

Letters Letters Letters

We enjoyed the exploration of perceptions and ideas about “small” in your July/August 2008 issue, and we were pleased to see attention to the small person in Dan Kennedy’s essay “The Kitchen Cupboard,” reflecting on the experience of design for his daughter Becky.

But Becky’s challenges in the family home mystified us. Cereal boxes on the floor? A stool to get to the phone or the freezer? In her own home? The design changes that would eliminate those barriers for Becky are not complicated. Move the cereal. Shift the phone jack lower. Consider a side-by-side refrigerator that everyone can access more comfortably.

We will never achieve perfect usability for everyone everywhere through legal requirements or even best practice in inclusive design. We can find a reasonable balance that anticipates a wide range of human diversity. It is fine to acknowledge that there will always be some gaps to bridge. We can aspire to make those gaps infrequent and small in the places that many people use. But at home? There we should be able to eliminate the disabling aspects of design.

Marie Trottier

President
(and a small person with achondroplasia)

Valerie Fletcher

Executive Director
Adaptive Environments Center/
The Institute for Human Centered Design
Boston

When Crystal Carrington on the ’80s TV show *Dynasty* picks up a then state-of-the-art cellphone that has the size and grace of a World War II walkie-talkie, we crack up. When Will Farrell, as a cooler-than-thou fashion dolt in a *Saturday Night Live* skit picks up a cellphone the size of an after-dinner mint, it kills us. Our reactions to the actual size of anything are not objective — they are exquisitely subjective.

The last decade saw housing consumers terrified that unless there was enough space around their lifestyles, they would be forever “pinched.” Houses in America grew

like Topsy during that time — and now heating and cooling costs, real estate taxes, and a few years of normal homeowners’ maintenance woes have opened the eyes of all those who bought a pre-bust bloat house to the reality that what was “right” is now “massive.”

When I wrote *The Small House* for McGraw-Hill in 1985, I “scooped” my friend Sarah Susanka by about a decade. While that book sold very well for what it was, its tiny fraction of sales in relationship to Sarah’s *Not So Big* . . . juggernaut underscored not only my obvious deficiencies as a writer, but the fact that the word “right” not only applies to house size, but also to timing. Although I had just built myself an 1,100-square-foot, one-bedroom, one-bath house, the idea for the book was from a gifted editor at McGraw-Hill, not some forward-looking young architect.

As the New Age religion of Green sweeps the country, imposing upon us a checklist of moral judgments, the positive karma of “small,” or the negative aura of the “McMansion” should best be seen in the light of their context: houses are not so much “big” or “small” as they “fit” or don’t.

Duo Dickinson AIA

Madison, Connecticut

I relished the theme of your “Small” issue. I appreciated the effort to reconcile ecomorality with scale through the justification of creativity (small is beautiful, practical, clever, innovative) and you made an interesting bridge to the creative with the feature “Solo.” I loved Deborah Weisgall’s exploration of this idea of working alone and its rewards. Although I would disagree with her that all creativity and “work involving the mind depends on inventing something from nothing,” I agree that it depends on “blank time and space for an idea — a concept, a vision — to coalesce.”

In my psychotherapy practice, I have been more aware than ever lately that without solitude for reflection, a depth of awareness and perception is entirely missed. Thought — like full vision, hearing, and

comprehension — requires multiple levels of personal attention. Distillation is the slower process to get to the essence of things. We are thrilled by flashes of brilliant insight and connection, but without the counterpart of extended contemplation and exploration, integration tends not to occur as fully, thereby foreclosing maximum creativity.

The common desire of the artists Deborah spoke with and of the people with whom I work is, as she says, “to maintain a consistency and thoroughness of thought and inquiry and an intensity that cannot be diluted.” I like the way she put that. It is also the essence of worthwhile psychotherapy and the true pleasure and ideal of psychoanalysis. As with creativity, it is precarious to sustain.

Oscillation between the control and contentment possible in the realm of privacy and intimacy and the excitement and stimulation derived from exposure and risk is a poetic balancing act. It may be “small,” but it seems convincingly essential.

Kyra Montagu

Brookline, Massachusetts

Thank you for drawing attention to design’s contribution to the economy [“Design and the Reinvented City,” May/June 2008]. Massachusetts College of Art and Design was founded by 19th-century industrialists who realized that their business success depended on the availability of a local workforce of skilled designers. As the only publicly funded independent art college in the nation, MassArt is committed not only to educating young designers, but also to retaining them and their skills within the Commonwealth. Our students work with local companies on real-life design challenges and, in the process, educate local employers about the value that design can add to their products and companies.

With the recent appointment of a statewide Creative Economy Director and the passage of House legislation authorizing a Creative Economy Council, the time is right to promote design as a leading industry in Massachusetts. We all have

a part to play: young people need to be introduced at an early age to design education and careers; companies can make greater use of the wealth of local design talent and skills; and the public sector can integrate high-quality design into everything from schools and bridges to branding and marketing materials.

Through our “Designing an Industry” initiative, MassArt is working to advance all aspects of the design industry in Massachusetts. I believe that the opportunities are boundless. As a designer at one of our recent programs said, “Design isn’t just an industry — it’s a way of thinking.”

Kay Sloan
President
Massachusetts College of Art and Design
Boston

The discussion of the creative economy by your distinguished roundtable participants in “Design and the Reinvented City” was most informative.

Your readers might be interested in learning about the Creative Economy Initiative on the North Shore. The first state-wide conference on the creative economy — sponsored by The Salem Partnership, the Enterprise Center at Salem State College, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council — was held in Salem in May 2006. An action plan was the outcome of the conference, and the state legislature is using its recommendations to create a Creative Economy Council. This will be the first statewide initiative and is an important step for the Commonwealth.

In April 2008, a North Shore Creative Economy Market Analysis was commissioned (available at www.salempartnership.org or www.enterprisectr.org). Design businesses are ranked first among creative-economy enterprises on the North Shore, representing almost 18 percent of all creative-economy establishments; architecture, considered a separate industry, was sixth, with almost 7 percent. Together, design and architecture represent close to 25 percent of the creative-economy establishments on the North Shore.

Other key findings were that over 2,200 creative-economy enterprises are located on the North Shore, employing close to 20,000 people. The creative economy

represents close to 12 percent of the North Shore’s total private sector employment. And finally, the North Shore creative-economy enterprises conservatively contribute over \$3 billion in annual sales.

This state-funded report is a major breakthrough as it provides the information and the strategies needed to grow this economic sector on the North Shore. Furthermore, it is the intent of the stakeholders throughout the region to use the report’s action plan as the prototype for the Commonwealth.

Patricia H. Zaido
Executive Director
The Salem Partnership
Salem, Massachusetts

As editor Elizabeth Padjen noted in the November/December 2007 “Clients” issue, “It’s (not) all about you” — nor is it always about architecture.

I loved seeing *ArchitectureBoston* begin to expand readers’ thinking about clients and stakeholders — who are they and how they weigh in. Shepherding groups through an animated dialogue and disparate opinions can be the most rewarding and productive phase of any project, if done well.

Serving as midwife to the client’s truth and vision can reveal a broad spectrum of possibilities. Giving voice to those who are often unheard and helping to define the client’s objectives without a myopic rush into “architecture or building” as the only solution, or only objective, is where the true creative process can flourish.

The measure of success will be valued most by those who have helped enrich and advance the process and are witness to many new outcomes and interdependent relationships as a result.

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