

DesignIntelligence®  
Quarterly

Multidimensional INTROSPECTION  
2021 Q1

# DesignIntelligence® Quarterly

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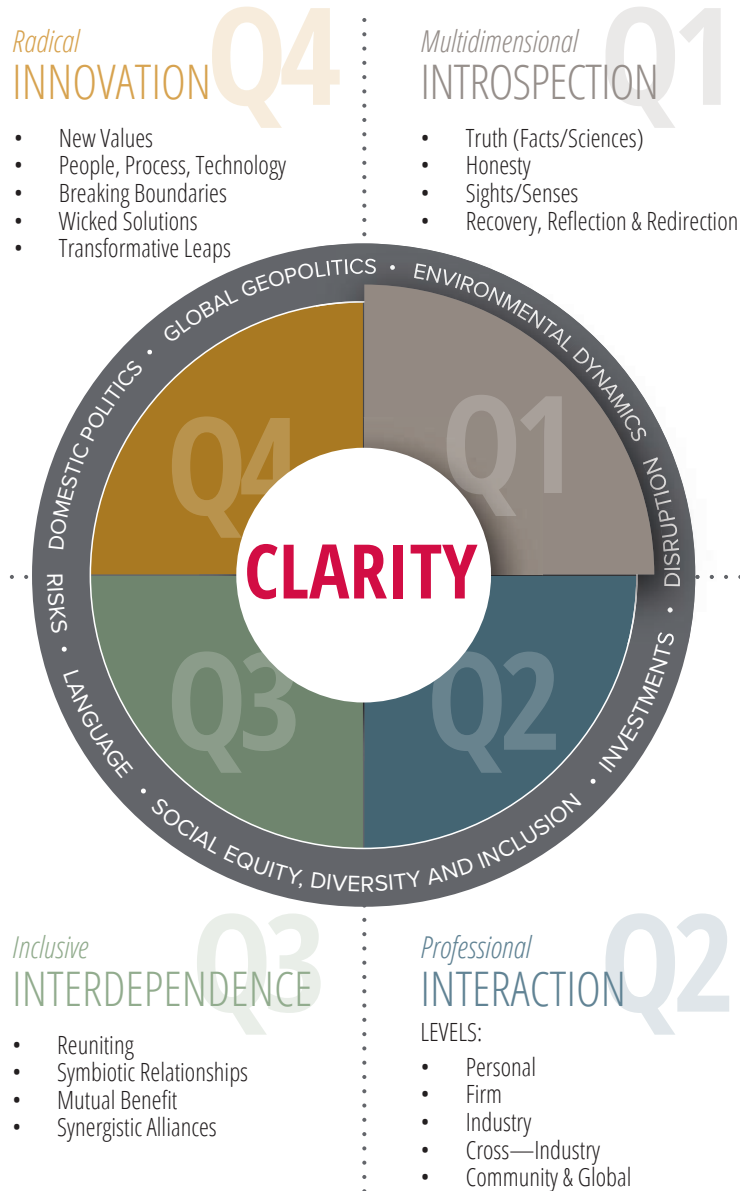
## CONTEXT: On Introspection

### THEMES

Three months into the new year, we are already heartened by many harbingers of hope. A new administration is in place in the U.S., functioning to rebuild unity. COVID—19 vaccines have been successfully deployed. The economy is showing signs of recovery. Despite ongoing political and social turmoil, things are looking up. This issue of Design-Intelligence Quarterly launches our yearly theme: CLARITY. To guide the shift from the mind—boggling events of 2020, our mission in 2021 is to seek the truth and approach certainty. Will we succeed? Time will tell.

To start the journey, we begin with a focus on Multi—dimensional INTROSPECTION in Q1, as depicted above. Q2 will take us outside our self—reflection to Professional INTERACTION. With whom and how can we grow by connecting in new ways? On an ascending scale from self, to team, to firm, industry, cross—industry, community and finally, globally, how can we better interact to solve larger problems? Can we relearn the skills to benefit from the wisdom of others? Can we learn to listen? Are we willing to be vulnerable? Have we created havens for trust and honest exchange? Parlaying this notion, in Q3 we build on Q2 to explore Inclusive INTERDEPENDENCE. Beyond mere interaction, can we strengthen the bonds and learn to rely upon one another? In Q4, based on the hope of increasing momentum, will we transcend the conventional by achieving Radical INNOVATION, the byproduct of new combinations of people, processes and tools with the power to make dramatic improvements?

### 2021 EDITORIAL ROADMAP





Themes we will continue to explore this year include:

- social issues — diversity, equity and inclusion
- public health and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic
- the ongoing technology revolution
- the political spectrum – changing domestic and global policies and impacts in a Biden administration
- environmental issues
- systems thinking and new scales and ways of working to solve bigger, more complex problems
- strategic business thinking and value propositions
- reforming professional education to meet new skills demands
- radical innovation – faster solutions to meet unanticipated problems

## CONTRIBUTORS AND CONTENT

What can you expect in this issue? More than a dozen leaders have contributed their mind— and soul—searching attempts to make sense of the road ahead by looking within. Dave Gilmore kicks off the collection with *A Culture Unsure*. My essay, “Looking In. Looking Out. Within You. Without You.” discusses a balanced perspective and offers tools for introspection and planning. Barbara Golter Heller’s candor in *Regaining Respect* examines fatal flaws in design professionals’ behavior that must be addressed. HKS’ director of organizational development Stevi McCoy confronts challenges in *Seeking Clarity*. EDSA leaders Scott LaMont and Eric Propes openly muse on their firm’s next—generation

readiness. In *Looking Backward, Moving Forward*, James Miner recounts Sasaki’s leadership transition. For an international perspective, read Paul Hyett’s ruminations on the challenges facing the new RIBA president: Brexit, the Grenfell Disaster and COVID—19 in the United Kingdom, in his essay, “The View From Here: ‘Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man.’” Drexel Dean Jason Schupbach reveals his ongoing passion in *Connecting Creatives*. Dodge Data & Analytics senior industry analyst Steve Jones’ interview entitled *The “30—Year Gut”* overviews successes, failures and potentials in retooling the AEC industry over three decades. NBBJ’s Kelly Farrell’s “*Inflexion Points*” looks at the timing and motivation behind a bold career move, along with observations on coaching and priorities.

Our closing feature, the second in a series, is *Parting Thoughts: A Conversation with Adrian Parr*. In this self—examination, the new dean of Oregon’s College of Design reflects on coming home and shares broad challenges for the global design community.

A final new feature, *People* introduces new DesignIntelligence team members.

We hope you enjoy it.

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*Michael LeFevre, FAIA Emeritus  
Managing Editor, DI Media Publications*



ESSAY

## A Culture Unsure

Design Intelligence<sup>®</sup>  
Quarterly



## DAVE GILMORE

President and CEO,  
DesignIntelligence

## A Culture Unsure

*DI's Dave Gilmore posits a new lingua franca for professionals in their quest for action, relevance and reinvention.*

In 2020, several preexistent dysfunctions across our culture were rapidly brought forward, exposed, elevated and ignited. These issues would have eventually found the light of exposure but the acceleration of so many at once has us on our heels trying to take them all in.

We described these movements as “crises” last year. What they really are societal disorders spreading uncertainty and disease across our culture. For as long as history has been recorded, discrimination, prejudice, marginalization and exclusivism have played central roles in wars, conflicts, riots and genocides.

At least since the Industrial Revolution, humankind's abandonment of responsibility towards the earth and its natural resources has grown to where we find ourselves today: a world depleted, polluted and marred.

In response, climate is revolting, with heat indexes that rise higher each year, air quality that diminishes at record levels, weather patterns that manifesting extremes not witnessed by prior generations, tides that rise higher and faster than any models predicted, destructive regenerative storms on land and sea occurring more often with greater ferocity and the list goes on.



The powers of language, image, sound and pervasive technology have combined to turn from good, better and best to become instruments of distortion, disorientation and dissolution. Reasonable people have set aside rationality to embrace misinformation as truth, to replace empirical fact with speculation and to deploy cursory perusal instead of rigorous research in the pursuit of truth.

Politics oscillates from extreme to extreme. Amid such gyrations, hyperbole replaces integrity, exaggeration displaces veracity and posturing kicks authenticity to the curb. The longer these conditions occur the more distorted they become. In time, the prior founding truths of society are no longer recognizable or deemed applicable. Retreating to isolated independence becomes the norm in a culture unsure. Interdependence, collegiality and collaboration lose the purity of their meaning when manipulated for political or marginalizing purposes.

### A New Lingua Franca

At DesignIntelligence, we believe the built environment industry must move from a reactive, knee—jerk posture to one of initiating action, responsibility and balance. We are promoting and encouraging a new dialogue to explore and discover an updated lingua franca for our industry. We affirm so much of what this industry has accomplished, and we will continue to, but we recognize the shortcomings undermining our collective relevance and the positive possibilities we could achieve. It's time for new definitions of old language to come forward. Take the word “value,” for instance. How has it been defined and used these past 50,



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*Each organization must confront what they're willing to change to ensure sustainable relevance. This involves honest introspection, not an inventory of rationalized excuses to avoid the pain of change.*

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25, or five years? It's become a word with many meanings, overused for promoting and selling, mis—used to posture supposed outcomes. In its overuse and misuse, it has devolved into a cliché – a word without distinction or a universally applicable meaning. To have meaning, we need specific, qualifying language. The value of what? To whom? In effecting change, language and metrics matter.

Our vocabulary must expand. We must learn to use new language. Our expressed influence must accelerate new equitable outcomes. Our skill sets and expertise must be refreshed and enlarged. Our perspective must be radically altered, broadened and transformed.

Many investing in new dwellings, spaces and gathering places are befuddled by the dynamics of 2020. Imagine holding millions of square feet of property now in question. Imagine the conflicts with banks, investors and tenants around cash flow, debt service and unmet pro forma expectations.



Imagine the anxiety of not knowing what to do when everyone is demanding you do something. Imagine bearing the cost in stress, relationship strain, employee anxiety, diminishing bank accounts and reputational assaults day in and day out with no one offering viable, rational, defensible solutions.

Who is coming alongside to offer these portfolio investors solutions that address their direct business challenges? I'll state it for the record, a building or building design is only a partial solution, not the full solution these folks are looking for.

Non—industry disruptors have figured this out and are moving into the built environment in droves to address real challenges with real, whole solutions — something the

native built environment hasn't done, leaving the door open for others to enter.

The future of the built environment industry continues to be uncertain. Misalignment is occurring across the broad landscape of professions and trades that make up this industry. Demographics are shifting at a head—swirling pace. Baby boomers, once thought to be rapidly moving to the exits, are not doing so in the numbers predicted. Many firm founders and principals are staying engaged for fiscal or mental health reasons. Younger generations are moving into leadership roles still needing experienced, seasoned mentors to support their risk—taking and new business models. Wholly new leadership structures are rapidly being devised and developed.

New equity sharing models are on the drawing boards to reward performance via nontraditional recognition. Lessons from admired non-built environment industries are being assimilated.

2020 was a year of re-posturing, mostly to react, cope, protect, survive and sustain. 2021 will be a year of transformation and reinvention. Some organizations will not survive. Some will cease to exist due to failed leadership and the absence of resilient business practices. Others will close their doors due to fatigue and cooled passion. Many will merge, hoping for new possibilities, while others will thrive, driven forward by new dialogue, delivery methods and demographics.

## Reinvention and Relevance

At DesignIntelligence, we posit that reinvention is triggered by the question of relevance. Much of what's being offered as value by built environment professionals is being questioned by newly altered buying markets. As such, buyers will look to alternative sourcing for solutions. Each organization must confront what they're willing to change to ensure sustainable relevance. This involves honest introspection, not an inventory of rationalized excuses to avoid the pain of change.

Meaningful introspection usually leads to new choices and different decisions. As you lean into your organization's search for certainty, we encourage you to view the future through an optimistic lens. Transforming your organization and what it brings to the market in this post-pandemic period just might result in you being the best and most effective you've ever been.

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*Dave Gilmore is president and CEO of DesignIntelligence*

ESSAY

**Looking In. Looking Out.**  
Within You. Without You.

DesignIntelligence®  
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**MICHAEL LEFEVRE**

Managing Editor, DesignIntelligence

## Looking In. Looking Out.

(Within You. Without You.)

*DI's Managing Editor, Michael LeFevre, examines the relationship of introspection and self-awareness to perspective and offers tools for plotting personal and professional journeys.*

## Keep It Loose. Keep It Tight.

When I was younger, I wasn't the kind of person that had it all mapped out. I enjoyed the freedom of being able to react to what life sent my way. But over the years I've learned the value of looking within as a springboard for mapping the personal journeys we call our careers and lives.

In the early days, I relished the freedom of being foot-loose and fancy-free. Let those other people take notes, schedule their days and plan. Nerds and teacher's pets, all of them.

When a friend called and suggested a spur-of-the-moment road trip, they'd have to say no. (They had homework or guitar practice.) Not me, I was loose — ready to avail myself of what life offered. Maybe I just knew who I was and where I was on my plan, but not likely.

In the years that have followed, to cope with more responsibilities, I've adopted a hybrid approach, one that alternates periods of reflective planning and contemplation with the freedom to be in the moment, allowing for serendipity, the whims of fate and surprise. It's worked for me.



I've only consciously decided a few significant things in my tenure on this planet. In hindsight, each of those decisions dramatically shaped who I am. Now in my seventh decade, I wonder why I didn't do it more often. In hindsight, periods of reflection, coupled with well-timed visioning and planning tools, armed me to make informed decisions.

## A Few Tools

In my late-to-the-party embracing of the value of planning and visioning, I've come to scavenge and stash a handful of tools along the way. Now, safely tucked away in my overstuffed cache of professional goodies — and having been shared with countless colleagues — I've come to treasure them. Since we're immersed in introspection, I'd like to share them with you. Here are my top tools for effective introspection, thinking, planning and action.

### 1. One Thing

In the film "City Slickers," Billy Crystal plays radio adman Mitch. Amidst a midlife crisis, Mitch and his city friends embark on a Wild West holiday driving cattle. There, they encounter Curly, a grizzled, cynical cowboy, portrayed masterfully by veteran movie curmudgeon Jack Palance. Enchanted with Curly's spirit, they inquire: "Curly, what's the secret to life?" "One thing!" Curly growls. "Okay, okay, what is it?" they plead. "That's what you have to decide," Curly snarls.

“

*Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.*

— John Lennon

Every book I've ever read on self-analysis reminds us: to know where we're going, we must begin by knowing who we are. What do we like? What are we good at — or not? Such self-audits or self-assessments are the point of beginning for self-direction, the essence of introspection. You look within. Useful in times of reflection and redirection, such inward looks are most useful following failure. In military parlance, an after-action review. Immediately after an event, good or bad, take time to debrief and analyze it. What worked? What didn't? Learn and advance to be better next time. What's your "one thing"?

## 2. Role Models

In searching for your "thing," it may be valuable to look to people. Consider your role models. Who do you admire and why? Specifically: parents, colleagues, celebrities, teachers? Which attributes do they have that draw you to them? Humility or bravado? Are they thinkers, leaders or doers? Assemble a collection of those you admire and analyze the qualities common to all. In those commonalities you'll find gold. Emulate their good characteristics. Shun the bad. Increasingly, you'll know who you are, who you are becoming and who you want to become. Use your role models to inform who you are and what you must do.

## 3. Start with Why

A variant of the Curly method and still one of the most watched TED Talk videos is Simon Sinek's presentation, "Start with Why." Sinek sagely advises: Don't ask what you do or who you do it for, start with why you do it. That will lead you to your answer — your "one thing."

## 4. SWOT Analysis

A classic introspective organizational analysis tool is a periodic analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, or SWOT. Do this in written form and as a group if you can. Based on the results, develop a plan to do something about what you learned. What must change? What should keep going?



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*No battle plan survives contact with the enemy. When your plan meets the real world, the real world wins.*

— Helmuth von Moltke

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## 5. Force Analysis

This classic decision-making analysis tool deconstructs larger questions into their smaller, more easily understandable constituent parts. At its core, it's simply a pro and con list with weighted factors. Facing a decision? Take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle. On the left side, list factors in favor of this course of action. On the right side, brainstorm and list forces pushing against this approach. Use the seven W's as a guide, i.e., who, where, what, when, why, how and how much? Then weigh the factors using a three-part "triage" metric to assess small, medium and large considerations. Beyond

the power of the list alone, the secret is to weigh the factors in relative terms, analyze them and do something as a result of the analysis — make an informed decision.

## 6. YouMap

Since we're talking about introspection, what better place to start than with yourself or with whomever you're coaching. What if we created a visual representation — a picture or graph — of you or them? Specifically, your capabilities in key areas. My own adaption of kite graphs, scatter graphs and rose diagrams as pioneered by process gurus such as W. Edwards Deming, et al., is called YouMap.



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*Setting a goal is not the main thing.  
It is deciding how you will go about  
achieving it and staying with that  
plan.*

— Tom Landry

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YouMap provides a visual plot of an individual's capabilities along multiple axes to guide reflection and freeze it as a snapshot in time. Current capabilities for design, technology, leadership and any number of other self- or firm-valued capabilities — both soft and hard skills — can be graphed. When done for current and desired future states, users can visualize their paths, target growth areas and make plans to achieve them.

## 7. SMART Goals

Having done countless personnel development reviews over the years, I repeatedly found one aspect lacking. We'd have a deep discussion of current status and desired states, but always ended without a plan to improve things. In my years developing people and teams, much

of our work took us into uncharted territory. There was no manual or rule book for Building Information Modeling (BIM). No job descriptions either. No one had ever done it before. We had to write them. Inevitably we'd meet and agree that improvement was needed in a category — say, technical software skills. Great! We agree you need to improve in a specific area. But what next? The conversation would end there. Jane wants to develop her prioritization skills and John want to become a better public speaker. Fantastic! Laudable goals, but how to achieve them?

Do we hope they miraculously appear? Wait patiently until some benevolent mentor drops them in your lap? No. To self-actualize your introspective findings and goals, you need a plan. A fine model I've used on many occasions is to develop a SMART Goals action plan, creating goals that are specific, measurable, actionable, reasonably achievable and time-based. Using a spreadsheet, simply list your goals, grouped by category. Next, under headings such as what, when and how, log whether you'll use a class, a book, online videos, personal discussions, on-project experience or other means to achieve each goal and by when. At the end of the year (or your next review period), tally the number of goals accomplished to give yourself a score. Then, update your plan and continue anew. Armed with hard data, you'll no longer have to rely on the vague wishes and regrets rambling around inside your head. You'll know. You'll have the metrics.



## 8. Visioning

Stepping back from management, tracking and metrics tasks, have we unleashed the power of dreaming? An old anecdote describes Jack Nicklaus before he steps up to the golf tee. With a graceful swing he strikes the ball. It flies skyward in an elegant arc, lands on the green and rolls into the cup. What was his secret? He envisioned it. He saw it in his mind in advance. More than once. Staying with the golf analogy, we recount the tale of a prisoner. After having been wrongly convicted and spending 10 years in the penitentiary, on the day of his release he returned to the golf course with friends. As they wrapped up play, his friends were amazed at his

four-under-par round. “I played 36 holes in my mind every day for the past 10 years,” he replied.

Visioning is a learned skill. With practice you can become better. In 2006, while attending the CIFE summer session at Stanford, I was privy to a session on visioning. There, we were taught to call on our senses for specific, vivid imagery while dreaming of future states. In your future dream state, who is in the room? What does it smell like, look like and feel like? Be specific. Like all good writing, be detailed: show, don't tell. As an outcome of having learned and practiced visioning at CIFE, my future vision for BIM and collaboration was featured by ENR as the cover story of their June 6, 2006 issue.



## 9. Annual Planning — “One Year at a Glance”

Years ago, management consultant Bill Bean, CEO of Strategia, shared a liberating idea. Rather than keep separate calendars for work and home, he coached us to integrate and keep just one. Even better, create a view of it that shows an entire year at a glance. With a year-at-a-time in view, it's easy, via color coding, to space out activity types. Using, for example, blue for work (including work calls and conferences), gold for family and friends (e.g., vacations, outings and holidays), green for self (health, hobbies, exercise, fun, meditation), and red for learning and spiritual development (planning, reading, church, community, growth), you can plan and block activities in desirable patterns. This technique leverages the science of LEAN visual controls and data compression to enable powerful visibility and thinking in annual cycles. Gone will be the days of being enslaved to day-by-day humdrum. You'll have considered a larger perspective and looked ahead. You'll have a plan and can live and be in the “now.”

