On "School" (Spring 2013)

I agree with Gretchen Schneider, in her article "Design for Dignity," that Farshid Moussavi has an out-of-date view of practicing public-interest design. In fact, we have some data to back this up, based on research conducted as part of the 2011 FAIA Latrobe Research Prize. In a survey of a random sample of 383 national AIA members, 90 percent of respondents thought it was, indeed, possible to create designs of the highest quality while practicing public-interest design. The prevailing belief now is that there is no trade-off between serving communities and doing excellent design.

Closer to home for Moussavi, we also surveyed students at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. Fifty-six percent said that their interest in public-interest design had increased since they entered Harvard; 37 percent attributed this increase in interest to a professor at school; and 54 percent, to a particular class. Perhaps Moussavi needs to revise her attitude if she wants to remain of interest to her students.

Of course, the proof is in the pudding. One need only look at the work of recent GSD graduates such as Michael Murphy and Allan Ricks of MASS Design Group to see what Moussavi has missed.

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Design Corps
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In "Beaux-Arts and Back Again," David Hacin's and Nader Tehrani's excellent discussion makes clear we've moved beyond the Beaux-Arts/Polytechnique/artistic/technical debate as the sole model for architectural education. With the inclusion of a host of subjects—history, theory, sociology, geography—the platform of education has considerably broadened. Nevertheless, teaching the core skills of visualizing and transforming ideas into physical realities remains the primary goal of an architectural education. Like the clinical rotation in medical school and the moot court in law school, the design studio in architecture school is the most effective means to engage a design problem and move beyond analysis to synthesis.

The studio structure, however, can be far more flexible than it tends to be today, largely defined as a one-semester design project. Studios can be research-based, with design problems used for testing assumptions. Short, one-month interactive workshops on site can teach the values of the client and community. Integrated studios with structural and environmental engineering components can introduce students to the potential of the creative interaction between disciplines.

Stretching the definition of design studio requires more flexibility, more organization, more cooperation, and more inventiveness, but isn't that exactly what is required of us today in practice?

ANDREA P. LEERS FAIA
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In his brilliant novel "The Glass Bead Game," Hermann Hesse imagined an elite society devoted to the intellectual pursuit of a beautiful but arcane game. The game has a sophisticated set of rules and values, impenetrable to the uninitiated and requiring years of study in the arts, mathematics, and cultural history. I have often thought Hesse perfectly describes the ethos of formal academic architecture.

As far as I am concerned, this is not a criticism.

Inherent in a number of pieces in the issue is the question of whether architecture schools should be teaching technical skills or formal design. There is Steven Brittan's assertion that "we should reduce the distraction of esoteric theory…" on the one hand, and David Hacin's observation that "…the goal of the US undergraduate system is teaching students how to think" on the other. The two are not mutually exclusive, of course, particularly when coupled with some form of cooperative work/study program; but between the two, learning how to think in formal design terms is best accomplished in an academic setting.

What is sometimes lost in this debate is that architecture and the visual/spatial arts have a logic of their own. Technical skills are, by and large, knowledge based. Knowledge-based reasoning is language based, and Western cultural bias favors language-based reasoning over spatial reasoning. (The word "logic," after all, is derived from "logos," Greek for both "speech" and "reason.") The esoteric design exercises and debates of the academic architecture studio are meant to develop an intuitive sensitivity to this other, less-recognized form of logic. The technical stuff can come later and, in any case, is probably more current and applicable when learned in a practice setting.

The problem, of course, occurs when the academic ethos of the studio is transplanted wholesale into the real world, which, justifiably, regards it as irrelevant. This is a syndrome of both the celebrity architect who is applauded for it and the recent architecture graduate who is not. But that is not a reason to abandon a process that develops the kind of logic essential to formal design skills.

