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Principles Essential To The Renewal of Architecture

41 principles for architects to live by.

By Andrés Duany
Sep 15, 2003



In response to an age rife with social stress, driven by economies so powerful that the entirety of the natural world is decisively affected by the pattern of human dwelling; for a design profession confused by the esoteric and the transient, we set forth these principles:

It is essential that the discipline of architecture take substance from its own tradition and not be subjected to artistic or intellectual fashions. Architecture is not a consumer item.

It is essential that the language of architecture be in continual evolution but that it not fall under the thrall of short fashion cycles.

It is essential that architecture interact with the imperatives of economics and marketing but not be consumed by them. It is a role of the art of architecture to tame the savagery of commerce.

It is essential that architecture engage the supporting disciplines of engineering and sociology but not be enslaved by them

It is essential that certain critics -- those who do not possess the craft and experience of building -- not be granted undue influence on the reputation of architecture and architects.

It is essential that architects develop an unmediated voice

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By *Wally Siembab*

Aug 31, 2005

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[The Sky Is Not Falling On Cities](#)

By *Carol Coletta*

in the press, to explain their work themselves. (Architects should affect this demand by canceling their subscriptions to those publications that do not comply.)

It is essential to observe that participation in a permanent avant-garde is an untenable position that consumes those who do. Architects at the peak of their abilities must not be marginalized merely because their time of fame has passed.

It is essential to eliminate the humiliation of architects performing for the opinion of an absurdly small number of critics. Such critics are empowered only because they are recognized as such by the architects themselves. This problem does not apply to architectural historians, who earn their standing through research and documentation rather than through personal preference. Historians support the knowledge base on which architecture stands and from which it evolves.

It is essential that buildings be durable and mutable in balanced measure. This is crucial to the longevity required of urbanism.

It is essential that the design schools accept the responsibility of teaching a body of knowledge, and not attempt to incite individualism. Students should be exposed to the general vernacular and not just to the very few geniuses produced by each generation. Emulation of the exceptional does not provide an adequate model for professional training.

It is essential that the architectural schools be liberated from the thrall of sociologists, linguists and philosophers. Those who are primarily dedicated to other disciplines should depart to their own departments from which they can continue to educate architects in proper measure.

It is essential that the wall between history and the design studio be eliminated. History is to be a living continuum. The achievements of our predecessors is the basis of all human progress. Architecture cannot be the sole exception.

It is essential that students be exposed to the apprenticeship system. There has been no more effective method of learning architecture. Most of the finest buildings of all time were the result of apprenticeship.

Aug 25, 2005

Cities aren't in decline. The way population change is "measured" by the Census Bureau leaves much to be desired, writes Carol Coletta in this week's Op-Ed. But even if cities were in decline, a city's population is no longer tied to its economic success. What is ironic about these estimates and the misleading story of decline that has been spun around them is the fact that cities no longer have to grow big to grow wealthy. For the first time, according to research from CEOs for Cities, a city's population is no longer tied to its economic success.

[From NIMBYs To DUDEs: The Wacky World Of Plannerese](#)

By *Ric Stephens*

Jul 26, 2005

Ric Stephens has compiled a list of some of the wackiest -- yet at times quite realistic -- urban planning words, in a vocabulary he has dubbed 'Plannerese.' This week's Planetizen Op-Ed includes a selected glossary of the terms, in addition to 'A Modern Fairy Tale in Plannerese,' which looks at a typical planning issue through the humorous lens of planning jargon.

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It is essential to our communities that architecture be practiced as a collective endeavor and not as a means of brand differentiation in pursuit of the attentions of the media.

It is essential that architects retake responsibility for an urbanism that is currently abandoned to the statistical concerns of zoning, building codes, traffic and financing.

It is essential that architectural expression assimilate the cultural and climatic context, no less than the will to form of the architect.

It is essential that buildings acknowledge the character of a place. It also necessary to acknowledge the opposite: that architectural influence can travel along cultural and climatic belts to positive effect.