## 10. Life Master-Planning — “The Ten-Year Plan”

Having embraced the one-year calendar and seeing the crest of my career ahead, in 2005 I decide to scale this technique and create a 10-year plan. In contractor parlance, I called it the 10-year look-ahead schedule. Each of us has predictable segments in our career arcs. Planning and logging recurring activities by putting them on a list removes their ability to live “rent-free” in your brain. You can forget about them and focus on the important things,

freeing time to live in the present and react to change. With categories for work, health, home, health, family, finance, travel, things (e.g., cars, computer, cell phone) and others, I was able to reasonably see, predict and plan for the road ahead. Again, I used a spreadsheet — valuing its freedom as infinitely flexible graph paper, sortable, hierarchical, editable and portable — to plan and track life. As I approached the original 10-year milestone, I extended the tool another 10 years to give conscious thought to the next decade of my reinvention (aka retirement.)

## 11. “Project” Scheduling

Regardless of size and complexity, there is never enough time to complete our projects. Having a sense of urgency is what makes them fun. Whether you're designing a roadmap for your team to attempt the daunting task of scheduling the messy process we know as design, or simply pre-thinking a different kind of life project, you need a plan. Even if you're just building a doghouse or planning a trip, the greater the degree you've considered in advance what it will entail, the better your chances for success. Scheduling is a core skill of anyone who considers themselves a project manager — the responsibility of advancing an objective from A to B.

Guess what? Your life is a project. Manage it. You're a professional. You've done this before. You DO know the steps. Go to a quiet place and rack your brain to list them all. Not just your activities. Include the tasks of all those you'll interact with to accomplish your project.





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*To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan and not quite enough time.*

— Leonard Bernstein

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Most important is the list. If you omit a step from your sequence, you will attempt to bake a cake without a key ingredient. To develop a good schedule, list activities first, then sort them into sequence; next, assign durations followed by dependencies. Allow for contingencies, surprises and new information. But what if you're wrong? Fine! No problem. Expect to be "wrong," because life will happen. But if you have done a schedule, you'll be miles ahead when called to update it or completely rethink it due to some external chaos event.

Schedules offer two other valuable functions. First, given that we never have enough time, they force us to create deadlines to manage with. As Leonard Bernstein suggests in his quote above having a sense of urgency is a powerful force. Second, having worked backward to list, sequence and fit activities within the deadline, you're a step ahead. You've at least considered how to proceed.

## 12. The Creative Process — and Critical Thinking

There are many classic models for the cyclical path of creating. The list easily begins with W. E. Demings' Plan/Do/Study/Act model. Feedback loops, systems thinking, iterations and rapid prototyping as discussed by experts such as Michael Schrage and inspiration, immersion, ideation, incubation and implementation as described by IDEO's Tim Brown and David Kelley are also proven models. Another classic, the scientific method, advises: 1) form a hypothesis, 2) design an experiment, 3) collect data, 4) analyze data and 5) draw conclusions.

This method may serve science well but is perhaps too structured and rigorous for the serendipitous free-flow and discovery of explorative design. For its simplicity and scant three components, my favorite is an amalgam of many design methods thinkers: collect, analyze, synthesize. By engaging in each subprocess in isolation, we focus energy acutely for better outcomes.

## 13. Sharing: The Sanity Check

Regardless of your interest in and use of any of these tools, the most important context for using them is perspective. After you've spent time within yourself, get outside yourself. Run your thinking by a peer, partner, mate, sibling, client or external expert sounding board of some kind. Without such sanity checks, you may stay mired in a vicious, self-defeating vortex — being unable to see your own forest for the trees.

## 14. Be Prolific. Shoot Often.

A final bit of advice is self-evident. Keeping your head down can be a strength, whether you are being deeply introspective or deeply productive. If you work hard, you'll increase your chances of coming up with a good plan because you'll have taken more shots. Keep shooting.

## Get In. Get Out. Keep Going.

Introspection is an act of beginning. It fills us with an honest assessment of where we are, an admission of failures and a recognition of strengths and opportunities. Introspection can be the spring point of determination to change, get better, defy the odds or set a plan. But after having looked within, we activate true potential when we recast our gaze to the world — and the people and context that surround us.

The idea is to alternate view, scale and direction. First inward, then outward. First backward, then forward. When we initiate a Janus-ian dialogue between ourselves and the outside world, we gain perspective. In looking in, we see and know ourselves. In recasting our gaze externally, we are “looking out” for others in two ways. First, in our attempt to see them, second in the sense of caring for and about them. The spaces between these alternating views become precisely the kind of clarifying moments we desperately seek.

When it comes to introspection, get in, then get out. Be looking, be thinking. Move from within yourself to without — iterating, thinking and doing. Use tools and other people when you need to. Plan, then adapt. If you can get better at knowing who and what you are, you'll have a much better chance of enjoying your journey — whether it goes according to plan or is lucky enough to be enriched with life's surprises. Enjoy it.

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Seeking Clarity

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## Seeking Clarity

*HKS' Director of Organizational Development, Stevi McCoy, discusses control, emotional intelligence, acedia, punctuated equilibrium, segmenting, the human spirit and hope*

### STEVI MCCOY

Director of Organizational Development, HKS

**DesignIntelligence–Michael LeFevre (DI):** Your role as director of organizational development at HKS seems crucial in coping with the issues we're facing. Did your training prepare you for what you're facing?

**Stevi McCoy (SM):** Honestly, I'm not sure any training could have prepared anyone for what happened this year! But my background in change management and communications was helpful in understanding what needed to happen and when.

With all the uncertainty COVID brought, I think it was the sudden lack of control that impacted people the most. Nobody knew what was coming next. It was a situation we'd never seen before, and we weren't sure how to navigate it.

Every day our teams wrestled with this duality of business—as—usual on one hand and almost paralyzing doubt on the other. In times like these, you take it one day at a time, identify what we know and admit what we really don't know.

There is great truth in F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous statement, "The true test of a first—rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

**DI:** I've always loved that quote.

**SM:** I do too because it's quintessentially human — this ability to live between two opposing forces and keep moving forward.



On one hand, we didn't know what the virus was doing or how the pandemic would affect our ability to deliver. On the other, we did know what our clients expected of us—what they needed. We did know our strategic plan. But to be able to navigate these truths at the same time and still function? That was initially our biggest challenge. We had to partition what we didn't know, double down on what we did and keep our eye on the work in front of us.

**DI:** That's a great observation — accepting the loss of control and scaling back what we know and what we can predict. We're so used to thinking, "I'm going to go to work tomorrow. There's going to be a football game on Saturday. I've planned for it a year in advance." But now, there's not.

**SM:** That's right, we were stripped bare of everything we thought we knew. Not only did we not know what we were dealing with, there was an added layer of misinformation. We had to sift through what was real and what wasn't, and that complexity made it difficult for our leaders to lead. It was a scarcity of knowledge in a sea of data.

**DI:** I'm not a psychologist, but I think the ability to "hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time and still function" relies on the executive function of the brain. Outside the brain, you have multiple executive functions, a daunting litany of things you're responsible for: organizational development, human potential, growing talent, leadership development, change management and internal communications strategies ... What background armed you for this range of domains?



**SM:** My degree is in organizational psychology, which essentially explores the human behavior element of business.

It's understanding people and equipping them to be the very best they can be. A business strategy is only words on paper unless competent, efficient and engaged individuals make it happen. Most of what I do boils down to understanding where we need to go as a firm and ensuring our people and teams have the skills and information they need to get there.

**DI: Most people I know in the design business didn't go there because they had good people skills. They were introverted. They liked to design and draw buildings. As someone who does have people skills, what attracted you to applying them within a design firm?**

**SM:** Relationships and opportunity. Knowing the CEO, Dan Noble, and the need the firm had at the time. Like most things in life, it was serendipitous — the opportunity came about, and I was excited to jump on board. Even though people are people, every industry — every company, really — is distinct. The design industry is no exception. It has its own unique DNA. At HKS, for example, there is an exciting creative energy. This sense of infinite possibility immediately intrigued me. But although the design industry is unique from others, the baseline needs of people and how we interact with each other — that's a constant across any team in any business.

**DI: Your firm recently had a major restructuring and reinvention. Your position was created as an outcome of**

**that. Has your mission changed as a result of COVID and the other concurrent crises?**

**SM:** No, we didn't change course, as much as double down on certain aspects. The strategic plan we executed two years ago had been in development for a while. One of its hallmarks was clarity. Clarity of communication, clarity of roles and responsibilities. Applying a level of clarity gave us significant traction in our strategy.

Even in the face of COVID, we continued to ask ourselves, "What am I uniquely poised and equipped to provide to the firm? What is our vision, the clarity of execution, how are we going to get it done and how are we going to organize ourselves to make it happen?" I would say COVID just increased the urgency of our mission.

**DI: Your answer is well timed, because after a bewildering, befuddling year, clarity is our editorial theme for 2021. Can you share some of the challenges? Working from home, managing personal lives? Have you found clarity?**

**SM:** We've compared this year to an evolutionary concept called punctuated equilibrium.

**DI: Another of my favorite ideas.**

**SM:** It's one of mine too. It's a biological theory that says along a relatively static period there are moments of extreme environmental disruption that make it impossible to continue in stasis. We've experienced just that.



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*By deconstructing the problem,  
you see the pieces in a way you  
hadn't before.*

Not more than a month into the pandemic, we knew that some aspects of our pre—COVID life would never be the same. We would be forced to evolve.

In March, when COVID—19 first impacted our firm, 1,400 people across our 24 offices literally went remote overnight. It was astounding.

We were shocked at how fast we could make it happen. It was a testament to our teams, especially our IT group, for making it so seamless. But this was just the first step in our adaptation.

Equipment and connectivity, fine: we got those. Our next biggest challenge surfaced working parents. Because not only

did we go home, so did the kids. We have a fair number of working parents at our firm who, overnight, were not only working from home, away from their teams, but were also suddenly expected to be homeschool teachers. Parents were tag—teaming trying to simultaneously teach, parent and work.

How can we support these parents? I told one person, “I wish I could somehow babysit everybody’s kids for them during the day.” And the disruption rippled beyond our working parents. Even if you didn’t have children at home, it was a good bet someone on your team did. In the beginning we tried to have fun with it. How can we virtually help keep the kids entertained once virtual learning was done for the day? We created children’s content.

We talked about schedule flexibility. Before, when people were working remotely, they felt like they had to always be online. So, we looked at flex scheduling.

Early in the crisis, we realized this wasn't a temporary disruption, it was irrevocable change. But rather than think of it as a loss, we turned it into opportunity. Through regular surveys, we learned about this new way of working and identified what we needed to be successful in this new environment.

We created a flexible work policy that will outlive the pandemic and become our new way we work. We've been able to take the good things we've learned and evolve in ways we never dreamed of.

Now that we're nearly a year in, our biggest challenge will be combating burnout. The reality is, we're no longer working where we live — we're living where we work. That's a big difference. We've been in this continuous "crisis" mode for 10 months. It's not sustainable. Although many things are beyond our control, a big part of our focus in the coming months will be helping our people find a more measured pace— even amidst the chaos.

**DI: So many mid—course adjustments and reactions on your part at the individual level. Did any of them necessitate change at a structural level? For example, did you ever consider saying, "Okay, Jane, you're a fantastic landscape architect, but we have a new need. We're going to open up a daycare division and we're going to pay you a great salary to run it"? Did you consider anything like that?**



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*the word acedia ... an ancient term that describes a general feeling of angst, unrest or ennui. It's an uncomfortable impatience that seems like depression, but it's not ... I thought, "That's it! That's what I'm feeling." ... Being able to describe what's going on in your heart and head and share it with your family is curative.*

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**SM:** The daycare thing's a good idea, Michael. I'll have to take that into consideration. Structurally, one of the big hurdles we've faced is working in an environment that is physically removed from everyone — clients, colleagues, team members.

This change pulled back the curtain and allowed us to see things we might have taken for granted.

We realized the physical, in—the—office environment might have created blind spots for us as far as productivity and equity were concerned.

When the visual connection — that casual, organic chatting with people, passing—by—someone’s—desk information sharing — was gone, structurally, we lost something. Not just the information sharing, but things like quality control, timely, effective feedback, mentoring and client nurturing. Suddenly, these things had a spotlight on them, because we weren’t able to say, “Oh yeah, they’re productive, I see them working,” or “Oh yeah, they’re working right next to us, we’re mentoring.”

Maybe we weren’t. Maybe we weren’t managing our clients in the most effective way. Maybe our quality control wasn’t as systemic or effective as it could be. Maybe we weren’t giving feedback in a way that grew our people. We thought we were, but, stripped of that physical contact, a lot of things came to light. We had to deconstruct something we thought we knew well and build it back up in a purely digital space.

**DI:** Good word, deconstruct. I’ve had to adopt that strategy in the past. In looking for the next department manager there wasn’t a single ideal person with all the necessary qualities and skills. To solve the problem you analyze the need, break it down and build it back up from constituent parts, not necessarily all from the same person. After deconstructing, you build a team, a hybrid or matrix solution.

**SM:** By deconstructing the problem, you see the pieces in a

way you hadn’t before. You asked about structural changes. We were forced to rethink our communication channels. Not just pushing out communication, but just as importantly, bringing it back. Since the organic back—and—forth was gone, the big question became, “How are we making sure that our people are equipped with the information and knowledge they need?”

Starting in March, we implemented biweekly surveys, hosted regular “listening conversations with leaders,” introduced anonymous feedback channels and provided education to our leaders on things like “asking powerful questions” and “empathetic listening.” We amassed an incredible amount of data and knowledge about our teams’ physical, mental and environmental well—being. What we learned helped us develop additional training on leading hybrid teams, digital collaboration and conflict resolution. This summer, when the questions of diversity, equity and inclusion came to the fore, we focused on how to equip our leaders with the facilitation skills to handle these tough issues.

**DI:** We’ve talked about the individuals and leadership in the firm. As a “people” professional, there must be huge pressure on you now. I’ve always respected people who do what you do for a living because I didn’t want to deal with personal trauma and psychological issues. That’s why I chose to draw bricks and deal with inanimate objects. How are you holding up? Any tips to share?

**SM:** Self—care is important in times like these. Like everybody, I take it one day at a time.



That's challenging, because I'm a future—focused person at heart. But when you lose a reliable pattern to imagine the future, you're forced to take things a day at a time. You live in the present because that's all you have.

Before COVID I was never an overly scheduled person. That flexibility served me well until now. But with all the uncertainty, I've adopted stricter guide rails. I don't just slip into work. I have a start time for the day. Depending on when meetings end, I try to have a specific log—off time. It's important to have that kind of schedule predictability in your day, so I can have dinner and spend time with my family. I might log on later in the evening, but I need to put a firm stake in the ground and say, "This is my life time," because, if you don't clarify the lines, everything gets

blurred. You're neither working nor living as well as you can.

Also, simple human connection is good for the soul. Just reaching out and allowing yourself to be real and vulnerable with others is a powerful antidote to the isolation we're all feeling. A few months ago, I stumbled across the word *acedia*. It's an ancient term defined as a general feeling of angst, unrest or ennui. It's an uncomfortable impatience that seems like depression, but it's not. A lack of fulfillment, a wandering of the heart, an inertia you can't shake. When I discovered the word, I thought, "That's it! That's what I'm feeling." It was oddly therapeutic to find a defined "diagnosis" for what I was experiencing. When you can define exactly what you're feeling and say, "This is what I'm going through. Are you going through this too?"







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*It's easy to say diversity yields better solutions and we need everybody's vantage. Yes, we do need everybody's expertise and unique skill set at the table. But that type of higher—level collaboration isn't always easy. To do it well takes empathy, patience, self—awareness, humility and deft communication.*

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It gives you a sense of comfort and connection. Being able to describe what's going on in your heart and head and share it with people around you, whether via Zoom or with your family, is curative.

**DI:** Are you talking about defining feelings or defining a work product since we don't know where we're going long term?

**SM:** Both. This situation — the last 10 months — has not

only made it okay to talk about feelings, it's almost made it impossible not to. Without the barrier of a physical office, we are bringing our true selves to the table, glimpsing kids and spouses in the background of Zoom, seeing each other in sweatshirts and ball caps. I think being authentic and vulnerable with each other has helped us get through this shared crisis. It helps us work better. But getting real can be disarming and uncomfortable for some people.

I worked with many leaders this year who were in a zone they had never experienced before. Not just COVID—related stuff, but also the vulnerability we've been asked to experience, admit and share. The racial tensions that happened this summer only added to it. It's okay to feel depressed. It's okay to feel fear. It's okay, as a leader, to not know all the answers. But we have to realize that although we're all in the same storm, we're not in the same boat, so it is critical that we ask questions to understand where the other person is. That is something they don't necessarily teach you in business or design school.

Those are things that aren't typically brought into work, but the cataclysmic shifts in the way we work have demanded it. I think this is a change that will last long after the pandemic crisis is over.

**DI:** Let's look backward. You've been in your role a while. I've been in this business for five decades. We were taught in school to practice as lone geniuses. We've convinced ourselves we are creative, collaborative people, but were never taught how to collaborate. Have you seen that with your staff, and if so, how do we fix it?

**SM:** The problem with the lone—wolf approach is that it leaves so much potential on the table. I know that approach is taught in school, and people really dig into it. Maybe the thought is when you're in school, there's a certain amount of self—actualization that needs to happen, digging deep within yourself, changing the way you think. These are valuable processes that aren't necessarily collaborative in nature.

Collaboration is critical, though. Because as we go forward, the complexity required for integrated design solutions cannot be achieved through one person's skill set, experience, world view or expertise. As individuals, we bring a dynamic, unique perspective, which is wonderful. But the best solutions come from true collaboration and a mosaic of diversity.

It's easy to say diversity yields better solutions and we need everybody's vantage. Yes, we do need everybody's expertise and unique skill set at the table. But that type of higher—level collaboration isn't always easy. To do it well takes empathy, patience, self—awareness, humility and deft communication. I cannot stress that enough.

And you can teach those things in school. As technology and AI become more sophisticated, they will increasingly commoditize a lot of the work we do. That leaves emotional intelligence as our key differentiator. Patience, self—awareness, humility — all those elements fall under the umbrella of emotional intelligence. At the core that's what makes us human.

If we can cultivate humanity that cannot be replicated by technology and develop those skills early in school — not just as a nice—to—have but as an imperative, as a requirement for how we approach design — that will make us better designers.

**DI: A fine aspiration. It remains a mystery to me. Maybe it's the artistic heritage and education, but why are designers still continuously ascending on their self—actualization scale, when in most other businesses and industries students find out who they are in school, get out and quickly become a managers and leaders? That's comes much later and is harder to develop in designers. I'm glad to hear you acknowledging it, and I think the schools are beginning to make that shift.**

**SM:** I think so too. The shift from self—actualization to a more outward, client and team—focused posture isn't just picking up speed in schools, it's also quickly moving into practice. To truly collaborative design that involves all stakeholders — from the design team and clients to communities, and even the environment.

**DI: I just made a connection to what you talked about earlier. Driven by COVID, we've had to learn the willingness or vulnerability to say, "I don't need to control this issue, this design, whatever. I can ask my staff or my client for help. And that's okay. It's not about me." What are you worried about? What are you hopeful about?**

**SM:** The thing that concerns me, even beyond the immediate health and economic threats, is that the way of life we've

been forced to adopt because of the pandemic will become entrenched.

**DI: Do you mean due to COVID and political divisiveness?**

**SM:** All of it, really — and our behaviors in response. For the past 10 months, we've been sheltering in place, isolating ourselves, engaging with others on the same screen we use to enjoy Netflix.