MICHAEL LIU AIA
The Architectural Team
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The lead image in the article "Beaux-Arts and Back Again" intrigued me. The image appears upside down and cannot be perceived as we might experience the space without losing balance. Book spines are falling off shelves that do not support them, and the form of the steps, although beautiful, lead to a door on the ceiling. Was this a deliberate attempt to encourage architects to turn our perceptions upside

down in our search for meaning in education, where sometimes, in the rush to embrace new technologies and building science, traditional methods and skills are left behind?

The firm that provided the image is called "Levitate." They ask us to look up, into the future, as opposed to down, into the past. I believe that an architect's education can find a balance between new ideas and those that build on the history, work, and understanding that came before.

Gravity is still a force with which to be reckoned. Am I reading more into a simple graphic reversal? For a moment, I had an image of Mary Poppins' tea party in my head.

PAUL HAJIAN
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I was struck that in an issue about "schools" of architecture, there was nary a word about the design of those very schools. If a core belief of architects is that the shape of settings for human activity can help shape those activities, then certainly the design of schools of architecture should serve to promote the kind of interactions that might lead, eventually, to good design beyond the walls of the university.

The answer to this question—what is the appropriate design for an architecture school—might be simple, if we all agreed on what kind of education we were hoping to provide. But we don't. Among the many opinions in the magazine, two stood out for me. One was the belief, most eloquently articulated by William Rawn, that architecture schools should develop liberally educated students and nurture their knowledge of society as much as their knowledge of technology. Another view, argued by Gretchen Schneider, is that architecture schools should instill in their students the desire and skills to work toward improving the conditions of those who inhabit houses, schools, and public places that are detrimental to their "pursuit of happiness."

Following Rawn, we might want an architecture school more completely integrated into the heart of the campus, perhaps not set off in its own building, so

that students are comfortable as humanists and social scientists as much as artists and engineers. Following Schneider, we might blow apart the whole notion of architectural education being campus based. Instead, why not move architecture schools into communities of greatest need?

Of course, I think we should want both. So perhaps a future issue could look at how we should build new and redesigned schools to fulfill these two—and perhaps more—missions for architecture in the 21st century.

MAX PAGE
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As a person who believes that education is the single most promising hope for life on our planet in this era of the anthropocene, I co-chair a committee that in April 2011 persuaded the BSA board to vote for the following "Aspirational Curriculum Recommendation for Environmental Education in Architecture Schools":

Schools that train professionals involved in the building sector of the economy should develop their own curricula that provide graduates with the theoretical and practical competence to consistently design high quality low-carbon or alternative energy built environments. Graduates shall be well trained in the process of creating energy performance-based and other evidence-based design that balances ecological, economic, and social sustainability.

No mention of this found its way into the recent School issue. But what is more disturbing by far is that climate change and sustainable urbanization were mentioned only once in the entire issue—by Steve Brittan—and sustainability only once, in passing. And while I hope to remain friends with many of the authors whose work I respect, I must chastise them for demonstrating so clearly that climate-change awareness is not even on their personal radar screens as they speak about the state of our schools or our professional practice. Worse, an editor and editorial board that purports to raise the level of awareness on topics of importance to our

profession also appear to be unaware of the elephant in the room.

PETER PAPESCH AIA
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Boston

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The purpose, pedagogy, teaching techniques, and values of architectural education are, indeed, changing. I found it valuable that your contributors rooted their discussions within the broader context of the profession: What kinds of changes are the practitioners asking from the academics to better prepare students for the changing nature of the profession? But I think it's interesting and necessary to ask the same question from a different point of view: What practices within academia are able to drive the profession's adaptability and leadership within the ever-changing demands of our environment? I am interested in strengthening the synergy between our area schools and professional practice.