It is essential that architecture not become a pawn in the culture wars. It is a falsification of history to consider a style representative of this or that hegemony or liberation.

It is essential to see that architectural style is independent of politics. The most cursory observation will reveal that buildings and cities are neither democratic nor fascist; that they easily transcend the ideology of their creators to become useful and beloved to other times.

It is essential that buildings incorporate authentic progress in material and production methods, but not for the sake of innovation alone.

It is essential that architects harness those systems of production that make the best design available to the greatest number. Only those artifacts that are reproduced in quantity are consequential to present needs -- we have the challenge of large numbers.

It is essential that the techniques of mass production affect the process of building, but it is not necessary that they determine the form of the building, or the urbanism.

It is essential to engage the mobile home industry, the prefabrication industry, and the house plan industry. These are efficient methods to provide housing. The current low quality of their production is the fault of non-participation by architects.

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It is essential that architects endeavor to publish their work in popular periodicals. How else will the people learn?

It is essential that the techniques of graphic depiction not determine the design of the buildings. Computer-aided design must remain an instrument for the liberation of labor and not become a determinant of form. Because a shape can be easily depicted does not necessarily mean that it should be constructed.

It is essential to recognize that each building should be coherently composed. A building cannot be the simulacra of an absent urbanism. Authentic variety can only result from a multiplicity of buildings. True urbanism is the result of many designers working in sequence.

It is essential that traditional and contemporary architectural styles have equal standing, as they represent parallel, persistent realities. They may be used badly or well, but their evaluation should be on the basis of their appropriateness to context, and their quality, not to fashion.

It is essential to deny contemporary buildings dispensation for having been created in the so-called modernist era. They must be held to a standard as high as their predecessors'. After all, the means available to us are not less than theirs.

It is essential to acknowledge a preference for controls by known rules and properly constituted laws, rather than be subjected to the whims and opinions of review boards.

It is essential that architects work concurrently with landscape architects in the process of design. Landscape architects must in turn abdicate their preference for autonomous layouts. The ground is not a canvas and nature is not material suitable for an installation piece.

It is essential that architects, like attorneys, dedicate a portion of their time without compensation to those who do not otherwise have access to professional design.

It is essential that architects participate in the political arena so as to affect the built environment at the largest scale. It is disastrous to create policy without the participation of those without an adequate design education.

It is essential that architects debate those who through relativist argument undermine architecture's potential as a social and ecological instrument for the good. The academic imperative of weakening architecture and architects harms society.

It is essential that we not impose untested or experimental designs on the poor. The likelihood of failure in such cases has proven to be very great; and they are powerless to escape its consequences. Architects should experiment, if at all, with those wealthy enough to be patrons. They can afford to move out of their buildings if necessary.

It is essential to understand the difference between creativity, which we accept as a necessary and originality, which when pursued at all costs is destructive to architecture. The pursuit of originality condemns our cities to incoherence and the architect's life's work to unwarranted obsolescence.

Because so much of the craft of building has been lost, it is essential that architects allocate a portion of their time to its research and recovery; and to the sharing of the fruits of this endeavor by teaching and writing.

It is essential that the architectural vernaculars of the world be the subjects of systematic study and that they be models for the design process. Good, plain, normative buildings must again be available everywhere and to all.

It is essential that the analysis of everyday building not result in the conclusion that the people will accept only mediocrity. It is pandering to give them only what they already know.

It is essential that buildings incorporate passive environmentalism in siting, materials and the performance of their mechanical elements. Economic analysis alone will not reach this conclusion.

It is essential that architectural history include not just the form-givers, but the masters of policy. Talented students who are not seduced by form making should be exposed to these role models. Municipal policy and administration is sorely in need of their abilities.

It is essential that architects respond to context. If the context is not suitable, then the proper response is to

inaugurate one that is so. Not until this is common practice will the proliferation of architectural review committees cease to bedevil both good and bad designers.

[Andrés Duany, FAIA](#) is a principal of [Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company](#). He is a co-founder and member of the [Congress for the New Urbanism](#).

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