In addition to the devastating human loss, we've also lost a fundamental piece of our community — the places we gather in, fellowship, physical togetherness. Although we miss it (probably more than we realize), I fear we will adapt to our new normal so much, we'll gradually stop missing it at all. What concerns me is we'll become complacent and feel like we can get along without tight—knit community, without people, and our behaviors will gel in a way that isn't good for the health of our society. Science says that it takes an average of two months to form a habit. We've been at this for much longer — and when the vaccine starts to demonstrably diminish infection rates, I hope our reclusive habits diminish too.

But that's where I'm hopeful. It's encouraging to see the design innovation springing up out of this moment — not just at HKS, but in the industry overall. When I reflect on the last year, I'm encouraged by the resilience of the human spirit. Resilience became the word of the year. It's the ability to bounce back regardless of what comes at you. To bounce back stronger than you were before. Even in the most divisive and uncertain times, humans persevere.

My faith gives me this hope. Hope that no matter how bad or hopeless things seem, things will work out.

It's funny, going back to the F. Scott Fitzgerald quote, when he talks about the ability to hold two opposing ideas in tension, he goes on to say how it's possible to "see things that are hopeless yet be determined to make them otherwise."

**DI:** Maybe when we get back to being able to control things, we can make it a point to rebuild your concern. If we are resilient, there will be a pent—up demand for community. Movie theaters and cruise ships will be full again.

**SM:** I hope so. I can't wait to travel again! I suspect when we get back a sense of normalcy and predictability, when that fear goes away, we can once again focus on other things, like rebuilding our community. Design can have such an incredible impact on imagining what this "rebuild" will look like. That's hopeful. The innovation that came and will continue to come out of this moment. The ways we've been stretched and the dormant muscles we've learned to flex. That's exciting.

**DI:** Hope, community, innovation and flexing muscles ... great thoughts to end on.

*Stevi McCoy is director of organizational development at HKS, an interdisciplinary global design firm with 24 offices worldwide. She brings over 20 years' experience in strategic communications, people engagement and business optimization.*

*With a singular focus on growing talent and maximizing human potential, Stevi's core areas of expertise are leadership development, change enablement and culture transformation. She has designed and implemented organizational effectiveness programs for firms large and small across multiple industries including hospitality, healthcare, architecture & construction, financial services, and sports & entertainment.*



A dark, atmospheric photograph of a forest. The scene is dominated by evergreen trees, with a winding road visible in the lower half. The road has a double yellow line in the center and a white line on the right side. The background is a dense, misty forest, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall color palette is dark and muted, with shades of grey, black, and deep green.

# Looking Back, Going Forward

DesignIntelligence<sup>®</sup>  
Quarterly



## JAMES MINER

CEO, Sasaki

## Looking Back, Going Forward

*Sasaki CEO James Miner reflects on a 70—year firm evolution, a 10—year transformation, understanding history, expanding disciplines, the quest for diversity and next—generation leadership.*

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** Your firm recently underwent a transformation. New positions, new vision and other changes. Have those adaptations helped you cope with COVID and the other issues that have come to the fore this year — political, social, economic and environmental?

**James Miner (JM):** It's been a decade—long process. The outward expression of that transformation has only been noticeable over the past year or so after we highlighted our updated mission statement and design culture on our new website. But there's been a tremendous amount of internal work, reflection and coordination to get to where

we are today. The driving force behind all this change has been a strong desire for increased collaboration and support for one another, especially among firm leaders.

Firm leaders at Sasaki today want to work together, share ideas and even share credit for the work. The past model forced firm leaders into competition with one another under the “eat what you kill,” “seller/doer” principal model. That model is a challenge for anyone that excels at one aspect of building the business but not the others. As a result, the firm leadership was more homogenous than it is today. We have been actively working to identify other skills firm leadership can provide and value.

For example, are principal leaders working to advance the diversity of the firm, engaging with others to achieve the highest quality design or actively sponsoring the next wave of firm leadership? When you only measure performance by revenue and profit, these skills are not incentivized.

I wish I could tell you we've figured it all out, but this is still a work in progress even after working at it for several years. That we've been having these conversations is a critical first step. It also laid the groundwork for not only surviving the past nine months but continuing to take on major initiatives that respond to all the political, social, economic and environmental issues that have grown in importance throughout the pandemic. As a partnership, we've been building trust so we can take on tough issues together.

Doing this in person is hard enough and doing it over Zoom while working from home has been even harder. But because we have emphasized collaboration and a sense of openness among our leadership, we've been able to move ahead despite these challenges. Since COVID struck last spring, we've taken on initiatives around systemic racism, gender diversity and inclusion. We've opened a new office in Denver to be able to serve our clients at a time when travel has been restricted.

And, we're in the early stages of moving our main office into downtown Boston, which we see as an opportunity to totally transform our work environment to reflect new ways of working we expect will remain with us even after the pandemic is behind us.



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*rather than taking all those profits home in your pockets, you can invest those earnings in less profitable, but more rewarding and meaningful work.*


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**DI: Have any aspects not worked out as planned?**

**JM:** One of our biggest challenges has been around diversity, especially at the leadership level. In terms of gender, Sasaki has more women than men. The problem is distribution — considerably more women than men among our employees with 10 years of experience or less, but far more men than women among senior employees. This creates a gap in role models for women seeking to advance their careers at the firm and a sponsorship gap for emerging female leaders. This has led to retention challenges and a continued imbalance between men and women at the top levels of firm leadership, even though we have promoted more women to the role of principal than in the past.

One key lesson learned is that sponsorship is critical to success.





Men will often reflect back on their ascent to leadership and pride themselves on surviving several “sink or swim” moments when they were thrown in front of clients, given an opportunity to make an important presentation, or handed a key client relationship and told not to screw it up. What we men fail to realize is that someone else — most likely another man — had enough trust and faith in us to throw us into the water in the first place. Too often, that same trust is not given to our female counterparts. As a result, they don’t get the same chances to shine. Without deliberate sponsorship across gender boundaries, the development of a more diverse leadership group can’t succeed. And gender is only one aspect of diversity — racial diversity requires even more attention and

thought, because our industry lacks diversity and the skills, experience and sensibilities to deal with those issues.

**DI: Having had time to reflect during this past year, what adjustments are you contemplating?**

**JM:** We are in the middle of two major diversity initiatives at Sasaki, one focused on gender and inclusion, the other on what it means to actively be an anti—racist organization. The latter is long overdue, and the events of the past year have taught us we need to be doing more to support racial diversity and equity not only in our organization, but in the work we do.



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*A lot of people want to change everything, but don't have the patience to understand why things are the way they are ... it's important to understand history and why things happened, even if you disagree. You have to ask, "Why did that happen? Why was it done that way?" ... That's something the next generation has to work on.*

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It's going to take a lot of work to do this right — there is no “quick fix.” We cannot shrug our shoulders at the data. There are simply not enough people of color coming out of design schools. We have to figure out how to introduce more people of color to the design profession earlier, so the talent pipeline grows more diverse over time. We cannot blame our networks for lacking diversity; we have to expand them to be more diverse. We cannot point to our clients' lack of diversity as the reason we do not take on more socially responsible work; we have to be more selective about who we work with and the projects we take on. As hard as all this sounds, it won't be long before those who don't take on these issues in a meaningful way will starve for relevancy.

**DI:** Sasaki is considered a top landscape design and planning firm. Have you considered expanding your range to explore more “dimensions?” Design disciplines, skill sets, expertise, partnerships, alliances and diversity of all kinds?

**JM:** This question touches on part of our firm's identity we have been working hard to change. Sasaki's position in the marketplace is largely shaped by our prominent reputation around landscape architecture, planning and urban design. What's interesting is that architecture has been a part of the firm since it was founded in 1953, but it's not known well enough. Part of Hideo Sasaki's legacy in the design industry is his belief that landscape architecture, planning and architecture should be considered as equals — that design should be integrated and informed by the land and the environment.

In his mind, the best buildings were designed to be part of the landscape, not the other way around. In the early days Hideo collaborated closely with Pietro Belluschi, then dean of the architecture school at MIT, while Hideo ran the landscape program at Harvard. Within the first 10 years of creating his own firm, Hideo hired Ken DeMay, who was the assistant dean at the Pratt Institute School of Architecture in New York City, to build an architecture practice within the firm. This was all in support of Hideo's multidisciplinary approach to projects that involved planners, urban designers, architects, landscape architects and civil engineers. Sasaki has continued to include all these design disciplines ever since.

As the firm evolved, our architecture practice became siloed into two distinct practice areas: higher education and corporate interiors. Ten years ago, we made a commitment to embrace our roots and make sure all our design disciplines are represented in each market we serve. That meant we needed to expand our architecture practice to be able to take on mixed—use urban typologies where a lot of our planning and landscape efforts had been focused, in addition to continuing to build our already—robust higher education practice. We're also actively working on building our capacity to do science and technology projects, which has been and will continue to be an important market segment.



**DI:** In a world where cities, public spaces and workplaces are crying out to be transformed in response to new demands, does your business model need to transform? Are you looking to new forms of engagement, compensation, value and incentives to support bigger problems — in response to the forces of change affecting professional services models of the past?

**JM:** That sounds like a loaded question — everyone should always be examining and modifying their business model! In a recent conversation with one of my mentors, he used the analogy of drilling for oil to explain the importance of constantly evolving one's business. As he put it, those who are simply in the business of extraction will eventually run out of oil and will have to shut down their drills and go find something else to do. What this means is if we just focus on one thing — one market, one area of practice or one way of working — we will eventually go out of business. Firms that focus on extraction don't survive for a hundred years. Firms that keep moving, adapting and evolving do.

So, the short answer is yes. The longer answer includes efforts to recalibrate employee engagement, professional development, mentoring and sponsorship. It includes re—examining executive compensation and incentives to make sure the right value sets and behaviors are being rewarded. It has also included increasing the amplitude, scope and influence of our nonprofit arm, the Hideo Sasaki Foundation, to more meaningfully engage with the communities we serve.

**DI:** Design professionals continue to impact only a small percentage of the built environment. What are the obstacles to being more successful, more valued and leveraging what we do to have more impact over a broader spectrum?

**JM:** Part of the reason design professionals only impact a small portion of the built environment is that design is a privileged endeavor. Often, only the most elaborate projects can afford a full team of design experts. Even when a project budget can afford a nationally or globally renowned design firm, it still takes an enlightened client to want to bring in additional consultants to focus on other critical elements such as environmental resilience or community engagement. Publicly funded projects that focus on these topics, on the other hand, tend to be woefully underfunded. One way to counter this is to accept that some areas of practice are more profitable than others. But rather than taking all those profits home in your pockets, you can invest those earnings in less profitable, but more rewarding and meaningful work. For anyone worried about the economics of this, consider the cost of declining retention rates. It is increasingly true that your best and brightest talent will likely go elsewhere if they feel their work is not meaningful.

Another obvious challenge is being in the service industry. Traditionally, a big part of any firm's revenue comes from responding to RFPs, which limits our influence on the direction of our work from the onset. The key here is to invest in pro bono work, research and PR that reflects our firm's values.



That can lure prospective clients with similar value sets into a way of working together that is less project—specific, and more about a relationship. Longstanding client relationships are more like partnerships, and that is where real change can occur.

**DI: What environmental issues do we need to tackle first? Should design professionals become political activists? Most of us are not inclined to do that — we like to do design work. Any thoughts?**

**JM:** Like it or not, politics are no longer taboo in the workplace. We all have to get more comfortable stating our positions and making space for others to state theirs. It's less about political activism and more about participation. Ask your teams the tough questions being debated on the political stage and make it safe for people to express their honest opinions.

The climate crisis has to be at the top of everyone's mind, so engaging in open dialogues about how your work is or should be influenced by climate concerns is a great first step. Where does your firm stand on climate change, and how does it inform the work you do? Would you be willing to design an airport? Would you be willing to stop using concrete in all your buildings? Have you had a conversation in the office about the Green New Deal? How about climate equity?

These conversations can be important learning opportunities for everyone, so you don't have to be an activist to engage. No matter where you or your firm stands on any

of this, you'll have great ammunition on hand for conversations with your clients when these issues come up. And they will come up.

These kinds of discussions will do more than provide fodder for client discussions. Because the environment is such a broad topic, it can be hard to know where to start and overwhelming to try to solve everything. But every design firm can do something, whether it is sourcing more local materials, finding ways to integrate renewable energy sources or developing creative adaptive reuse strategies for existing buildings.

**DI: What are you proud of?**

**JM:** Looking back, I'm proud of the firm leadership transformation. The people who built the firm and preceded me had a very different set of priorities. Not that they were wrong. Times change, people change, leadership styles change and some leadership styles are appropriate for different periods of time. You can't take somebody who ran a firm one way 20 years ago and put the same leadership style in place today. That doesn't work. I was in the awkward middle, in the Gen X bridge between the Gen Ys and the boomers. It's been an interesting orchestration.

It was awkward because I was trying to learn from our former CEO, pay respect to the leadership that preceded me, while also trying to listen to a very different side of the firm that was emerging and get through a transition period. It took until 2018 before we finally clicked. It's been a long time. That was the real transition.

Now the firm is evolving because there's a way of working in a dialogue among the leadership that gets us through challenging issues together — as opposed to second-guessing and back-channeling. Interestingly, the challenges brought on by the pandemic and other social and political crises in 2020 ended up brining the firm's leadership closer together — I think we all realized these issues were bigger than any one of us could take on alone. We needed each other to get through it all.

**DI: What were the secrets to your weathering that storm?**

**JM:** It's not that any of those who preceded me did something wrong. A lot of people want to change everything but don't have the patience to understand why things are the way they are. It's not that change is bad. I love change. I love pushing and doing things, but it's important to understand history and why things happened, even if you disagree. You have to ask, "Why did that happen? Why was it done that way?" And understand it still has value. That's something the next generation has to work on.

Change agents say, "We should do this, or we should do that." And I say, "Would you like to hear how we did something similar five years ago, and why it didn't work." Not to say it's not relevant now, but let's learn from that lesson and do better this time. Let's appreciate that it's been tried before. That kind of patience and due diligence is missing in a lot of folks' skill sets to understand how things got where they are before they jump to where they should go.

**DI: It may be an inherent character flaw of those of us inclined to be change agents. We assume "new" equals "good" and dismiss the past.**

**JM:** Well, as they say: Patience is a virtue. When there's an opportunity for change, the way to do that is to embrace and learn from people with different perspectives and then make the changes together, understanding it's not going to be easy to get it all done in one day or by one person.

**DI: Does embracing history, context and gradual change imply incremental change and not revolution?**

**JM:** Correct. Our change was not a revolution. A revolution would have been too disruptive. There were revolutionary moments, though. Our former CEO retired fully in 2013, and there have been moments ever since that I have had strong instincts about what to do that were countered by a sense that I didn't have enough experience to fully trust those instincts.

Those feelings were especially present in the early stages of our leadership transition, when we essentially had a three—CEO model. We had a leader for each of our core practice groups and together we formed the Executive Committee, which was equivalent to a board of directors at most other firms. I also had an added responsibility as chair of the executive committee, but without title. From a legal perspective, I was also the firm's president, but also did not carry that title. Rather, the three practice group chairs were all referred to as managing principals.

In addition to running the firm, the three of us were expected to maintain a full practice. Let's just say that model didn't work ... not only was it bad for my health given the stress of all the hats I was wearing, it was less than ideal in terms of developing and maintaining a strategic direction for the firm at an important point in our evolution.

Fortunately, I was self-aware enough to know that we were going to need some outside help to guide us through the transition. We formed an external advisory committee who helped us understand that the next generation of firm leadership was looking for a new way of working: they wanted to collaborate and be part of a team. To achieve this, we were going to have to let some of our more prolific rainmakers go, because they had developed under a different model that incentivized individual performance over collaboration. That was in 2014, and it was a revolution moment.

Our next step was to name a number of new principals, a majority of whom were women to begin to address a gender gap in our leadership. And so, from 2015 to 2018 we thought we were on our way. We'd created this new philosophy around collaboration; we'd established new leadership; and we'd expanded female leadership in the firm. But then, several of female leaders started to leave and we wondered, "What's going on?" It didn't take long before we realized that we had not done all the right work on the sponsorship of our women leaders.

**DI: They had position but lacked authority and support?**

**JM:** Yes. That's how it felt to them, and that's how it played out, despite our best intentions. Reflecting on that, no one advised us to do otherwise. That's a lesson learned. It's got to be deliberate. That's not easy because the best sponsorship happens naturally. There has to be an affinity, a mutual need and desire. In other words, "I want to work with you because I like you, but also because you provide something I don't have. And if I throw you out there, you're going as my protégé, you're going to perform."

That's how it works. You make me look good for having sponsored you, and you benefit from my having sponsored and given you the opportunity. There's a mutual relationship. If you artificially say, "Okay, Michael, we want you to sponsor James." You'll likely say: "I haven't really worked with James, but okay. I'll give it a shot." That strategy does not work, and we still struggle with getting it right. When strong working relationships between people aren't present, sponsorship is a challenge. It's something we're working on.

Another ongoing effort has been establishing a strong sense of identity and culture within our firm. It's become increasingly important for firms to expand beyond their professional identities. Sasaki has always had a strong reputation in the market for the kinds of work that we do, but today, attracting and retaining talent requires that we focus not only on what we do, but how we do it. That's where firm culture comes into play. Ten years ago, we didn't make much as much room as we do now for people at the firm to gather and talk about broader societal issues and how they should influence our way of working.





We were in the habit of having company meetings, when what we really needed were community dialogues.

**DI:** In reconstituting your leadership meetings, what new form have they taken?

**JM:** We needed to stop having all—office meetings. We needed to think of them as events, gatherings, so people want to come. There's something to be gained. Something you can't get anywhere else. Not just a one—way flow of information. So, we changed. Initially the format was jarring.

At that time, we were in the early stages of refreshing our mission statement and had identified four core values for the firm: diverse, curious, strategic and inspired. We then decided to have four quarterly office events, with each event themed around one of those core values. Each meeting focused on different aspects of our practice that related to diversity, curiosity, strategy and inspiration. That last one — inspiration — was a year—end celebration of everything we had achieved together: diverse, curious, strategic and inspired.

In some cases, we had facilitators, activities, Legos. All to send the message: “Out with the old, in with the new. Let’s do something completely different.” Office meetings still carry that sense of enthusiasm and excitement. People know there’s going to be something good. There’s a reason to go. And our year—end parties have been a lot of fun and a great expression of who we are as a community at the firm. We’re really looking forward to having those again when the pandemic is over.

**DI: Is it accurate to say meetings went from reporting to social and interactive in nature? Not deliberative or decision—making, just the joy of coming together and interacting?**

**JM:** Exactly right. Some information and reporting still happens. But a lot of the reporting had focused on firm operations, financial, HR, reviews, technology. None of it had to do with practice.

It was a deliberate attempt to build in exciting project stories, milestones, celebrations or focused topics. We did one recently focused on great Zoom interviews, stories and successes. How do you win an interview remotely? There’s always a theme and a focus on the work. And still a good financial update right up front to give people a sense of where we stand.

**DI: Having recently refreshed the firm structure and leadership, are you looking at the next generation of Sasaki leadership yet?**



*To achieve this, we were going to have to let some of our more prolific rainmakers go, because they had developed under a different model that incentivized individual performance over collaboration. That was in 2014, and it was a revolution moment.*

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**JM:** I get asked this question often. I don’t know yet. Should I know? Maybe I should. But it takes 10 years to do a full transition. I don’t know that I’ll be in this position for another 10 years. Who knows? But I do want to plan for it, because being unprepared is the worst.

The great thing about our current leadership at Sasaki is we’re all young. I’m one of the oldest members of the board of directors, and I’m 46 years old. That says something about the transition we’ve gone through as a firm that has been in the business for almost 70 years. After Hideo Sasaki retired in the ’80s, our last CEO led the firm for over 30 years, before handing over the reins in 2013. In some ways, I feel like I just got to where I am as a leader.

But it has already been over 10 years in the making since I was first elected to our board in 2009. I am not wed to any timeframe, but my working assumption is I will only be in my role as CEO for as long as I am the right person for the job. My primary motivation has always been to put the firm first and to put others in a position to succeed, and that is still relevant today. We have now established a model for leadership to turn over more frequently, and that's a good thing.