One of the greatest challenges for contemporary practice is staying current with developing trends and approaches to our work, whether it be technology systems, developments in material and construction techniques, sustainability, or issues involving social and economic planning. Most firms have identified the need to be better connected to research that might enhance our work, yet few have the time or financial resources to do this on our own.
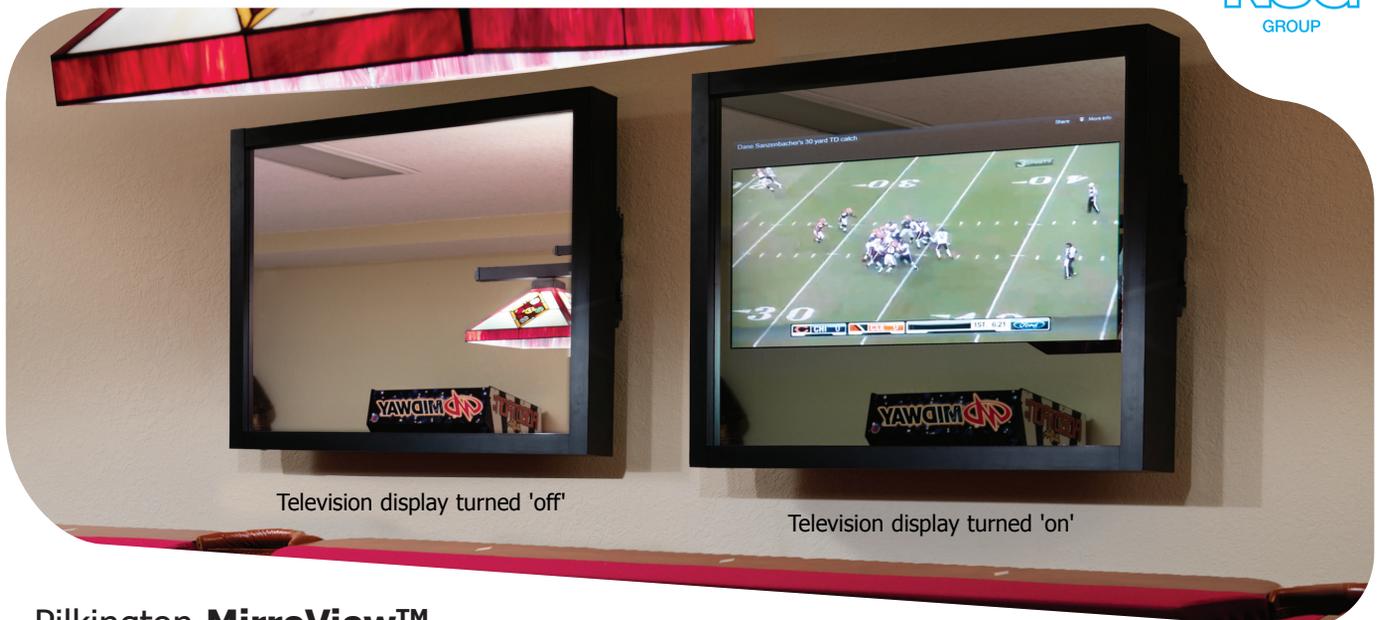
The School of Architecture at the University of Minnesota has developed a Research Practices Consortium where students can participate in research projects that expand the way we approach our work as practitioners. I propose that we try this model in Boston. The first step is to connect relevant research from participating local schools of architecture with practitioners through a portal on the BSA website. Following that, our committee aims to launch a new research-based internship program, which aspires to bring this body of research directly to local firms.

Students will have an opportunity to be sponsored as "research interns" and given the means to build on their academic work while learning how to tailor their interests to the needs of the practice and its clients. We see great potential in expanding the modes through which ideas are shared between academics and professionals.

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Correction: An article about public-interest design in the School issue of *ArchitectureBoston* misstated the name of the actor who plays Howard Roark in the film version of *Atlas Shrugged*. It is Gary Cooper, not Gregory Peck.

We want to hear from you. Letters may be sent to letters@architectureboston.com or mailed to *ArchitectureBoston*, 290 Congress Street, Suite 200, Boston, MA 02110. Letters may be edited for clarity and length, and must include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Length should not exceed 300 words.