Why Design Matters

We are living in a fast-paced profit oriented time. This societal ethos values a skin-deep world where effects are immediate and short lived. Architecture is the opposite of this. It is unmoving and eternal. How can we cope? Perhaps in the elegance of timelessness and beauty in our city.

When we think of the great societies of history, we refer to their architecture. When we talk about the great work of today, we look elsewhere. We see our own architects designing buildings around the world that the world sees as examples of great civilization. The world discusses the great institutions in our area, the cutting edge research and our great medical facilities. It is our collective responsibility to bring our skyline and our buildings into this discussion. We have been there in periods of our history, we must be there again.

In Boston, as everywhere else, design is not static. Design evolves to meet a changing society. As new challenges emerge, we must develop new technologies and systems that can meet them. Often, this is a process of applying enduring design principals to contemporary problems: sustainability; climate change; population growth. But principles alone are not enough to achieve design excellence. The best buildings are the result of a thoughtful process that engages a broad range of people, so that a client's aspirations can be brought to life. It is critical that we who design our physical environment engage the users of our buildings in thoughtful dialogue about how to expand our sense of what is possible. This is how we set and meet the highest standards.

For clients, "design excellence" can be a slippery phrase that sometimes conjures ideas about big budgets, extravagant appearances, and a process that favors the architect instead of the client or the community. Architects know that the pursuit of design excellence is about the pursuit of better buildings, which lead to better communities, and a better overall physical environment. We understand that choosing excellence over "tried and true" may seem risky for clients, no matter the scale of their project. The reality is, part of design excellence involves understanding constraints—including financial constraints--and finding ways to apply a high order of creativity and technical expertise to delivering well designed buildings that perform in ways that meet the client's goals and positively contribute to the communities where they are sited.

Design can improve our lives and even better our world. It's up to us all—architects, other design professionals, clients, regulatory agents, community activists, to create the kind of places we want to live, and to share our stories about how best to attain them.

Architects can promote design excellence in multiple ways, aside from designing buildings: Sitting on commissions that select and review design; attending public meetings to support other designers; and simply listening carefully to clients, consultant ants, and building users to understand how they currently use buildings, and how those uses may evolve.

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