**DI: What are you worried about? Hopeful for?**

**JM:** It's hard not to be worried about politics and the divisive impact it has had on our country over the past year. Our industry is heavily influenced by public policy and the economy, so politics matter.

But I am optimistic 2021 will provide a release of positive energy and pent-up demand for arts, culture, entertainment and tourism that will be critical in reinvigorating our cities and communities. I am also hopeful we can hold on to some of the more positive things we have recovered during the pandemic — like more time with our families, more time outdoors and more flexibility to balance the competing demands of work and life.

More recently, I am proud of the effort we have put into maintaining our culture and community at the firm since we started working remotely back in March. Unlike some other places in the country, most everybody at Sasaki has been fully remote since the pandemic began.





For the first 10 weeks, I wrote an email every day to the whole office, as a way of keeping in touch and offering encouragement in the earliest phases of our response to COVID—19.

I then transitioned to a weekly email, which I've been doing now for over 30 weeks. People send me interesting links, project updates, shoutouts and other announcements to include in these messages. It's a way of keeping our community together.

**DI: Any regrets?**

**JM:** I wish it didn't take the killings of Ahmad Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd for us to come to terms with our collective, long-overdue awakening to our industry's role in prolonging systemic racism. I and others at Sasaki have taken time to reeducate ourselves so we can be more comfortable talking about these issues. Even though we're committed to doing the work, we're still only just at the beginning of addressing them.

**DI: James, it seems your 100—year evolution, 10—year leadership transformation and diversity strategies have positioned you well for another 100 years. Thank you for talking with us.**

*James Miner is Sasaki's chief executive officer. Over the past decade he has helped guide the strategic evolution of the firm. Key efforts have included rebranding the firm to elevate their collaborative and inclusive approach to design, renewing their commitment to being active members of the Boston design community, growing their commercial architecture and interior design practices, establishing a firm—wide research grant program and adding new expertise around technology, fabrication and digital design. James is also chair of the Sasaki Foundation Advisory Council, which brings together leaders across sectors from Greater Boston to help shape the work of the Foundation. The Foundation connects young people to design mentorship and resources and has awarded \$385,000 in grants to research groups that foster diversity and equity in the design field.*

*As a licensed planner, James's portfolio of work at Sasaki spans all scales and includes urban infill projects, corporate campuses, new communities, strategic land development and regional planning. James also has significant experience planning for colleges and universities. He holds a Master of Urban Planning from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and a Bachelor of Science in Art and Design from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is an active member of the American Planning Association.*



ESSAY

**The View from Here:**  
"Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man."

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## PAUL HYETT

RIBA, Hon FAIA,  
Vickery Hyett Architects,  
Founder—Partner

### Grasping Nettles

Simon Allford, the recently elected 60th president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, faces greater challenges in terms of scale, breadth and complexity, than any incoming president since the aftermath of World War II. Back then, Sir Lancelot Keay's concern was essentially singular: how best to orchestrate the repair, renewal and expansion of the national building stock. When Keay took office, that process was already well underway: the great reforming Labour government of Clement Atlee was a year into its stride, creating the infra-structure of welfarism — new towns, suburbs, schools, hospitals and above all, new housing. The aspirations of the New Jerusalem Movement,

## The View from Here: “Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man.”

*From the United Kingdom, Paul Hyett reflects on three challenges facing RIBA's new president and Britain's architectural profession: Brexit, the Grenfell Disaster's Insurance Impacts and COVID—19.*

which had long engaged in informing the post—war agenda, were to be pursued with a vengeance. In contrast, Allford's problems today are multifarious, and there is no New Jerusalem-style roadmap to guide his effort.

Sir Lancelot was also superbly well prepared to respond to his challenge. At 63 years old, he was the first RIBA president to come from a Local Authority salaried background. He had spent his entire life in the public sector, first at Birmingham, where he was responsible for 16,000 new homes, then from 1925 at Liverpool where he ultimately became City Architect leading the effort to re—house families from the cleared slums of inner Liverpool. *Cometh the hour, cometh the man...*



In stark contrast, and through a career spent entirely in the private sector, Allford has, with college chums Johnathan Hall, Paul Monahan and Peter Morris, created one of the finest architectural practices in Britain. AHMM has established a prodigious reputation with a string of awards to its credit across a wide range of building genres, the Stirling Prize being the recent crowning glory. Like his father David, who also enjoyed a distinguished architectural career, Simon lacks nothing in guts, grit, determination, and intelligence, but again in contrast to Keay, Allford's background offers little in the way of relevant experience to the tasks before him. *Cometh the hour, cometh the man ....?*

What an hour it is! Unlike the concentrated reconstruction challenge facing Keay, Allford must urgently shape the profession's responses to three pressing practice related issues: Brexit, the Grenfell Disaster and COVID—19.

The burden will be awesome, for we must look to Allford's presidency alone to lay the groundwork and frame the essential responses to each of these challenges.

The competition for presidential office at the RIBA was fierce this year and offered no shortage of enterprising talent: three women and two men campaigned on agendas that covered all the familiar territories: low carbon eco-friendly design, innovation, diversity, inclusivity, communication and government lobbying. But only Allford's campaign included initiatives for the wider range of Grenfell and COVID— generated problems, and only Valerie Passetti campaigned on the issue of Brexit.

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*Allford's problems today are multifarious, and there is no New Jerusalem-style roadmap to guide his effort.*



Simon Allford, Photo courtesy of RIBA architecture.com

So, let's look at these issues in their order of emergence, starting with:

## Brexit

Brexit's potential to damage the interests of UK architects is enormous. Hitherto free to practice across the European Union, British architectural qualification and registration are no longer recognised. That privilege was traded away as a last-minute government concession to secure the elusive, much coveted Brexit separation deal. Beyond that, U.K. architects will now be ineligible for inclusion in European tenders for public commissions — a condition that had previously been mandatory.

Our freedom to recruit younger architectural talent from across Europe will also be severely hampered as the lethal impacts of work permit restrictions kick—in. This has potentially dire consequences for a profession that exports professional services extensively, relying on architectural “overseas” talent to deliver its workloads, and on the “core” language skills of our continental friends to communicate on a par with our clients and competition. (As in America, the presence of second and third language skills among our indigenous British architectural population is shamefully limited.)

Allford has much to contemplate here and much to do to get architectural service exports into Europe onto the Government's priority list. Public and government interest remains stubbornly preoccupied with the emotive subject of U.K. fisheries, an economic segment with an annual catch

value of just £987 million, which is insignificant when compared to the U.K.'s Professional and Business Service exports into Europe which stand at £66 billion.

Of that, architecture and engineering services represent 16% — over ten times the value of fishing! The shocking explanation here is that our 12,000 fishermen — with their 5,911 small trawlers that are over 50% foreign owned anyway — have appealed to this once maritime nation's nostalgic sentimentality in a way that 56,000 architects, despite our extraordinary global influence and earning performance, have notably failed to do.

As a celebrated Stirling prize—winner and a sophisticated lobbyist, Allford is well equipped to bang this drum at government's door.

*Cometh the hour ... ?*

## The Grenfell Disaster: Insurance Impacts

Sir Martin Moore—Bick who has, with admirable determination and skill, led the investigation into the tragic fire on the residential tower block that killed 72 people on 14 June 2017, is still hearing evidence for Phase 2 of the inquiry. But even as that process continues, the impact of the Grenfell tragedy wreaks havoc across the entire construction industry's indemnity insurance market. A recent issue of the Architects' Journal reported three—fold Professional Indemnity (PI) premium increases, with some architectural firms unable to renew coverage at all.



*Allford must urgently shape the profession's responses to three pressing practice related issues: (above, left to right) The Grenfell Disaster, Brexit, and COVID—19.*

An incredible 69% and 58% of firms respectively report cladding related claims and fire safety issues being excluded from future coverage. Some architectural practices with large portfolios of completed, metal clad buildings reportedly face “eye—watering” 1000% premium increases ... irrespective of the quality of their work and their ability to show code compliance and safety of design. Understandably, architects’ insurers have no appetite for these risks.

To attract renewed interest in our PI business, some argue the profession needs to increase insurers’ confidence in our education, training and quality control. Either way, we will need to increase fee levels to facilitate payment of higher PI coverage costs. One commentator insists that in getting our own house in order we must

re—establish authority over our own work. Allford will have a heavy—duty agenda to deal with in this regard, but there can be no doubt that he carries the experience to lead the response.

*Cometh the hour ... ?*

### **COVID—19’s Effects**

James Pickavance, one of London’s leading construction lawyers, recently said in a [podcast interview](#): “The world of construction litigation is only just beginning to ‘inhale the impact of COVID—19.’” The pandemic has certainly had far—reaching social and economic consequences beyond anything seen in my lifetime.



Our architectural responses can anticipate incorporating “intelligence” into our building surveillance and services systems to facilitate early screening and detection of “COVID—Carriers” (see this author: DesignIntelligence Q3, 2020). Short—term, architects will continue to assist in planning safer circulation and separation arrangements in those public buildings that have remained in use, and they will continue to design conversions and adjustments to provide emergency COVID hospital facilities. Like many other professions, architects have adapted quickly to remote and isolated working practices, on-line meetings and virtual communications. But Allford’s attention will principally need to turn to the further impact on PI insurance cover for COVID is set to generate a heavy stream of claims relating to construction delays, many of which are already in incubation.

Much of this will centre upon the legal battles around the meaning and application of appointment clauses relating to force majeure. These disputes will feed lawyers for a decade and more as new case law emerges. Developers and contractors will clamour to establish their respective rights during a pandemic which has made it all but impossible for the construction supply side to discharge its duties under contract.

Consultants can operate a remote-working policy courtesy of today’s brilliant IT facilities, but how can builders build when the U.K. government has enforced a stay-at-home policy? Breaches of stay-at-home directives may not have been an option for contractors, but developers can claim that government ‘lockdowns’ have merely been a necessary



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*These crises may well spark a major cultural reorientation of U.K. architectural practice. A yawning vacuum openeth before us. Will we step into it, grasp the nettle and stand to be counted? There is no doubt we should. No one is better positioned to lead the process.*

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response to a force majeure. The issue of whether force majeure applies will surely become critical.

Pickavance estimates it will be six to 12 months before we see these claims coming on stream in construction disputes around the world. Much confusion will surround multitudes of scenarios where contracts were already in varying degrees of delay before COVID circumstances began to impact progress adversely. Architects whose fortunes are inextricably bound up with design and build procurement will be particularly exposed here.

Ultimately, this will only escalate the cladding crisis that has already consumed the world of construction insurance. We need to mature in our attitudes towards insurance ... it's essential as a profitably functioning insurance market is one of the cornerstones of our industry. Allford has serious work ahead of him on this issue.

*Cometh the hour ... ?*

## Nettles Grasped

To put all these challenges into further perspective, let us go back to an RIBA presidency even earlier than Sir Lancelot's. Just over one century ago, John William Simpson took office. Like Allford, Simpson, also the son of an architect, faced the fall-out of a global pandemic.

Spanish Flu became the worst healthcare disaster of the 20th century. It was so named because, unlike Allied and Axis powers, neutral Spain had no censorship imposed on reporting outbreaks there. But the disease didn't start in Spain.

Some historians trace its true origins to Kansas and the illness, on 4 March 1918, of US Army Private Albert Gitchell. From there it spread rapidly across the Atlantic to the trenches of Europe — in the last months of World War 1, 84,000 American soldiers were deployed to join the allied war effort in March 1918 alone. As with COVID-19, both the US president and the British prime minister — Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George — would catch the virus and survive and, as with COVID, a second

and far more lethal wave of the pandemic followed shortly after the first. Ultimately, 675,000 Americans would die, and some estimates put global deaths at up to 50 million. The toll in the UK was around 228,000. In comparison, UK COVID deaths already number 106,564.

In this respect, Allford is destined to lead the architectural profession in its response to the worst pandemic in a century. If history repeats itself, it will also be the worst pandemic of this century.

Unlike Keay, whose profession embarked on a rapid course towards a majority of its membership being in state employment by the early 1970s, Allford, courtesy of Mrs. Thatcher, will preside over a largely privatised profession with less than 1% in state employment. However, notwithstanding these statistics, some believe that the RIBA's broader membership has never properly thrown off its state-employee culture, arguing that despite notable exceptions among its leading practices, too many U.K. architectural practices have remained shy of the commercial sharpness and discipline expected by the development world.

Any residue of such shyness is surely set to change. We've received the shrillest of wake-up calls and Allford is set to turn all lights on as we face his call to arms to meet the churn in the months ahead. These crises may well spark a major cultural reorientation of U.K. architectural practice. A yawning vacuum openeth before us. Will we step into it, grasp the nettle and stand to be counted? There is no doubt we should, and no one is better positioned to lead the process.

In so doing, Allford will do well, irrespective of Brexit, to look beyond our shores. The U.K. architectural profession already punches well above its weight on the international stage, with some 10% of our £4.8 billion contribution to the national economy being in exports. Our biggest markets for architectural services are Asia, the European Union, the Middle East and the USA, with respective shares of 27%, 23%, 20% and 14% of our international revenue. These figures have grown rapidly with exports of professional services by U.K. architects increasing some 28—fold in the last twelve years.

The future is bright if we continue to grow these markets, and the demand is surely there: between now and the year 2035 the global market in construction is expected to be 80

billion square metres of new build. That equates to 60% of the entire current stock of building worldwide — to be added in just 15 years. Of that 38% will be in China and 15% in North America. If the world's design teams address the eco—agenda effectively in this work, the beneficial consequences will be incalculable. British architectural practices can and should play an enormous role in this challenge, potentially taking our export services up as far as five times their current values – that would be 50% of workloads to be export based.

Simon Allford's presidency should be the stepping—stone to great days ahead.

*Yes: cometh the hour ... !*

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*Paul Hyett, RIBA, Hon FAIA, is a founder—partner in Vickery Hyett Architects and is a regular contributor to DesignIntelligence.*



A black and white photograph of a long, arched stone walkway. The walkway is composed of large, rectangular stone tiles and is flanked by a wall of stone blocks. The wall features a series of arched windows with white frames. The walkway leads to a doorway at the end, which is also arched and has a white door. The lighting creates strong shadows, highlighting the texture of the stone and the depth of the walkway.

**Connecting Creatives**

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## JASON SCHUPBACH

Dean, Drexel University's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** You recently moved from Arizona State University to Drexel to take on a new challenge. At ASU, you led an ambitious curriculum redesign initiative to reposition the school to be more technological and equitable. Before that, you were with the National Endowment for the Arts, the Department of Cultural Affairs in New York and held other cultural positions. Through all these roles, a thread of connecting communities seems common. Is that a guiding principle?

**Jason Schupbach (JS):** I believe I was put on this earth to help creative people do amazing work that will make people's lives

## Connecting Creatives

*In this candid conversation, Jason Schupbach, new dean of Drexel's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design, reflects on transcending disciplines and generations and embracing diversity and technology to enable multidimensional design education.*

better. I get excited about the nexus where artists work on social justice issues. I'm not Beyoncé. I'm not the super creative, talented person, but I want to be the person that helps those people behind the scenes. I feel like I know a lot about the structures that support creative people in this country. That's my art form. The through—line is how can I clear the decks so creative people can do awesome things to continue the human project and make the world a better place.

**DI:** A valuable role. So many of us are educated to think it's all about us in a singular sense. Our talent, creativity and vision. But as we grow, we learn it's about connection. You've taken that on.





**JS:** I'm not interested in the white—man—designer—as—hero thing. That's been problematic for our society. Just look at what's happening with Philip Johnson's legacy right now. Brave people of color and others are stepping up to say, "This guy was a Nazi! Why are we honoring him?" I'm instead interested in the communal. How can we all work together while reckoning with our complex and damaging history? The simplest thing I can say is it takes a village, and creative people are part of that village and have a role. My job is to make sure that role is understood and supported.

**DI:** Let's talk about that. After a befuddling 2020, our editorial theme for this year is clarity. We begin that pursuit this quarter with Multidimensional Introspec-

**tion. As you reflect on your charge, what untapped dimensions are you looking to explore, beyond architecture and the "lone, white, male architect" stereotype? What is the breadth of the Westphal curriculum and mission?**

**JS:** Westphal is an incredibly diverse, innovative and transformative applied arts college. It is the creative hub of Drexel University. You can name the creative career you'd like to study at Westphal – we've got it all. I love that about it. We have everything from digital media — which includes game design and VR — to architecture, interior design, dance, fashion design and film and television. We offer a lot on the business side of the creative fields.

We have one of the country's best music industry programs. We also have the country's longest-standing arts administration and museum leadership program. I like that balance. It speaks to teaching the creative side, but also teaching the business and management side.

In January, we launched a major planning process. It is critical for anyone in the creative fields to lean into the generational shift that's happening. I don't want to sound ageist — I'm a Gen X-er — but we haven't done a great job managing and working with baby boomers. We have people retiring with 40 years of experience, and we don't even record a single lecture from them before they get away. It's like, "Oh my God, you just left, and you're a genius!"

There's that generational shift, the older generation leaving, but there are also other younger generational shifts happening in higher education right now and across society. We knew they were coming, and now we've got to take them on. Things like social justice, #MeToo, the anti—racism, LGBTQIA+ and inter—gendered work. There's serious work to do there in higher education.

We don't look like America in higher ed. Not only are the numbers of BIPOC faculty low across higher ed, we also don't have the "lived" experience in faculty. It's not just about race, although race definitely matters. Dori Tunstall, who I admire so much, is the first Black woman to run a design school anywhere. She is dean of Design at the Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD). She talks about how lived experience is just as important as the color of your skin — that you need faculty that understand the



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*We don't look like America in higher ed.*

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experience of BIPOC students so that they can bring their culture fully into academia. She is doing amazing things, working on how higher education systems don't support teachers with a variety of lived experience. Furthermore, she also talks about the importance of starting with indigeneity — that we don't focus enough energy and resources on hiring and supporting Indigenous faculty and students. Read her Fast Company article. It's amazing. I'm in awe of what she is accomplishing and am trying to learn from her.

The generational shift has happened. We always knew it would happen around social justice issues. They've been around a long time, and now, the new generation wants change. We all know the horrible things that happened this year. Those were built on years of horrible history. The second generational aspect we're going to take on in our planning process is what the pandemic has wrought around technology. Zoom is just Version 1.0 of a new way of collaborating digitally. It's like when email was introduced. It wasn't Gmail or Outlook yet; it was beta technology. This is the "Blackberry"/first—out technology version. Even so, it's already fundamentally changed the way we teach and the way we operate in the world, including where people will live, work, and the ripple effects.



This goes across many fields — retail, digital media, architecture and interiors. Changes we thought were going to come in 20 years came in a matter of months. They're here. That is a huge impact to address in our planning process. Drexel University has a new strategic plan for repositioning ourselves. Higher ed has anticipated financial challenges on the horizon, including smaller high school graduating classes starting in 2025.

