the need for well-designed dispensaries that take into account everything from client privacy and comfort to safety, security, and sales appeal is set to explode. It's a new retail realm and one where careful and creative design will play a crucial role. The next issue of *i+D* will investigate retail design of all kinds, with a targeted look at the burgeoning business of designing perfectly planned spaces for the legal sale of marijuana. ●

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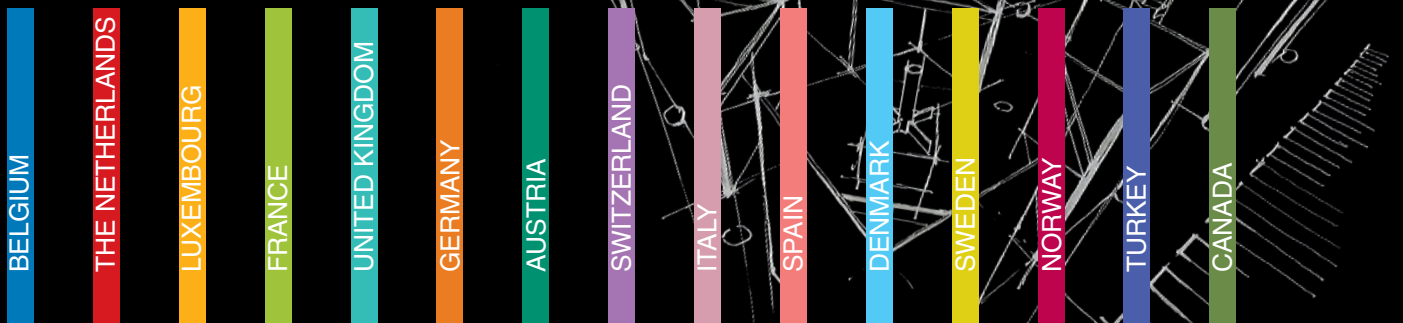


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