What is Architecture: by Liz at ArchiMash.com

Defining Architecture

At a basic level, architecture is commonly defined as the process of planning, designing and constructing buildings or structures.

By definition, a building is merely a structure with a floor, roof and walls. True architecture goes well beyond a mere building. Every architect seems to have a different definition of what architecture means to them.

It is important as a student and practitioner of architecture to start to develop your understanding and philosophies about what architecture is for you, both as a designer and an inhabitant of architecture.

So what is it that makes architecture, architecture?

By People

Without people, architecture would not exist.

Architecture is not a natural phenomenon. It is a man-made phenomenon that stems from the thoughts and ideas of the human mind. Without the human mind, thoughts of the possibilities of what architecture could be would not exist.

These thoughts and ideas would not be brought into reality without humans becoming excited and passionate about those ideas and taking action to turn them into something real, beyond an idea on paper or a vision in the mind.

Architecture is ultimately created by humans, for humans.

For People

Without humans to create and experience architecture it does not exist.

An architectural designer is designing and creating for the people who are going to use and **experience** the structures and spaces and places they create.

The key consideration at the core of every design must be the internal **experience** that the final architectural design and structure will create for the people inhabiting it.

Whether a designer is conscious of this or not, every design primarily affects the experience of people.

If you believe architecture is art, it will create an internal response in people, through the combinations of colours, materials, compositions and design elements and principles. Some people may love the result, some may not.

If you believe architecture is a political statement, it will create a response in people through confrontation and a clear agenda that supports certain ideals. Some people may agree and adhere to the ideals, some may not.

If you believe architecture is a social statement, it will create an internal response in people that makes them feel comfortable and like they belong and are connected. Some people may feel a part of something, some may not.

Every piece of architecture will create an internal response and experience in people.

Experience: Sensation, Thoughts, Emotions

Humans perceive their external environment and the architecture within it through physical sensation, thoughts and words, and emotions. Our internal experience comes as a result of what we perceive in the external environment.

We sense architecture through sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. We see the composition of design elements and principles in a unique visual and aesthetic experience. We touch and feel the materials, and smell the cold of the metal, the rain on the hot concrete, or the freshly sawn timber. We hear the echoing of stilettos on a timber floor or the clanging of a metal gate.

In response to these sensations, we have thoughts about what this means and give words to these meanings. We can consider architecture and design with an analytical and rational mind, and create thoughts and ideas about the meaning a particular space or place creates for each of us as individuals or as a society.

We experience emotions that energetically align with our sensations and thoughts. An emotional response will either feel good and make you want to stay, or it will feel not so good and make you want to go. Even no awareness of the architecture or a lack of an emotional response to it is a response.

Architecture as art may make you feel in awe, inspired, or excited. Or, shocked, repulsed or uninspired.

Architecture as a political statement may make you feel activated, confronted or disturbed. Or inflamed, passionate or aroused.

Architecture as a social statement may make you feel connected, accepted, or included. Or separated, isolated or outcast.

An experiential response to architecture is internal and personal to every individual, but it is the internal sensations, thoughts and emotions inside our bodies that is the human experience.

So how does architecture create a particular experience?

The Language Of Architecture

Every piece of architecture is created by the universal language of architecture. A language is created by the compilation of a series of elements and principles of architecture. These different combinations are evident throughout architecture and vary between different cultures, time and places. The fundamental design elements and principles are repeated, over and over, in different combinations to create different experiences.

These architectural design elements and principles have been identified by people looking at architecture and buildings and trying to make sense of it and bring some meaning and order and logic to the pieces and aspects of what makes architecture.

It is the considered use of these elements and principles that allows an architect to organize and consciously control the design decisions and outcome and the experience of sensations, thoughts and emotions in the inhabitants.

It is the absence and unconscious use of these elements and principles that allow an architect to unconsciously create something uncontrolled with little consideration of the experience of sensations, thoughts and emotions that their work will evoke in humans.

So how do we design for experience?

Memory

Personal, internal response and experience come from individual memory and the association people make with external environments. Certain environments and experiences will make you feel safe and secure, or peaceful or calm, or distressed and unsafe. It is impossible to determine how every human will interact with and respond to a certain piece of architecture.

Certain qualities in architectural space will evoke universal and collective responses and experiences in people.

A bright, light, open space lined in timber looking through openings to a view of a forest of trees can make someone feel safe and secure, calm, peaceful and connected to nature.

A small, cold, dark, enclosed, concrete box can make a person feel disconnected, isolated, alone, and fearful.

Regardless of what culture, time or place you come from, there are certain qualities of space that make you feel a certain way and evoke a particular response and experience. An architect has control over this, whether you are aware of this or not, and whether you like it or not. With this, comes responsibility.

Feeling Good or Bad

There may be times when a designer chooses to make a statement that creates controversy or confrontation in an attempt to bring awareness to something. It makes people talk and try to understand. It makes people feel uncomfortable, or on edge, and want to get away.

There may be times when a designer chooses to create a place of calm, relaxation and safety, where people want to stay forever.

The key is to understand what the general experience is that you are trying to achieve, and why? And then start to develop a design that will generate this response through a unique combination of design elements and principles.

There is so much pain and suffering in the world that unless there is a good reason, an architectural designer should want to create something that creates a positive experience that makes people feel good and enhances our lives and wellbeing, and improves what was there before.

So What Is Architecture?

Architecture can and is everything. It is and can be art, a political statement, a social statement, a functional space, a thing of beauty or ugliness, a haven, a language. At its core, it is a human experience. It does not exist as architecture without the human experience.

It is up to the architect and designer to determine the sensations the inhabitant will experience.

It is up to the architect and designer to determine the meaning of their architecture.

It is up to the architect and designer to understand the emotional response that their work is going to generate in people.

It is up to the architect and designer to decide if this is something that will contribute and add positive value to the world, and make the world a better place for the people who will experience their work.

Good architecture could be considered that which consciously addresses these issues.

Bad architecture could be considered that which unconsciously ignores these issues.

It comes down to personal experience.

Liz at **ArchiMash.com**