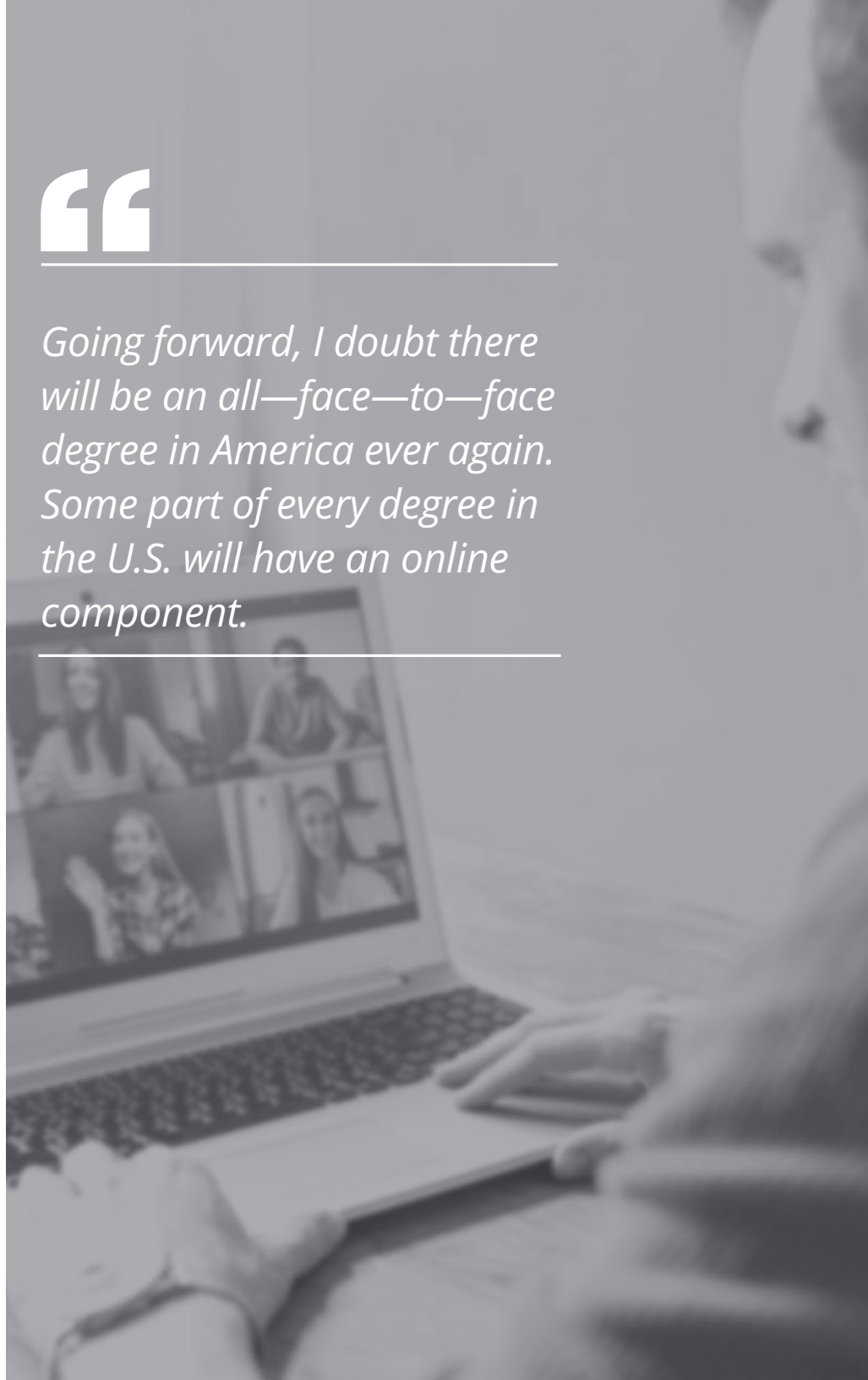
Going forward, I doubt there will be an all—face—to—face degree in America ever again. Some part of every degree in the U.S. will have an online component.

**DI: That's dramatic.**

JS: It may be, but we've already crossed the threshold. My mother can use Zoom. It's here. And it won't only be online meetings. We've learned what's good and bad about online teaching, but we'll adapt further because we're in the infancy of using this new tool. When we take on new tools, we change the way we teach. We change the way we do everything. Drexel and Westphal are doing quite well amidst COVID. We've got the same problems everybody else does, but these are simply stormy seas we needed to sail through. I am not interested in trying to find a way around the storm. We need to sail right into it. Let's have the hard conversations, do the hard work, and be experimental. It's okay to fail and to try some things, to get to whatever's on the other side of those stormy seas. That's the challenge right now. Some schools and creative people will be willing to embrace it, be bold and steer into the storm. Others will look for that way around it. But there is no way around it ... That's where my head is right now.

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*Going forward, I doubt there will be an all—face—to—face degree in America ever again. Some part of every degree in the U.S. will have an online component.*



**DI: Love the attitude.**

JS: This stuff was going to come anyway, so let's take it on.

**DI: You're right. The design professions — certainly architecture — have been complaining about the problem for decades, so let's seize the opportunity. Since we're exploring multidimensionality, I'm glad you're talking about design disciplines, technology, working collaboratively and generational dimensions. You must have been thinking about those things in your tenure at Arizona State. In redesigning their educational approach, your team made significant strides in adopting a technology—based pedagogy — two years before COVID. Share some of that.**

JS: We tackled a total redesign. It was a collaborative, listening—based process, as opposed to a typical strategic planning process. We went around the country and tried to listen to folks in a multiplicity of ways. We had round tables, a listening website, tons of individual meetings and we invited in forward—thinking speakers.

People consistently told us what needed to change. This was before COVID, so we worked through a process where we tried to embrace what people had said to us and figure out how to change what we did.

Through that process, we started to deliver a few degrees online. We were getting our architecture master's degree online. Normally, that would take a while to happen. We launched our graphic design degree in three months.

It was crazy how fast we did it. Up until then, the ASU Design School had no online degrees. We had awesome online classes, but we were able to take it further and get online degrees started. I was proud of that. Those aren't easy things to accomplish.

Several things came out of the redesign. One was the urgency around social justice issues. Secondly, the biggest thing we heard from everyone was they wanted us to teach people not just to be great designers, but also to be more prepared in leadership and people skills. There was a demand for students to better understand society, politics, negotiation, public speaking, and business.

There are technical skill sets, and there are soft skill sets. The World Economic Forum has a list of top skill sets, and teamwork is up around the top. Harvard Business School has been writing about teamwork for 200 years. How many of their case studies have we taught in a design studio? There's so much research about teams, and it's such a critical skill set, but we haven't taught the social science of teams in design schools. At least, very few do. We don't teach about failure. Public speaking? We say, "Oh, they'll just pick that up." We should teach those skills.

We started the process at ASU by looking at those human skill sets and how we would incorporate them into our curriculum. That was ongoing as I left. In other fields like law or medicine, the lines between undergraduate learning, grad school, residency versus learning in practice, are clearly drawn and agreed upon as a field.



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*I am not interested in trying to find a way around the storm. We need to sail right into it. Let's have the hard conversations, do the hard work and be experimental. It's okay to fail and to try some things, to get to whatever's on the other side of those stormy seas.*

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But in architecture, design and other creative fields, the line between what is taught in school and what is taught in practice is vague. We push on each other. The line is blurred. We need conversations about what can be done in the four years we have students, especially now that we have access to new technologies that allow us to teach differently.

I give a lot of credit to Marc Neveu, the architecture department head at ASU. He and the wonderful people in the ASU architecture program completely reinvented their architecture degree based on what Marc knew from his previous job as editor of the Journal of Architectural Education. Through

the redesign process they investigated what could be done to create a more flexible architecture degree.

They're throwing out the old model of sequential studios and trying to open the curricula, so you can learn architecture and a multiplicity of other skill sets too. They're looking at the idea that an architectural mindset can be applied by a mayor or an astrophysicist and benefit other fields. I admire what the ASU architecture program has done. They deserve credit for rethinking things. That was a huge change and remains exciting.

**DI:** That's exciting. We've always heard the excuse in the four-year curriculum: "there's only so much room," and it's become insular. We've neglected the other things you've called adult skills. It's remarkable the ASU team embraced them. It's also remarkable that it was done two years ago. What was the catalyst?

**JS:** They had been talking about it for a long time. I was hired to redesign the design school. That was my job description. I'm collaborative; I try to listen, build off what's going on in the world. We hired Marc, and the team there worked hard. I'm far from the only hero. I was just trying to clear the decks and help people through it. Because we were doing the redesign, we said, "Dream hard."

They ran with the opportunity. One leadership act I took was to set the platform we were going to change. They're still working on getting it implemented. It was almost a year ago now they voted to make change happen. To implement it fully will take four years because of the way it has to roll through all four years of the undergrad degree.

**DI: You have not followed a conventional architectural path — designing buildings, learning the craft. What shaped your mission? You have a Bachelor’s in Public Health from UNC, a Master’s in City Planning/Urban Design ... I also saw a reference to creative economics. What prompted your role as a connector?**

JS: Great question. I went to school for Planning and Urban Design. Somehow, I got into MIT. I became fascinated with creative people. I’d always been a creative person. I thought, why not go to Arts Management school? What am I doing as a city planner? Richard Florida had just written his book “The Rise of the Creative Class,” and it was influential.

It’s a troubled book. Even he admits it has no equity lens. But at the time, cities started taking an interest in their cultures in new ways. So, I wrote my thesis on cities’ roles in supporting creative economies. I got interested in doing that kind of work and went to work for the Department of Cultural Affairs in New York City. That was the first time I encountered my white privilege very clearly. I had been in a bubble. I was the chief cultural planner for the city at 20—something. It was very humbling.

I learned a lot and wanted to keep pursuing that kind of work. I worked on a Ford Foundation Initiative, and then with Governor Patrick in Massachusetts, as the creative economy and innovation officer for the state.

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*I’m not interested in the white—man—designer—as—hero thing ... it takes a village ... I’m interested in the communal.*





All those jobs looked at different aspects of support systems for creative people. The equity work has been a lifetime journey to learn to be humble and understand, because I have the appearance I do. Also, because I've been able to access more resources in the positions I've had the privilege to serve in. I do everything I can to try to make those systems work in more equitable ways. All those jobs were about how to create support systems with whatever tools were at my disposal in that moment. And to try to insert a through—line of equity in it as well.

Experience builds to the next experience, so fundamentally, I have always remembered to be humble. I've done a lot of equity work on the East Coast, but the East Coast has its own unique story about what America is. In the West, it is a completely different story. The indigeneity of the West, the complex history of somewhere like Arizona, which was part of Mexico for many years, is radically different. It's sobering to go out there and realize you don't know their American story. If you want to work the right way, you have to listen.

**DI: Thank you for your honesty. I'm not aware of many role models for what you're talking about. Did any mentors, peers or influencers shape your path?**

JS: In my academic career coming out of MIT, Mark Schuster encouraged me to go in this direction. He was one of the very few urban cultural policy professors in America. I've also been fortunate to have crossed paths with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women who have helped me in my journey. Susan Chin was my boss in New

York City. She is an amazing woman. She was the chair of the board of the New York AIA and executive director of New York's Design Trust for a while.

When I started doing foundation work, people like Maria Rosario Jackson and Judilee Reed guided me and helped me understand how to work the right way, through an equitable lens. Roberta Uno was the program officer at the Ford Foundation. I'll never forget the first time I walked into a room and Roberta pointed out there weren't a lot of people of color in the room. That was the first time I'd ever heard anybody say that. I was in my twenties and thought, "Oh my God, I never thought about that before." Now, it's completely obvious because everybody talks about it, but this was 20 years ago.

I'm grateful those women of color did the hard work and were willing to shepherd someone like me. I had other great bosses. Charlie McDermott in Massachusetts, Joan Shigekawa and Jamie Bennett at the National Endowment for the Arts. Joan Shigekawa's a legend. I was so excited to work with her. She's an amazing woman. There have been lots of people, but it's always been a village. As a result, I don't ever work without talking to lots of other people and working together.

**DI: Let's shift to your current context. Culturally and contextually, Drexel and Philadelphia are very different places than ASU and Tempe. How might your mission compare? Are there synergies with Penn, Temple and the other institutions that surround you now?**

**JS:** I've been here five months. I know some of the people that run some of the other colleges in town. There are a lot of art and design schools in Philly. It's exciting to have so many potential partners and competitors. It is clear over the years — people have found their space: "We don't do that, Temple does that. We do this instead."

Our cooperative education program is famous for being one of the first of its kind and continues to be among the largest co—op programs. Drexel has always positioned itself to be industry—focused, preparing students for their future careers. We are also an R1 university and deeply tied to the Philadelphia community. So, Drexel's got its own personality and our programs have their own personalities, and we are pretty good in Philadelphia about not stepping on each other's toes.

**DI: You are touching so many more disciplines than just architecture. Great potential synergy.**

**JS:** Yes, Westphal has 25 degree-granting programs, including product design, graphic design, photography, art history, animation and visual effects, and on and on.

**DI: What are you optimistic about in the coming year?**

**JS:** Vaccines that work! I think the generational shift challenge is here whether we like it or not. All the hallmarks of it are happening, and I'm excited to see what it reveals. The more voices we bring to the table, the more we hand over power to those voices, the better things are going to be. Take the example of television. We teach film and television,

as well. TV has never been better because people have finally started handing the reins over to different kinds of voices and writers. I was obsessed with *Lovecraft Country*, which was a bizarre combination of Afro—futurism and Lovecraft, who was a racist. It was like nothing I'd ever seen on TV before because it had new voices writing it. It was written and produced by a Black woman. As the doors open and we figure this out, many of our design fields are only going to get better. The multiplicity reveals itself to better things. We have huge challenges as a country. It's no joke that our democracy needs work. Democracies are work, and we've got to get to doing it.

In higher education, the more we accept that change is here, embrace it and are willing to have the hard conversations, and do the right things — is only going to make things better, more interesting, more challenging. And we didn't even talk about the environmental crisis we're in right now. We can take these things on. I'm a 300% glass—full kind of person. This can be annoying to the pessimists around me, but I always think the human project generally gets better. We can do this if we are real with ourselves and trust each other. So, I'm excited about the future. I can't stand when people ask me, "What's your vision?" Stop asking a white, male leader what his vision is. Please stop. It will be our collective vision — where we will all go together. In a place of higher education, one voice cannot be the only voice that matters. Not in these times.

I am excited to see what we all come up with together in our planning process. Then implement it. We have to do it. You can't just have a vision and not get it done.

We'll probably have to revisit it in five years, but let's get it done. Let's get to work. That's what I've been saying to everybody. Let's get to work. I'm sick of sitting on my hands and talking about things.

**DI: Thank goodness we're finally acknowledging these issues. Thank goodness you're here. Thank you for the work you're doing and for sharing your thoughts.**

JS: Thank you. I appreciate that. One last thing I'd say to everyone is to please find a way to be well through all this. It's so hard right now. One of my other goals as a leader is to constantly remind people their personal wellness matters. It's okay to not to show up that day because you need to find a way to be well — because it's not going to get any easier. I'm hoping people turn things off and rest when they need to. Resting is part of the work.

*Jason Schupbach is dean of Drexel University's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design. Recently he led The Design School at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University, the nation's largest and most comprehensive design school. At ASU, he led the ambitious ReDesign.School initiative to position the school as a 21st-century collaborative, relevant and equitable institution. He was a key collaborator on ASU projects such as the Studio for Creativity, Place, and Equitable Communities; expansions of the school to downtown Phoenix; justice work with Race Forward; launch of a new Master of Innovation and Venture Development degree between the design, business and engineering schools; and the university's partnership with James Turrell's Roden Crater.*

*Previously, he was director of Design and Creative Placemaking Programs for the National Endowment for the Arts, overseeing design and creative placemaking, grantmaking and partnerships, including Our Town and Design Art Works grants, the Mayor's Institute on City Design, the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design and the NEA's federal agency collaborations. Earlier, Schupbach served as creative economy director for Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, growing creative and tech businesses in the state. Prior to that, he was director of ArtistLink, a Ford Foundation—funded initiative to stabilize and revitalize communities through affordable space and innovative environments for creatives. He has worked for the mayor of Chicago and New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs and written extensively on the role of arts and design in making communities better. His writing has been featured in the Aspen Institute's "Best Ideas of the Day" series.*



**“The 30-Year Gut”**

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**STEVE JONES**

Senior Director, Industry Insights Research  
Dodge Data

## “The 30—Year Gut”

*Reflecting on successes and failures, Dodge Data’s Steve Jones recounts the retooling of an industry — for people.*

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** As it turns out, we have amazingly similar common missions to connect and inform people. You, at Dodge Data, through data, industry and market analysis, and DesignIntelligence in a different vector, through practice, experience, community and thought leadership. We’ve known each other for 20 years. For most of those years you’ve traveled the country — and recently, the globe — making regular conference presentations on the state of things. In subjects ranging from BIM to innovation and construction, you’ve regularly shared data and industry trends. As we begin the year, I’d like to reflect on what you’ve seen.

**Steve Jones:** You and I both come from long tenures on the architectural practice side. You went on to work with a major construction company and I moved over to technology (Primavera). But at this point we are both in the wonderful and fortunate position to be able to view the whole industry and try to understand and share the various forces shaping its future.

From my vantage point, I think we’re about a third of way through what will be looked back on as a 30-year gut—and redo of the global design, construction and built asset management industry, from design to physically putting work in place to ongoing operation.

I tell everyone (especially younger folks) that this is THE best time to be in this industry, ever.

**DI:** We both spent much of the past 20 years evangelizing on the merits and transformative potential of BIM. You were responsible for producing dozens of McGraw—Hill, (now Dodge) SmartMarket reports which shared hard survey data on BIM adoption, owner value, contractor value, interoperability, its impact on project delivery and sustainability and a host of other timely topics. In recent years you’ve done less work specifically about BIM. You even joked at one conference: “BIM is dead.” What did you mean by that, and where has your focus shifted?

**SJ:** I remember that conference, Mike. Trying to be provocative, what I actually said is: “I want BIM to die,” meaning we should stop treating “a BIM project” as something special. I want modeling and model—based integrated digital workflows to be ubiquitous, so EVERY project is a BIM project. And digital information is like water from a faucet or electricity from an outlet. You can take for granted it will be flowing with adequate volume and reliable quality.

Of course, we aren’t there yet, so our research is constantly assessing where various players in the industry and regions of the world are in their relative transformation journeys. Our approach with any trend is to quantify exactly what the best users are doing with various tools or practices, what tangible, scalable, reliable benefits those activities are providing, and what they need specifically to advance.

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*I think we’re about a third of way through what will be looked back on as a 30—year gut—and—redo of the global design, construction and built—asset management industry.*

We're doing that with all kinds of technology as well as green trends, managing risk and uncertainty, safety, project delivery and the ever—changing business health of the companies operating in various market sectors.

**DI: Why do you think BIM hasn't had the widespread adoption and impact it promised? The gap between BIM "haves" and "have nots" is widening. The cutting-edge folks — designers and constructors — are still pushing it and doing great things, but most owners seem to care little. Why is that?**

**SJ:** We are in the field right now in process with a major study of BIM adoption in North America, Japan, Australia/New Zealand, U.K., Europe, and the Nordic countries, so I'll have data soon on how widespread it is. But in terms of the malingerers, we've been doing BIM studies all over the world for over 10 years and the number one reason they consistently give is: "Nobody asked me." Which translates into "Nobody is making me." As we all know, this is not an industry that readily adopts new technology. I like to say, "Everyone wants to be first to be third." Meaning, get somebody to try it first and screw it up, then get someone else to step in and fix it, then, and only then, call me, I'm all in.

So, we need both pull, like what my research does to objectively quantify the reasonably achievable benefits to attract the otherwise skeptical, and push in the way of owner mandates for designers and GCs, and GC mandates for trades. The U.S. doesn't have a central government agency tasked with driving BIM into the industry,

so we rely on ourselves. It's a bottom-up, street-level revolution, a project at a time. To assess progress, we did a study recently looking at how many BIM users have mandates for the companies they have power over hiring.

While the GCs were strong with MEP and structural contractors, almost none were demanding BIM for civil work. And only a handful of architects were enforcing mandate policies for engineers. There was some "would'ja please" going on, but a disheartening percentage of "No BIM Policy" responses. Meanwhile, we've all been watching the U.K. and other regions with government BIM mandates to see if they successfully spill over into private work. This new global adoption study should reveal a lot about that.

In many ways, I think BIM suffers from what I call the "shiny object syndrome." It got established early as a miracle cure for all that ails you, before almost anyone really knew what it was. So, it could only fail to meet hyper—inflated expectations. Even Phil Bernstein, who was the top BIM evangelist of all time in his years at Autodesk says: "Revit is the kernel of a good idea."

BIM also suffers from the "ROI trap." Since it requires investment to buy software, upgrade hardware, train staff and create and maintain processes and content, the money people always ask, "What's the ROI?" That misses the point that BIM is more about cost avoidance than cost reduction. And since hardly anyone carefully counts the cost of their avoidable mistakes, it's not realistic to quantify a traditional ROI for BIM.

Our research consistently shows the first few projects are losers, but benefits accrue quickly after that. In all our BIM SmartMarket Reports we separately track some 30 process, project and business benefits, many of which are reduced occurrence of bad things as well as improvements in good ones. When we ask about measuring what we call “Perceived ROI,” it’s also always true that the more experienced users gave up bothering to measure it long ago. They know it’s good and they devote their precious energy to trying to make it better.

As model—based, integrated digital workflows slowly and steadily become more common, and their benefits are well understood and expected as givens, it will just become “how we all do things.” That’s the peaceful, produc-

tive end stage of that 30—year transition I think we’re in the middle of.

**DI: At one point you were very focused on, even investing in, a collective, consortium or movement — of standard, shareable, data—rich manufacturer’s BIM objects. Even that seemed to fizzle. What happened?**

**SJ:** One problem is that BIM objects are too easy to make and too hard to make well. When Bentley bought its first BIM tool, Triforma in 1996, they asked my A/E firm to try it out on a project. We did a 90,000 SF office building with it and realized while “object—oriented design” as it was referred to then — because it hadn’t even been named BIM yet — was a powerful idea.



If you don't have content you spend most of your time building that content, much of which can't be easily reused. Then enter multiple BIM platforms with multiple data standards for content and you quickly had a Tower of Babel. One of my first BIM—oriented research reports (2007) addressed interoperability. At Sweets.com we tried to help guide good content creation, but many building product manufacturers just used any third-party resource they could find to build their content. Unfortunately, most of it was poor quality (too big, lacked the right data, not parametric or out-of-date by the time you tried to use it).

Some tech companies tried to aggregate content suitable for their tools (e.g. Seek), but in the end, most firms just built their own. There are several businesses going now that help them manage that. As with many things in the U.S., the BIM movement defied centralization. We're an independent, self—reliant people who resist top—down, one—size—fits—all solutions. The chance to have a single repository of “standard, shareable, data—rich manufacturer's BIM objects” as you call it has probably come and gone.

**DI: In hosting innovation conferences that address a broader set of themes, you and Dodge Data are redirecting the industry's attention to a broader set of challenges and opportunities. Talk about that.**

**SJ:** A lot of evolution is taking place. Green design has moved from focusing mostly on energy conservation to its impact on the health and safety of green building

occupants. Worker productivity has also shifted to worker wellness, in all the ways that matter. I think we became enchanted with tech as the answer to everything, and now we're coming back to the human element of our business.

I remember when I was just a puppy on the drafting board, a grizzled old project manager (who was certainly much younger than I am now) told me something I've never forgotten. I was wrapped around the axle about some design problem and she said, “Just pick up the phone and talk to the client about it. This is a people business.” When you boil it down, she was right. This whole digital transformation is 10% technology and 90% sociology. We can talk all day about data, but it's people who use it. Yes, we are introducing automation and AI at an amazing pace, and that will do wonders to reduce tedious or dangerous tasks and provide analysis faster to support decision—making, but it won't ever replace higher-level thinking or take the place of collaboration, qualitative judgment and emotional intelligence. Sorry HAL, but Dave's going to keep being able to open the pod doors. (Here's a [link](#) in case that reference is lost on some readers).

Whenever tech companies ask me to give them feedback on their new whiz—bang whatever—it—is, I always ask, “How does this help the user's day go better?” And if it's not obvious, I tell them they probably just have “technology in search of a solution.” Like BIM content, technology is now easy to build, but we need to ask ourselves: just because we can, does that mean we should? We're creating built assets for our civilization, so let's keep people at the center of our focus.

Collaboration and integration of formerly disparate entities, information silos and processes isn't about optimizing data models, it's about making things easier, less stressful and yes, more fun for people.

**DI: Looking back, do you have regrets? Missed opportunities for industry change, either personally, for McGraw—Hill / Dodge or the industry at large? Were there any golden chances we missed? If so, can we still retrieve them for benefit?**

**SJ:** I was a VP at Primavera during the dot-com boom (1999 - 2003) and was our representative to FIATECH. I recall posing a question to that group at the time about whether we believe the ideal tech—driven end state for this industry is MOAD (the Mother Of All Databases) or DOSI (the Dream Of Seamless Interoperability). That sparked a lot of fun debate. Regardless of which side you were on the common thread was we all fervently believed it was a decision we needed to make, and quickly, because tech was going to disintermediate all workflow processes and completely reinvent construction, “at internet speed,” within the next two or three years.

It was a time of crazy names (who remembers “Citadon”?) and crazier claims (everything, no matter what it was, was an “end—to—end solution”). While some of the start—ups survived and thrived (e.g. e—Builder), the flood of easy venture capital money was funding a lot of vaporware being expensively promoted at dozens of AEC tech conferences and generally just confusing everybody. I used to joke at the time that the most popular develop-



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*This is a people business... This whole digital transformation is 10% technology and 90% sociology. We can talk all day about data, but it's people who use it.*

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ment platform was PowerPoint. Meanwhile, established tech providers with good code, solving real problems for actual customers, were being relegated to the trash heap of history as digital dinosaurs.

A perfect storm of bad decisions and economic conditions led to the collapse of the dot-com bubble, and I think that stunted what could have been an exciting digital transformation. Worse, it soured a lot of practitioners on the idea of “web—based anything” for years. What a crappy hangover!

But that kind of event forces discipline into a market, and fortunately we have much more well—reasoned solutions available today. But we could have already been here and be further along.

**DI: What are you proud of? Any significant accomplishments?**

**SJ:** I like to think my industry insights research team has brought some structure to helping everyone evaluate what “good” is for a variety of technology solutions, digital workflows and practices, green design and construction, project delivery approaches, safety programs, risk management initiatives and business management metrics.

So, users can benchmark their own status and progress against the industry, and everyone can have reasonable expectations of achievable benefits and the realistic challenges involved. We also identify what current users need in order to advance/improve, and what non— or low —frequency users need to get more engaged, so everyone can enjoy better outcomes. People in this industry are crazy busy. Very few have time to comparatively evaluate new

tools and processes on their own, so we at least lay out a brand-agnostic framework for what to focus on. From the feedback I get, it’s helpful. And I love doing it!

**DI:** I know you to be a positive, optimistic person. Turning the page on a crazy year, what gives you hope?

**SJ:** We carbon-based bipeds are a fantastically resilient bunch! As nasty as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be, look at how many video-conference meetings are taking place now vs. a year ago. I know people gripe about them, but it’s a tangible demonstration of our natural desire and need to collaborate. Traditional contractual agreements have been a fundamental driver of a lot of the information silos that construction technology is trying to mitigate.



Emerging delivery models like IPD are attempting to legislate more integrated processes. But I like to look at what what's happening from the bottom up. That's the stuff that persists and that we want to encourage. What's great is that young people coming into the industry will never know any other way. No bad habits to unlearn. Trust among project team members will be a natural resource, like air and water, and all the tools will support transparency and omnidirectional knowledge flow to everyone's benefit.

While I think the end—state of this 30—year transformation will be vastly different than how things were at the start, it would probably look like a natural evolution to our earlier ancestors, who cooperated to feed their villages, build each other's barns and collectively create civilization. We'll be doing what we were put here to do. We just have to get out of our own way to do it.

*Stephen Jones is senior director, industry insights research, at Dodge Data & Analytics, formerly McGraw—Hill Construction. He focuses on how emerging economic, practice and technology trends are transforming the global design and construction industry. His decades of industry experience offer perspective on emerging practices in building information modeling, virtual design and construction, innovation, sustainability, risk management and other industry trends. He is a frequent international presenter and the author of SmartMarket Reports.*





# Regaining Respect

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## BARBARA HELLER

Founder, Heller & Metzger PC

Founder, CEO, Design + Construction Strategies LLC

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** We met at Stanford's Center for Integrated Facilities Engineering (CIFE) back in 2005. The focus there was on BIM and AEC process improvement. At Heller & Metzger PC Specifications Consultants, and Design + Construction Strategies, you've been a practitioner and strategist in the design space for decades, and I've known you to not be shy in sharing your thoughts on what's wrong with our industry. After a harrowing, confusing year, our theme for this year is clarity. We want to begin that quest in Q1 with introspection. I hope through our dialogue we can throw off the gloves and get to the bottom of some of these issues. And I hope we'll still be friends when we're

## Regaining Respect

*In this candid conversation, Barbara Heller reflects on the profession and speaks the truth about risk, reward and default behaviors*

**done! What do we need to do to see more clearly and right the many industry wrongs we kvetch about?**

**Barbara Heller (BH):** My suggestions for clarity are pretty straightforward. First, architects need to own the cost-estimating process. Contractors have weaponized cost estimating and use it as a bludgeon against architects. Next, architects who are experimenting with new project delivery strategies need to establish ground rules for how much time they need to make decisions and how design liability is delegated if the contractor decides to seize control of some portion of design. If those two things happened, a lot of problems we see would go away.



*Contractors have weaponized cost estimating and use it as a bludgeon against architects.*

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Also, it would be great if architects had more of a media presence. We've become kind of invisible. Often, when a new building is the subject of a news article, the developer, owner and contractor are mentioned well ahead of the architect. That's wrong.

**DI:** Those are bold challenges. I agree with you in principle. But they're challenges we haven't found a way to fix over centuries. They go to the nature of how architects think, practice and are motivated and rewarded.

BH: Anything can change if people decide they want the change. There's nothing to prevent an architecture firm

from becoming a full—service technical firm. However, most architects seem to prefer to concentrate exclusively on design. That must give them a lot of psychological satisfaction because they're leaving a lot of money on the table.

**DI:** At the risk of striking a nerve, your comments about contractors “weaponizing” and “bludgeoning” costs sound, to say the least, shellshocked or defensive. Having seen that from the other side — and to play devil's advocate — I would ask: what would the alternative get the team? That is, if the contractor didn't manage the budget? In my 20 years as an architect I felt exactly as you do, that the contractor was ill-intended and enjoyed beating up the architect.



**But having seen it from the other side, in working for a CM for 20 years with more than 70 design firms, the opposite is true. I finally was able to see my own bias. In fact, CMs would love to have architects manage their own budget. They would love projects to be in budget without having to be the bad guys, but it's seen as their job. Somebody's got to keep the project in budget, and CM's know how. Your question is, can architects learn to do it themselves? I think the answer is no. They need the input of the CM and the trade contractors. They don't have the skills to manage risk, budgets and contingencies. They don't know crew sizes, cranes, hoisting, market conditions, bonds, insurance, temporary protection, etc. They're not trained to manage contingencies. In fact, they're educated and motivated otherwise — to induce risk — through design change. And patrons of good architecture want them to! So, the next question then is how can we as teams do what needs to be done more collaboratively, more pleasantly, more politely: get projects in budget?**

**BH:** Shellshocked is a good word. Before discussing the specifics of cost estimating — which is a separate exercise from managing the construction budget — the Heller & Metzger side of our house was increasingly involved in difficult projects. Watching project after project experience unnecessary problems that compromised architectural services became discouraging.

As for cost estimating, it makes no sense that architects design things in a price vacuum. It diminishes the value of their work. I can't think of another commercial endeavor

that is presented without a price tag. Maybe the design of a new airplane. We've been constructing buildings, as a species, for over 5,000 years. The cost shouldn't be a mystery.

Owners wear many hats on construction projects. They are the client, the customer, and the CEO of the project. The client may be interested in the architect's professional advice, but the customer and the CEO are cost-driven. Architects should be credible when these conversations are held. Otherwise, they are on the receiving end of someone else's subjective interpretation of what is expensive. Doing a cost estimate is very different than bidding a project and managing the finances. Pretty soon, it will be an automated app via AI. A cost estimate doesn't require participation from suppliers or subs or anyone else outside the design ecosystem.

**DI:** Your second point goes to the other classic fly in the ointment, managing schedules. I tried to get to the bottom of both these challenges in my book, "Managing Design." You suggest architects must develop the ability to outline decision timelines. Despite the messy, cyclical nature of design, I think this challenge has a better chance of being solved. Even though there is little science devoted to this in school, as professionals we should be able to predict decisions and prioritize them. They're what we do as designers, but we've been schooled — and rewarded — for playing. Design doesn't necessarily work in neat, linear, sequential steps. But it can be more so, and to everyone's advantage if we try. In my role as a dedicated design manager I had success helping firms do just that.





**We prioritized decisions and helped firms focus. They resisted at first but appreciated it in the end because it helped keep their projects between the lines. As specification consultant and as a strategy advisor you've seen this too. Does developing design schedules work? If so, specifically what works?**

**BH:** Creating a successful business process is much like doing a successful building design. It must be imagined and identified as being a desirable outcome before it is actualized. If architects wanted to normalize the design process — for a specific client or specific building type — they could do so. But most architects, as creative and imaginative as they are, run aground when it comes to reimagining how they practice. This isn't true of all firms but seems to be true for a majority. DC Strategies runs into this impediment on some of our consulting projects. There may be an obvious way for an organization to improve efficiency or other outcome, but it isn't adopted due to the staff's emotional resistance.

**DI:** Great points. Tasks that architects do regularly should be able to be scheduled and managed — including time for design exploration, backtracking and option studies.

**You've worked at national AIA levels in leadership positions to effect change — in BIM, new documents, project delivery and other initiatives. How did you do? Can you point to any momentum changes?**

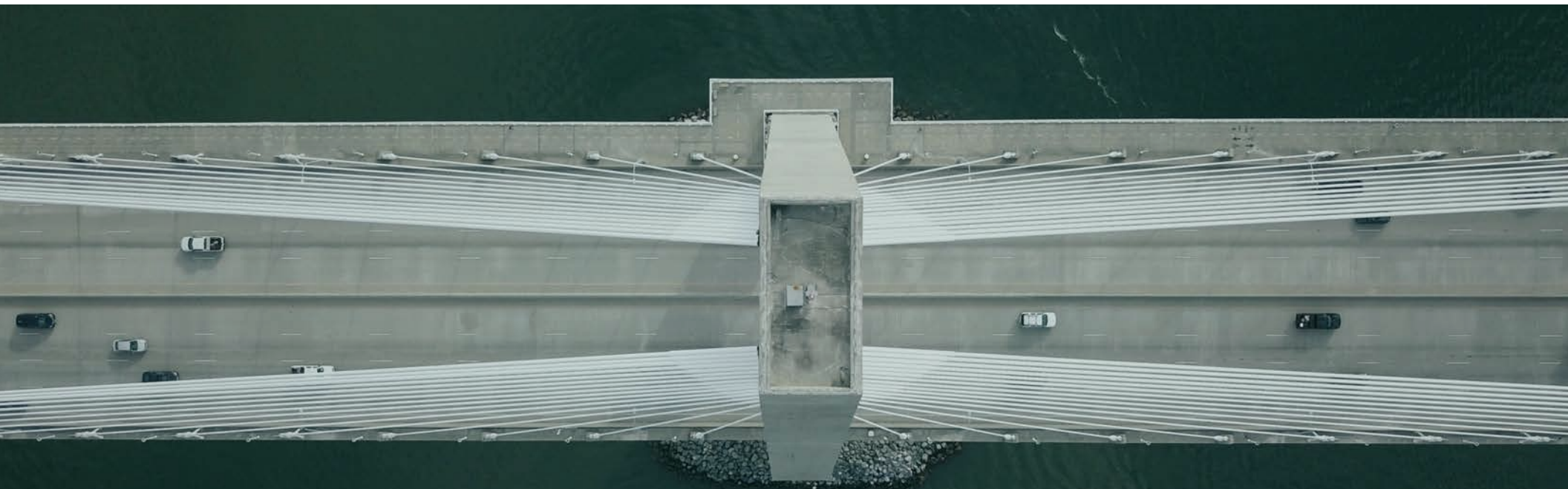
**BH:** I was the first female on the AIA Documents Committee in 1991.

Women were not invited on that committee by intention before then, and a few members decided to change the policy. Not everyone was on board. But things changed enormously, and after 15 years on that committee, I served my last term as chair. What I wanted to accomplish was to make the documents more about marketing architectural services and less about avoiding risk. Maybe I had some minor success, but not enough. Contractors have gained the upper hand in the industry by being the “can—do” guys and architects, especially as codified in the AIA documents, are the “won’t—do” guys. The insurance industry has had a hand in that by creating unnecessary fear of liability in the architectural profession.

**DI:** How do you see the AIA’s attitude toward industry change? Are we suffering from the old guard and our

**inertia, lack of momentum and fear of change? Or are you seeing some hopeful signs of improvement? If so, where are they? It seems we’re still searching for real leverage. We’ve hoped that might come from owners. As you said earlier, contractors have seized some of the opportunity. But as a rule — with some notable exceptions — the architectural profession has been intransigent. Where’s the leverage?**

**BH:** The AIA is challenged by the enormous diversity of its membership. Something like 75% of its members work for firms that are five people or less. Their interests and needs are much different than Gensler or HOK’s. Developing a program that serves the broad interests of the profession is difficult.





One thing the AIA could do that would benefit all architects is to educate the media so architects get top billing for their work. Consider the facts. In order to become a registered architect, it is necessary to have a graduate degree, an apprenticeship and to pass a lengthy, difficult exam. The requirements for becoming a licensed contractor vary by state, but none require a graduate degree or an exam. Some only require \$50 and a pickup truck. As for developers, there's only one requirement, and that's access to money, not necessarily your own. No education, experience or testing are needed. So why are contractors and developers getting more credit and publicity for creating a new building than the architect? It makes no sense.

**DI: I absolutely agree. It doesn't make sense. Nor is it fair. But we know things aren't always fair. What I've observed, having also viewed things from the CM's perspective, is despite the respect architects would like to have, they have contributed to diminishing that same respect through their actions. Repeatedly being over budget, being late, and being concerned about their own agendas have earned widespread disrespect. CMs and owners scoff at this repeated misbehavior. Architects have got to understand that and change their actions to earn back the respect they want.**

**BH:** Those are two separate questions: Respect within the project team and respect in the outside world are driven by different factors. It would be easier to fix getting credit and respect in the outside world. It's common to find a news article about a new building where

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*Shellshocked is a good word ...  
Watching project after project  
experience unnecessary  
problems that compromised  
architectural services became  
discouraging.*

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the people mentioned first are the developer, the contractor, the owner and all kinds of other interests. The architects go unmentioned or are buried on page three.

The AIA should step up and make a point of educating the media to make sure architects get credit for their buildings. It's something they richly deserve. They're responsible for the building and they have significant blood, sweat and tears involved in the process. Arguably more than the owner, developer or contractor, because it's their intellectual property. I don't deny the others deserve credit too, but the architect should at least get equal billing.

DCStrategies developed the diagram below to help educate a client new to the construction industry about its culture. It reflects the major players, their backgrounds and their rank in project influence and decision-making. A pecking order, if you will. The disparity in level of training and amount of control is unique to our industry. Uncredentialed people don't make critical project decisions in medicine or law.

## PROJECT POWER AND INFLUENCE: CONSTRUCTION DECISION MAKING



Graphic: Courtesy of Barbara Heller





The person with arguably the most power is the code official because they have the power to stop the project. Or to slow down the approvals. And code officials have a completely ad hoc background. There are 40,000 independent code authorities in this country — that's organizations, not individuals — and they each have the authority to create their own rules. That's another unique aspect of the construction industry, lack of federal regulation and enormous power at the grassroots level. One of the reasons there's so much variation in practice styles in different regions.

**DI:** The architect's liability is underappreciated. The value of their intellectual property is too. But I want to

**get your reaction on my other point, having seen it on the project team and having been on both sides, I used to bristle at how handsomely contractors are rewarded for all the reasons you cite. They don't have the intellectual rigor. Many have gone to construction school, but not for as long. It boils down to what's valued in our society. That is, the ability to manage risk and, as much as I hate to say it — in an era where courtesy is lacking — their ability to be aggressive and force results. Have you seen that on your projects?**

**BH:** It's even more than that. I've lived long enough to witness this sad evolution.

When I started practicing here in DC, the industry was dominated by a few local firms. There weren't any national architecture firms in DC except for SOM. There were certain major contracting firms and big developers, but they were all pretty much local. If they had a regional practice, that was exceptional.

At that time, the head of my firm was a prominent architect. The biggest construction firm was led by George Hyman and became Clark Construction. One of the largest developers was Oliver Carr. His company became CarrAmerica. In 1974, these individuals all lived in the same neighborhood, belonged to the same country clubs, drove the same cars, etc. Fast forward to today, 45 years later. CarrAmerica and Clark Construction are Fortune 500 companies. The son of the architect who owned the firm that employed me, and who inherited the company, didn't do as well with it. It was a 40—person firm when he inherited it and it ended up as a five—person firm in rural Virginia doing primarily residential work.

Most local DC architecture firms, the ones that controlled the design market in 1975, disappeared by 1990. Why is it these other entities were so successful at riding the wave, becoming national, going public, and understanding how to be profitable doing construction when architects couldn't? Part of that answer is attitude.

Architects tend not to think of themselves as businesspeople. It may be one reason that cost estimates aren't a routine part of the design process. Architects don't like to focus on money.

**DI: I agree. Until we get a generation of people who are educated, motivated and value these business issues the rest of the world runs on, we'll continue to endure these conditions we're talking about. We were educated and rewarded to do the opposite, that commerce was a bad thing, business was bad. We were artists, lone—wolf geniuses. The work was the focus.**

**BH:** The saying was, "If you have to ask how much it cost, you can't afford it."

**DI: Yes. That must change or architects will continue to suffer and languish.**

**BH:** As artificial intelligence becomes more robust and more individuals and nonprofessionals market themselves as designers, life will be more difficult for architects. The profession would be wise to expand its market footprint. I sometimes watch Home and Garden TV. Every show features someone with design skills who is not an architect. That's a missed opportunity for the profession. The AIA should ask them to make a show about architects doing great houses. There are dozens of architects as cute and personable as the Property Brothers. With perhaps more talent.

Another general observation about architects, and perhaps one reason the industry isn't making a fuss about their media profile, is that most of them seriously dislike conflict. They will bend over backwards to avoid having an argument. That's a shame. There will always be conflict and difficult people are everywhere. Heller & Metzger employees are mostly working mothers.

I started the firm because specifications consulting is an ideal “mommy track” niche in architecture. And the thing I find myself saying most often to my staff over the years is: “Quit being a girl! The guy’s trying to screw you out of your fee. He is not your friend. You don’t want him to be your friend.” This attitude is not exclusive to women, many of our male clients seem to feel a need to be dignified and polite and don’t get down there and dig in when they need to.

**DI:** Conflict is a part of business and life. I always say most of us got into this business because it dealt with inanimate objects and avoided conflict, but guess what? There are people, politics and conflict in projects! Being able to deal with all that gets rewarded. We need to teach and get better at that.

**BH:** You need a strategy for it.

**DI:** I’ve always seen you as a shining light. You speak your mind and are willing to do something about it. In your practice as a specifications consultant and over the last 20 years as a strategy consultant you have put yourself on the line to give back and effect change. Have you trained your replacement? Who is coming along to stand on your shoulders?

**BH:** Thank you for those nice compliments. I have a wonderful staff but none of them want the stress of managing a firm.





So, although we have a consistent approach to our work and share a philosophy of what differentiates our services, there's no leadership transition plan at the moment. That was a primary goal for 2020, but then COVID came along.

**DI: To try to put a lid on a crazy year and turn the corner to 2021, I'd like to hear about your own strategy. Back in January 2020 we were rife with cute analogies about "2020 vision" and seeing clearly. Thanks to COVID, politics, social unrest, climate change, the economy and other wide—reaching crises, that didn't happen. Instead, we were conditioned to deny science and facts, and were overloaded with 'fake news', mis- and disinformation. We're going to try again this year. In your quest for certainty and optimism, are you doing anything to bring focus and purpose to the year ahead?**

**BH:** We're not out of the woods with respect to the pandemic. Our workload is close to normal, but our receivables have tripled. Depending on what happens politically, economically and medically, we can't be sure we'll ever get paid for some of that work. That's an immediate concern. And then there's the question of the future of cities. Will anyone build a speculative downtown office building in the next decade? The pandemic has made many companies decide to become virtual companies so how people chose housing and whether they show up in an office may change dramatically. Higher education is in something of a crisis. Almost all our higher ed projects are on hold. The pandemic will change the nature of the construction industry and we don't yet know how it will evolve or how it will change our work. Since January 1 we've been flooded with RFPs,




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*although terrible things can and do happen, if you survive, your life is a gift. Doing something to make the world a better place will help offset the suffering caused by this calamity.*

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about triple the normal rate. So we are seeing activity and optimism in the industry for 2021.

**DI: Staying with our introspective bent, would you give that same advice to others — your clients?**

**BH:** I suspect our clients already know they need to get paid and that the future of the construction industry — especially large public projects — is uncertain. Giving advice about riding out the pandemic is foolhardy because there's no modern precedent or rational way to know what's around the corner. The world's experience with COVID is less than one year. We're optimistic that the medical cavalry is coming to our rescue, but that's not proven yet. The best—case scenario is that vaccines and therapies will be brought to market so that COVID will be a nonissue in a year. The worst—case scenario is that the virus will elude medical treatment and leave a significant number of people with impairments and others in lockdown, which will cripple the economy for a long time.



Like everyone else, I want to believe that human ingenuity will prevail. But that is not a certainty.

**DI: That's telling. You're a strategy firm and you know these issues, but you're struggling with them yourself. Do you have any plans to broaden your network to include more diverse participants in the year ahead? Diverse in age, thought, discipline and every way — to widen your perspective?**

**BH:** 2021 doesn't promise to be a growth year at this moment. That could change, but for now, we're happy to be alive and intact with the same staff we had in January 2020.

**DI: That's understandable. What haven't I asked you that you'd like to share? Something that's been bugging you, or a bit of advice in a time when wisdom seems so needed?**

**BH:** The pandemic has caused losses in some respect for everyone. Our country is leading the world in terms of COVID infections per capita. My mother was a Holocaust survivor so I would tell people that although terrible things can and do happen, if you survive, your life is a gift. Doing something to make the world a better place will help offset the suffering caused by this calamity.

**DI: Wonderful advice to end with. We need more of that. Thank you for sharing it and for reflecting with us.**

**BH:** I'm delighted to do it.

*Barbara Heller is an architect and founder of the specifications consulting firm Heller & Metzger PC as well as the founder and CEO of the business consulting firm Design + Construction Strategies LLC. She is a senior fellow of the Design Futures Council and a member of the Advisory Board of Stanford University's Center for Integrated Facility Engineering (CIFE). She has worked on over 400 construction projects and her clients include several firms whose principals were awarded the AIA Gold Medal.*



# Multidimensional Change

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**SCOTT LAMONT**

CEO, EDSA



**ERIC PROPES**

COO, EDSA

## Multidimensional Change

*Scott LaMont and Eric Propes discuss EDSA's leadership transition, structure and next—generation aspirational strategies.*

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** Your firm has a great legacy. Since its founding by Edward Durrell Stone Jr. in 1960, EDSA has grown to more than 120 professionals with an international reach. You recently underwent a major change. Your website calls it “The next generation of leadership.” What prompted it?

**Scott LaMont (SL):** While our previous studio structure paved the way for 60 years of historic growth, we saw an opportunity to improve our practice with a heightened emphasis on strengthening client relationships, improving efficiencies in business processes and a reaffirmation to be an industry leader. Once we committed, it came together quickly. There was no debate. As a leadership group, we all agreed that it was the right decision to benefit future generations of the firm.

**Eric Propes (EP):** DesignIntelligence helped us through the process. I remember Dave Gilmore asking, “What are you going to let go?” That was the first thing. We started looking at it all from a fresh perspective. With most of the leadership team beginning their professional career at EDSA, along with our deep—rooted legacy, that was hard to do, but we all agreed to it and pursued the change as a partnership.

**DI:** How did you come together so quickly? That’s not the norm for change like this. Any thoughts on why it was so easy to get consensus?

**SL:** We didn’t form a quick consensus when it came to the detail of the restructure — that took months of hard work. What came easy was the idea that it was time for EDSA to take the next step in our firm’s evolution. We have always had great potential and the ability to do amazing things but rethinking our “normal” set us on a path to achieve greater results.

**EP:** The key word Scott mentioned was potential — the potential to grow and better familiarize ourselves with various markets and sectors. We could have stayed the course and been fine, but you can’t get to the next level without change.

**DI:** Can you overview the major changes? The two of you were brought in as new leadership, but what other structural changes happened? Were criteria set for developing the new leadership or was it obvious?







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*In our studio structure, we had always been “player—coaches.” We were all part—time leaders and part—time designers and marketers, which was a model that came with many limitations.*

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**SL:** We can take it in two parts: leadership and structure. One fundamental change was to dedicate more responsibility to senior team members within the organization. In our studio structure, we had always been “player—coaches.” We were all part—time leaders and part—time designers and marketers, which was a model that came with limitations. We realized that accomplishing longer—term goals required more opportunities for mentorship, while still focusing on the health of the business and how we run our projects and teams. Without full—time oversight, those components would never reach their full potential.

Structurally, we looked at how the governance of the organization was working and what made the most sense to support what we were hoping to become. That’s how it started. Simple decisions that positioned younger leaders to assist more in our day—to—day, firmwide operations.

It was a nice back—and—forth cadence to get us to a place where we began to see the new structure come into focus.

**EP:** A big part of the restructuring was looking at our player—coaches. How could we assemble better teams? How could they operate more efficiently, and how can we play to each other’s strengths?

We tried to play to leadership’s complementing talent in the best ways possible and looked at what regions and markets we wanted to be in. We centered the organizational structure around how we could all work better together. The largest shift was a reduction from 13 different studios to six.

**DI: You changed leadership, regrouped people and consolidated studios. What about the human, emotional side? How did you cope with those issues through the change — personally, with leadership and in getting that message out to the firm?**

**EP:** From the start, it had been engrained in our heads, “What are you going to lay down or give up?” That was always the question — the backbone of what we were trying to do. Going into it with that attitude, we had a clearer perspective. It wasn’t, “How does this affect me?”; it was, “How can I best contribute?”

We were also going through COVID during these changes, so it automatically made us more vulnerable.



Our approach was not about telling people what they were going to do. It was bouncing ideas back and forth and saying, “This is the idea. What are your thoughts?” That was the key.

**SL:** If there was a lesson to take away, it’s that discipline and a dedication are needed. It’s easy to say, “All right, let’s meet again in a month,” and then a month later, you spend half the time recapping before taking another step forward. With our meetings coming one after the other, we found our momentum and knew we were on the right track. That’s not to say that the transition was perfect, but we did the best that we could under the circumstances. The open support and communication among leadership was essential and

continues to be as we move forward.

**DI:** I have to believe your process began with core values and vision. You’ve talked about what you’ve had to give up. Can you share some of the values that came into focus, the things that remained?

**SL:** EDSA already had core values in place that spoke to our beliefs, ideals, practices and the unique essence of our organization. The next step was about weaving our core values into a vision. We began to define where we want to be and where we want to go and the actions necessary to accomplish our goals.



While our vision statement will continue to evolve as our needs and ideas of the future continue to develop, our pillars are to perform at a level above the ordinary, help shape the future and remain fundamentally human in all that we do and how we design.

**EP:** The vision had to be simple but meaningful, which is not as simple to get to as we originally thought. We had sheets of paper filled with hundreds of words we thought would provide meaning to ourselves and the staff, while being aspirational and inspirational. Focusing on our legacy gave us hints to guiding the firm into the future.

**DI:** Things seem increasingly connected today. As

**landscape architects, maybe that's not news to you. Has your transition positioned you to respond better, or were you always acting across all these issues?**

**SL:** Being landscape architects, our awareness was probably more elevated than most, which positioned us to be more responsive to what's going on around us. With our realigned teams, we now have time to be more conscious about our design thinking and decision—making, which has given us the opportunity to find greater meaning in contributing to our profession.

**DI:** What are you worried about and what are you hopeful for?





**SL:** We have our eyes on a lot of different balls, and we don't want to miss one of them. Trying to implement some of the changes we're putting in place as we develop new business and push into new markets requires focus and attention. We want to make sure we live up to the expectations of ourselves, our team and our colleagues.

**EP:** We got through the last year, which shows we can get through just about anything. There's nothing but optimism for me. No matter what goes wrong, our team can support the project and support each other. That's what EDSA has always been about, and we're ready to see where we can grow in 2021 and beyond.

**DI:** Having navigated through a firm transition, you've got your next generation of leadership. Is there anything you would share as your greatest lesson learned or challenge?

**SL:** One thing that has served us well is getting people involved. Early in my career, I had the opportunity to engage with leadership. I may have just been a spectator in the room, but it helped me understand the context, the firm and the dynamics around it. So, we've been — and will continue to be — transparent with our struggles and day-to-day decisions so everyone can understand and participate. We have a lot of new, young leaders coming up within the firm. They have a spring in their step, and they're excited to get out there and make their mark. That is our greatest source of hope and optimism.



**EP:** An additional aspect to consider is our next generation's access and understanding of technology, process and the integration of design across multiple disciplines. In the past, we would go to a job site and hope we didn't hit a few pipes from the civil engineer when the contractor was installing plant material. Now with digital workflows, we're able to understand how the development will perform in tandem 20 years into the future through 3D models. We're looking at our approach with a pen-to-pixel mentality — where the artistry of an idea and free flow of the hand happens at an early conceptual stage and starts the creative track. We then begin applying modeling and supporting information as the idea starts to grow and evolve.

**DI:** I'm so glad you took us there because it completes the

**discussion. You've got a new structure, new leadership and a next—generation team. Now you're adding tools and process. Maybe we have to take this conversation offline. Over a beer ... maybe it's a future article. I want to get to the core of the new design process. It's very different from the architect siting a building, then calling you later to select plants. Everything you have shared has been inspirational and aspirational. With your structure, people, tools and process, you're set up well for the next 60 years.**

**EP:** I welcome more conversation on process. We're never going to have the easy button, because we're never dealing with something as simple as a wall. We're dealing with living nature and site impacts. I'm excited to see where we take it next.

*Scott LaMont, PLA, is chief executive officer at EDSA. Scott joined EDSA in 1996 and has been a driving force in the firm's practice and strategic growth since. Before being named CEO, he was a studio leader and principal for 12 years, instilling the firm's ethos with a design sensibility and comprehensive approach to projects while fostering long-term client relationships. Scott is focused on the big picture tenets of people, client service and vision while leading the 120—person firm toward inspirational design with enthusiasm, devotion, creativity and humility. His broad range of global experience spans large—scale planning assignments to mixed—use residential, hospitality and urban works that have strengthened EDSA's reputation as a design leader. He holds a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Florida.*

*Eric B. Propes, PLA, is chief operating officer at EDSA. Eric has served integral roles at EDSA since joining the firm in 2001. As a principal and project manager, he offers a broad range of project experience and technical knowledge, which he applies to creatively shape and evolve the design process. As COO, Eric applies his passion and professional insights in leveraging opportunities and efficiencies across people, processes and technologies to strengthen organizational cohesion and innovation. Eric is knowledgeable in all phases of design — adding extensive technical expertise with a style that combines a unique appreciation for a site's context with contemporary design alternatives. He has a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Kentucky.*

# Inflection Points

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## KELLY FARRELL

Corporate and Commercial  
Practice Director, NBBJ

## Inflection Points

*NBBJ's Kelly Farrell discusses bold moves, timing, inclusion, leadership and priorities — during challenging times*

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** You've just made quite a change. After 17 years CallisonRT-KL, including most recently as president and CEO, you took a new leadership position with NBBJ. That's dramatic after 17 years — a significant career turning point. How did it come about? Can you share your thinking?

**Kelly Farrell (KF):** Yes, of course. It's a question I've been asked a lot recently, and for a good reason. After 17 years at CRTKL, it was not an easy decision. I'm proud of the people of CRTKL and what we built. It's been a wonderful journey, and I've made some great friends along the way.

At the same time, I was ready for a change. That was in part spurred on by a conversation I had with Steve McConnell, NBBJ's managing partner, and Tim Johnson, an NBBJ partner who focuses on commercial development. We discussed the role of design to influence people's lives and radically improve outcomes for clients and communities.

Part of what makes NBBJ unique is its focus on integrating science, research and data intelligence to design. In our conversation, the prospect of leveraging that influence and scaling to do good for people, communities and clients was exciting.

Everyone I work with at NBBJ has a passion for great design and driving a more significant bottom—line impact around the planet, people and business. It's a spectacular platform. The design work is excellent, and when you add the science and research platforms, you get tremendous innovation potential.

Given the opportunity, it was an irresistible combination.

**DI:** It sounds like the stars were aligned. It's good to hear you talking about science, research, business and scaling – things most architects haven't been good at for 100 years. Are NBBJ fellows employees of the firm or strategic alliances?

**KF:** NBBJ's Applied Research platform encompasses many people, organizations and geographies. We have an ongoing research partnership with the University of Washington focused on acoustics, healthy work and other topics relevant to our clients. We are also in our fifth year of the NBBJ Fellowship Program with Dr. John Medina, a molecular biologist who advises us on the intersection of neuroscience research, the built environment and design.

**DI:** Why was this the right opportunity?

**KF:** The firm has excellent agility and self—determination. In one of my first lunches with Steve McConnell, he asked, "Do you know why we do what we do?" I said, "I hope it's to make the world a better place." He said, "Yes, one project at a time. That's why we do it." I embrace that philosophy wholeheartedly.





I also have a long career ahead of me, and the opportunity to join a platform that the firm has built is impressive. It's an opportunity to bring clients that platform with its multi—industry knowledge and geographic reach.

**DI: What attracted them to you? What's the synergy?**

**KF:** We immediately aligned about what design can achieve, specifically that you don't have to put design excellence on hold to integrate data and intelligence. My position has been that you can improve human performance if you back it with science and research and are willing to invest in technology to prove it.

That alignment was part of the attraction. Also, NBBJ has such a broad reach user— based campuses, corporate headquarters, healthcare, and commercial work and I bring

mixed—use commercial experience. With the diverse practice background, I think they saw that as a strength to join the team and grow.

**DI: Your move is happening at a unique time in history, during a pandemic. Can you talk about the timing?**

**KF:** Nobody had COVID on their radar. It's been the most interesting time in my life — the impact of a global pandemic. Many of our clients don't have the luxury of working from home. We've got people out on the frontlines, families who have made sacrifices.

Many people have suffered irreplaceable losses, and still, there's a silver lining. If any good comes out of COVID, it's that the whole world is reimagining, rethinking, and reminding themselves that new things are possible.



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*there's a silver lining ... the whole world is reimagining, rethinking and reminding themselves that new things are possible. It's not a time to be meek; it's a time to be bold.*

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It's not a time to be meek; it's a time to be bold. Regarding my career change, I could have said, "Come talk to me in a year," but again, it's a time to be bold.

I see the market is reprioritizing wellbeing, health, personal mobility and the connectivity that technology affords. Would we have done this interview via Zoom a year ago? Probably not, we would have met up — sat down face-to-face.

We're also reaching an inflection point with COVID, where vaccines are coming out. In April 2020, we wondered if or when that would happen. Over the summer, I found myself thinking, "Now is the time to be bold. Now is the time to take a risk, accept a challenge that propels you up that next mountain — take the jump over the canyon and go after it. "We all agreed now is the time, let's do it, and hit the ground running in 2021, so here I am.

**DI: The secret is to be prepared, be present and be looking when the opportunity presents itself.**

**KF:** Yes, be open to the discussion, and engage in it. The profession is redefining itself. Businesses are disrupted by technology and changing market conditions. Some of our clients traditionally stayed in one swim lane. Now they've stretched to three or four lanes. If we're well prepared and keep pushing what is possible, we'll be their partners for that journey. It may seem like an odd time to make a significant change, but it didn't seem strange to me at all. The timing felt right. Now it's about continuing the momentum.



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*I had gotten a lot mentoring from people who were new to the business, kids right out of school, because the profession's roots and apprenticeship — "Follow me, do what I do" — is an old model.*

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**DI: You had been in Los Angeles. Where is home now?**

**KF:** For the last seven years, I was on a plane most of the year. LA was home base, but I was only there a few days each month. Now, I'm a bit more grounded. I spent about half my time in New York before moving to LA, so it's good to be back. New York is such a resilient city, it never lets itself down, it always comes together and finds a better way forward. The energy of the city and business community is impressive. I was in the city last week, and it's quiet. Sleepy. I sat outside for a very socially distanced drink with a colleague and realized I've never seen so few people in the city before. It's surreal. But it's not going to stay that way. The city is going to pick itself up. It's going to say, "How do we do this smarter, better, stronger?"

**DI:** Let's talk about leadership — and you. You spent a significant part of your career working in the trenches, doing projects.

**KF:** A good friend gave me the advice when I received my first significant promotion: “Whatever you do, don't ever completely walk away from the work — it's the magic. It's why got the in business to do in the first place.” I've taken that to heart. As a rule, I never completely let go of the work, despite my various leadership roles. Because if you let go, you lose a critical connection that allows you to add immense value to your clients and the communities.

That connectivity allows me to benefit from excellent mentoring. Good mentoring comes in all shapes, from people with a large cadre of experience to people outside or just entering the profession.

Reverse mentoring by those entering or new to the profession is also important. We architects have strong roots in apprenticeship “follow me, do what I do,” and this era of “objective—based outcomes” gives those voices a place to change how we work and what we can accomplish.

You have to ask the least experienced person on the team, “What would you do differently, and how would you do it better?” They benefit from not having preconceived notions and thinking beyond conventional wisdom. It's key to our business. We offer knowledge, talents and capabilities; gaining perspective allows you to make those elements stronger.



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*moments like that can reaffirm our direction.  
Empathy has developed in the world that  
we shouldn't let go of.*

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**DI:** Having the courage to engage entry—level team members to unleash the power of their beginner's minds is counterintuitive, but it's great coaching and 360—degree mentoring. To be inclusive to entry—level folks with a well—timed question can make all the difference in a project's direction — and in their careers.

**KF:** There's lots of genius around the table to tap. The generation entering the profession now is bold, and they want more from it than it has traditionally delivered. We have a responsibility to give that genius a place to grow. My dad was in capital improvements and large projects for Methodist Hospital in Omaha, Nebraska, making me a proud Midwesterner.

On weekends I visited construction projects with him and saw how things were built. A lot of people were involved.

My dad was a client. He'd come home and regale us with stories about how he had to solve problems. He'd lament why he couldn't get the team to solve things together. That was his role as a client — making sure the team worked. I thought that was fascinating. He hired everyone, and he still had to get them to work together. He would tell us to be a good coach, no matter your position, and make sure people work together. So, yes, coaching started young at my house.

**DI:** What other dimensions are you exploring ... people, processes, tools, disciplines, diversity, inclusion?

**KF:** All the above. What an overdue conversation. At our best, we as designers get to do complex work that influences a lot of people.



But to think we can do it alone is arrogant. We've got to partner with people and create more diversity in process and decision-making, whether it's race, skills, capability or service, to have a better kaleidoscope through which to solve problems.

I had a humbling moment a decade ago. I was overseas in China, in a neighborhood set for repositioning, and I had a clipboard in my hand, taking notes. I'm keenly aware that I am an American walking through an area in China that's about to be torn down and rebuilt. The question was, what do I think should happen there? It wasn't a great question. The better question was, what does the community think makes them better? How do they engage? How do they prosper? We needed a person from the community on our team.

We need more diversity in the talent pool as well. Many students are going through school right now have the opportunity to do rotations. Architecture is their primary pursuit, but they're spending time in medical schools, business schools and other disciplines, so they know more about their clients' education when they graduate. It's fantastic. We need more thinkers like that in our business — more perspective. I've been privileged to work with nurses who work in design and bring entire facilities to life, from equipment planning to facility transitioning. Their success makes sense; the healthcare teams speak the same language and know what they need to accomplish for their patients; having those unique talents on the design side allows everyone to work better together.

We need more partnering like that across the board. To become the firm of the future, we need to seek those pieces rather than waiting for somebody to ask, "Should we go hire somebody?" Let's question, "Who do we need to be successful? What unique talents allow us to gain better perspective?"

We're good at creating space, but we need partners who are good at recognizing why we need to make that space and what it needs to accomplish to solve the better problem.

**DI: I'm struck by how well—formed your thoughts are on these issues. You also strike me as an anomaly in our profession — you're a leader. We don't learn much about leadership in school. Most of us don't aspire to it. You have. When did you aspire to be a leader?**

**KF:** My parents believed in transparency and debate. My mother used to set topics up at the dinner table, "This 'insert your favorite topic' was on the news. Let's talk about it." She'd say, "Kelly, you take this position. John," that's my brother, "you take this position." And we'd talk about things.

She had this great saying, and I'm trying to instill it into my son. She said, "Life is a series of choices. You make them. And indecision is not a choice." That was her thing. She believed you choose and can even change your mind, but you don't get to sit idly. That has stuck with me.

Looking back, I can also say I had many coaches, few formal but much more in informal relationships. Sometimes you can walk into a room and think you understand the whole problem. But then you take a break and come back in, and you realize it's very different than you thought. Good coaches, whether they're colleagues, leaders or friends, help you gain perspective.

I was raised to work hard and have some grit because life is not easy. If you put the work in and have determination, it won't matter what role you take on. You'll figure out how to lead.

I've got to imagine most of the world's industries are moving from management to leadership. They are wildly different things. The person two days out of school needs to be a leader too. Leadership has to work across the whole spectrum.

**DI: In different ways than we saw in the top—down command and control world because we're in a different context?**

**KF:** At its best, leadership is infectious. You build a team around transparency, respect, consensus and alignment.

How does leadership get us all to row in the right direction and play well together? It's a team sport, no one person can do it all — if they can, they probably aren't doing it well.

Looking at sports for an analogy, every person understands the roles and how those relationships work together to achieve something more significant.

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*A lot of us want to go back.  
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pendulum into something  
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They know when to follow the plan and when to switch positions. They find team flow. Good leadership and teamwork create a stronger entity a better player, and it fundamentally builds on trust.

We're solving more complex issues in design than ever before. We're past shelter and rapidly evolving experience. We're solving more significant problems. The only way we're going to do it is with more leadership. And leaders must be inherently comfortable with admitting when they don't know how to do something.

If you're not the best person to tell us how to do this, you may know someone else in your network. NBBJ's organization is a network. It shows where to get resources and smart people. Businesses structured this way set an excellent stage for leadership.

**DI: What are you worried about? What are you hopeful about?**

**KF:** They are probably the same things. I am worried that we, as a society, must figure out where we're going. We've faced some of our biggest challenges over the last 10 months.

That we've survived gives me hope we can solve those challenges and work together to help communities, change outcomes and do better. I worry that we are creatures of habit. That 10—month timeframe could be just a blip in the wide arc of history. Or it could be a catalyst for tremendous change. Our profession is trying to redefine itself.



There's more technology disruption than ever. The way people use spaces, the way spaces are transacted. Do you buy a home now, or do you rent forever? Twenty years ago, you bought a home. That's what you did. You rented for a few years, saved up and then bought something. Now, that's not automatic.

The profession has this fantastic opportunity to be relevant and shape where we're going. But we need to embrace science and technology to do it.

I want to play with high—performing teams. I want to play in new fields and keep redefining the game so we can keep moving. That's the beauty of what we do — if we're good at it, we get to keep doing it. And we do it better in teams. I spend many nights waiting for the pandemic to be over. Then I spend mornings thinking, “As we start to come out of this, what are the 10 things we're all going to do better? And how do we start putting that into motion?” That's where my head is.

**DI: Given too much to do, where do you attack first? One secret is what do you say no to. What has to stop to allow room for the new stuff? Something's got to go.**

**KF:** Yes, something's got to go. If you can get your priorities straight, the things that need to leave are easy to see. We are all so connected all the time that there is this tyranny of the urgent, and the urgent is rarely a priority. You have to let go of the things that are not priorities and direct them to people who see them as one. Align what you do with what you prioritize accomplishing most.



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I schedule and organize my day in a way where I can perform best. I make my best decisions in the morning.

Don't ask me to decide anything of importance after 5:00. I'll sleep on it and decide in the morning. We all know our cycles and rhythms. You have to organize your interactions to support you when you're at your best. The priorities, for me, are ...

[Knock on door.] **KF:** Oh, I hear footsteps. We're going to get interrupted. Here he comes. Hi there ...

**DI: Okay.** [Farrell's four-year-old son enters. New York is being blanketed with 12" of snow. Son needs Mom's assistance removing coat and boots. Interview pauses.]

**KF:** One sec. How is the snow? **Son:** Great. **KF:** It was great? **Son:** Yeah. **KF:** Okay. Hold on. Sorry, Michael, one second.

**DI:** You're fine. Take your time.

**KF:** There's a lot of snow, huh? **Son:** Yeah. [Mom unzips son's coat.] **KF:** Alright, out you go. Want those boots off? Alright, one sec. Hold on, hold on. There you go. Okay, out you go. [Boots off. Son leaves.] Thank you. Sorry. I'm back. Best part of life. [Interview resumes.]

**DI:** One of the positive outcomes from COVID is that what just happened is now acceptable behavior. It just struck me — that your moment with your son just now — is an important part of this conversation. Because it used to be that an interruption like that was embarrassing or unprofessional. Now, it's delightful. And we get to share it with you thanks to Zoom video calls. Maybe our pause due to COVID has helped us remember that moments like that are the most important things. They can reaffirm our direction.

**KF:** Yes, they can. It's real life. For a long time, society required people to leave home at home and only do work at work. I don't know if that's possible anymore. Because whatever's going on in your life influences the rest. We've gotten to this point where we're in each other's bedrooms, basements and kitchens. I know more about people now than I have for 30 years because of Zoom.

Empathy has developed in the world that we shouldn't let

go of — to your point, it's better. I know more people's pets' names, kids' names, and the squirrel that might be hanging out on their back deck than ever before. Being together in new digital ways helps us see each other and the world a little better. Now we see people not just in role X, and role X only looks like so. We're seeing people over a broader spectrum. That allows people to bring their knowledge base to the table faster because they don't have to spend an hour explaining who they are when it matters.

**DI:** If we're talking about priorities, that's a pretty good place to start — with yourself and your family first, and then work, in that order.

**KF:** My priority is to amplify personal and family relationships as a foundation for strong work. The vaccine is going to give us a starting point to begin to feel safe about going out. The vaccine is offering us that inflection point.

It's not an easy road we're on. The economy has a long recovery ahead. Entire business segments are on hold until we know how the future will unfold. People are renting space who haven't had any business in 10 months. Some companies with space have realized they don't need all of it. Most of my clients and colleagues aren't going to be back full-time right away.

It's been a pendulum swing. The majority of employees for office—based corporations worked in an office before COVID-19. Now, the majority are working at home during COVID-19.

But a pendulum doesn't stay on the extremes long. A lot of us want to go back. We want connectivity and community. Now, we have to swing that pendulum into something reasonable because if it jerks back, the infrastructure isn't there yet to accommodate it.

**DI:** Kelly, thank you for being introspective with us.

KF: Thank you.

**DI:** I wish you luck in your new role. I wish you good things. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to say?

KF: It's a brilliant time to step out there and do things. I hope the entire industry steps up because the world needs us now more than it has in a long time.

**DI:** I hope we do too.

*Kelly Farrell is a corporate and commercial practice director with NBBJ in New York, a global design firm focusing on commercial market sectors. As a Corporate and Commercial Practice Director in NBBJ's New York office, Kelly focuses on projects that create healthy environments and better human performance through research-backed design.*

*A natural leader with a strong business sense, Kelly is known for her ability to lead complex mixed-use projects from concept to reality. Throughout the course of her 20-plus-year career, Kelly has developed a reputation for design solutions that are forward-thinking, sustainable and pragmatic. She has a portfolio of award-winning projects that better inhabitants lives and are woven into their surrounding community.*

*Kelly is also an established thought leader, sought after by industry organizations and publications to provide insights on current and future residential trends.*

*Kelly most recently served as President and CEO of CallisonRTKL, where she helmed the firmwide leadership team. While at CallisonRTKL, she played an integral role in major projects that contributed to the redevelopment of downtown Los Angeles, including the Four Seasons Residences Los Angeles, 888 at Grand Hope Park and L.A. Live.*



PARTING THOUGHTS

## A Conversation with Adrian Parr

DesignIntelligence<sup>®</sup>  
Quarterly



**ADRIAN PARR**

Dean, University of Oregon College of Design and Senior Fellow of the Design Futures Council.

**DesignIntelligence — Michael LeFevre (DI):** Where are you from, and what influenced you growing up?

**AP:** I grew up in Sydney, Australia — a gorgeous city perched at the edges of the Pacific Ocean, stretching through a brief area of rural land before arriving at the base of the Blue Mountains. My parents have a weekend house in the Blue Mountains. As a kid I regularly moved between buildings, mountains, open plains and the sea. Each landscape had a distinctive tempo, materiality and poetics. All three were formative in my trans—scalar and trans—temporal approach to ecological thinking and practices.

**DI:** Your travels have taken you to some amazing places.

## Parting Thoughts: A Conversation with Adrian Parr

*Parr is the dean of the College of Design at the University of Oregon and a senior fellow of the Design Futures Council. She is a filmmaker and architectural theorist and has served as a UNESCO water chair for seven years. In this feature, designed to connect the DesignIntelligence community, we share a recent conversation.*

**What experiences stand out?**

**AP:** Two come to mind. There is the time a Turkana tribesman tried to buy me off my driver. Apparently, he offered up a lot of goats to the driver. I remember explaining I was married, but that didn't worry him at all. Lucky for me and my family back in the U.S., my driver wasn't interested in acquiring a herd of goats (grin). Then there is the time I, my driver and the car we were in were hijacked by a militiaman with a semiautomatic slung over his shoulder. That was a little more hair—raising. I remember quickly calculating I probably had 10—15 minutes to make friends with him and to convince him to let us go. I don't know which is more alarming: the prospect of finding myself married to a

wealthy old herd owner in the Kenyan desert or ending up captive to a militia group in a remote Kenyan village. Either way, that was then; this is now. I am back home, safe and sound.

**DI:** You are in the middle of a major life change, moving from the University of Texas at Arlington to assume the deanship at the University of Oregon. What are your parting thoughts, and can you share your agenda for your work ahead at U of O?

**AP:** Serving the College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs community as their dean these past few years has been a great experience. I am going to miss all my wonderful colleagues and friends throughout Dallas—Fort Worth and UTA. I was incredibly fortunate to work with so many folks who shared my interest in environmental and social justice. Leaving is bittersweet. That said, moving to the Pacific Northwest where my husband, Michael, and I married, where we have lots of family nearby, to an institution where Michael is an alumnus of the architecture program, feels like coming home. As the incoming Dean of the College of Design at the University of Oregon, I am excited to galvanize the incredible intellectual and creative talents of a stellar group of faculty and students in tackling the gargantuan challenges associated with climate change, urbanization, sustainable development, and environmental policy. The University of Oregon has an amazing, rich history and longstanding commitment to environmental initiatives. This aligns neatly with my own leadership goals and research interests.



Photo credits:  
Jon Hughes



In this regard, as a UNESCO water chair, I am also eager to contribute to and support the many environmental research initiatives already taking place throughout the College of Design and across campus. I would like to continue exploring the creative, intellectual, and pragmatic potential of watershed urbanism, the ways in which two distinctive systems – watersheds and urban areas – interact and inform each other, and how planning and design might create scenarios for mutual flourishing.

**DI: Do you have a favorite building?**

**AP:** Honestly, I don't. I am intrigued by the connection buildings form with each other; the socio—environmental parameters of the built environment; the healing potential of public spaces and buildings; the qualities that make a built environment hostile or welcoming; and the ways in

which a built environment can tickle the imagination and facilitate unexpected happenings. Landscape architect Diane Jones Allen once described me as a closet landscape architect. I think there is a lot of truth to that.

**DI: Who are your architectural heroes?**

**AP:** I am interested in collaborative and collective architectural paradigms that shy away from invoking modernist notions of a singular architectural protagonist viewed as heroically leading the profession. I am thinking of entangled design processes that emerge in concert with local stakeholders and meaningfully integrate social, economic, environmental, and political realities. Practices that come to mind are the Kounkuey Design Initiative, Design Impact, and MASS Design Group.



*Photo credit: Shirley Che*

**DI: What are you reading?**

**AP:** I just finished *Where the Crawdads Sing* and am now in the middle of *The Overstory: A Novel*. Both are brilliant pieces of fiction that grapple with the imbrication of trauma and ecology, turning the environment into a character of its own. I love getting lost in that kind of journey into the unconscious layers of environmental experiences, following the residues our encounters with the environment leave on our humanity, or the lack thereof.

**DI: What is your greatest joy?**

**AP:** Bodysurfing and skiing. There is a real-time navigation of smooth space you enter for each that I find particularly exhilarating.

**DI: As a leading industry voice, what would you change about the design profession if you could?**

**AP:** For all projects to use the SEED (Social, Economic, Environmental Design) evaluator as part of the design process. It is an incredibly useful interactive software program created by the SEED network ([seednetwork.org](http://seednetwork.org)) that provides benchmarks, standards, and an evaluation of the social, economic, and environmental outcomes of a project.

**DI: Have you reinvented yourself to remain relevant as a thought leader?**

**AP:** Many times. If something captures my imagination, it



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*I would like to continue exploring the creative, intellectual, and pragmatic potential of watershed urbanism, the ways in which two distinctive systems – watersheds and urban areas – interact and inform each other, and how planning and design might create scenarios for mutual flourishing.*

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saturates me with excitement. That often presents new openings on life I feel compelled to test. It is hard to say whether that is out of curiosity, impatience, or a more conscious undertaking for relevancy. The many directions I have taken in my life never begin with a tabula rasa. They always involve a return to dormant aspects of myself, carrying traces of previous journeys: acting, experimental sound art, spoken word, theorizing, policy, producing documentary movies, curating, and now — leading a college of design.

**DI: Having lived in so many wonderful places across the world, what's your favorite meal, where — and of course — an accompanying beverage?**

**AP:** Oooh, I am going to have fun with this question.

Eggplant Maqluba at the Auja Palestinian Ecovillage in the Jordan River Valley ... sweet hot tea on a rug in a Bedouin community in the Negev desert ... fresh sukuma leaves cooked by Mary in the Dagoretti slum of Nairobi ... chocolate crêpes from a street vendor in Paris ... a 5 PM spritz overlooking the canals of Venice; enjoying Catalan Pa amb tomàquet with my dear friend Santiago Zabala in Barcelona ... a glass of Barolo wine with tajarin al tartufo bianco in Piazza Santo Spirito, Florence ... after a day dog sledding in the Arctic Circle, sitting in a cabin, wrapped in a blanket, sipping on a hot toddy warmed by the aromas of cinnamon, honey, lemon juice, and whiskey ... and last but not least,

Beyond Burgers on a pretzel bun with home—cooked fries in the backyard with my husband Michael and our kids.

**DI: What's the best advice you ever got?**

**AP:** My dad taught me to never give up. It's 10% talent and 90% hard work. My Hungarian nana taught me love is infinitely generous. You can love many people, but in different ways. Just because you love one person doesn't mean you love another less.

*Adrian Parr is the Dean of the College of Design at the University of Oregon and a DesignIntelligence Senior Fellow. She has served as a UNESCO water chair for seven years conducting fieldwork with indigenous groups and slum communities around the world. She has published extensively on environmental issues and is the producer and co—director (with Sean Hughes) of the award—winning documentary, *The Intimate Realities of Water*.*



## PEOPLE: NEW DI TEAM MEMBERS



Beckie Hawk, *Webmaster*

Beckie Hawk has been in the graphic design industry since 1977 and has been designing and developing websites since 1997. This mother of two sons and grandmother of two grandsons lives and works in beautiful Madison, GA. Having worked as a contractor with DesignIntelligence for the last three years she recently joined us as full-time web developer. Beckie attended the Ringling School of Art and Design in the 1970's and studied to be an illustrator.

In her free time, she enjoys: "painting, drawing, walking in nature and pleasant encounters with the local wildlife. I like going on walks. That's when weird things happen."

*bhawk@di.net*



Nicole Puckett, *Graphic Design Lead*

As a former photojournalist, graphics editor and graphic designer, Nikki's experience in newspapers and the trade-show industry brings a contemporary aesthetic and enthusiastic focus to the DI community.

"I try to approach all projects the same way I live my life — with purpose, authenticity, and connection."

*npuckett@di.net*



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*From Design Futures Council's Leadership Summit on the Future of Environmental Responsibility*

# In the Balance

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Essays from Voices in the Built Environment Industry

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