

The resourceful architect

what else could architects do?

Background

The construction market is one of the hardest hit by the credit crunch. If recent news is anything to go by, students of architecture are expected to graduate with limited immediate prospects of employment as architects.

Students are aware they will need to use all of their resourcefulness in this competitive job market. Training in architecture demands great single-mindedness, and has been likened to training for the priesthood, but how might this training be re-deployed rather than squandered in the current crisis?

How could students turn their knowledge, intellectual discipline, and visual skills into virtues outside the context of architectural practice? And what advantages would come from a greater distribution of architecture professionals working in non-architectural jobs?

In the absence of a prosperous construction market, how might people trained in architecture enter a productive relationship with the smaller, local community or a more distributed economy? How too could architectural graduates help transform a downturn in building activity into significant social and environmental benefit?

Brief

Design a service, business or project that uses and extends your architectural education but is not based on being paid to design buildings.

In developing your proposal, make it clear what aspects of your training in architecture come into play and how they meet the needs of society today.

We expect the submissions to be diverse in form and character, reflecting participants' critical thinking about what architecture is and what architects do.

You might begin by considering:

- how could your special expertise make non-architects more resourceful in dealing with their built environment or any other challenge?
- what opportunities are there for people with architectural training to link with or work between existing initiatives?

- are there un- or under-exploited opportunities in the communication of architecture and its benefits to society or commerce?
- are there enterprise opportunities in support services to architectural practices?
- could your technical or visual skills be applied at a different scale than architecture usually occupies?
- how might your skills be used more effectively in collaboration with others?

Submission details

- entrants should submit a statement of no more than 500 words describing their proposal and its principal benefits
- up to 5 boards of A3 material, visualising the concept, each with the RSA label on the back
- digitised AV presentations are also acceptable

All work submitted should carry an RSA label on the back

Below are some examples of interesting and successful architecture-related businesses and projects. This is just a snapshot and not intended to be comprehensive. It is for you to develop your own response to the brief:

Architecture Network

The Open Architecture Network is an online, open source community dedicated to improving living conditions through innovative and sustainable design, and to making ordinary builders everywhere into master builders. Here designers of all persuasions can share their ideas, designs and plans, collaborate with each other, people in other professions and community leaders, manage design projects, protect their intellectual property rights and build a more sustainable future.

The Network grew out of collective frustration in sharing ideas and trying to work together to address shelter needs after disaster, in informal settlements and in our own communities. Architects, designers, engineers and anyone else involved in the building trades is welcome to share their ideas on the Open Architecture Network - but it's not just for professionals. Community leaders, non-profit groups, volunteer organizations, government agencies, technology partners, healthcare workers, educators and others are invited to collaborate and share their expertise.

Far from replacing the traditional architect, the goal of the network is to allow designers to work together in a whole new way, a way that enables five billion potential clients to access their skills and expertise. The network has a simple mission: to generate not one idea but the hundreds of thousands of design ideas needed to improve living conditions for all.

www.openarchitecturenetwork.org

Wordsearch

Wordsearch acts as the communications interface between architects, their clients and the wider public. It writes, directs, designs and publishes a range of material that explains architectural projects; produces branding and design strategies that create identities for places; and helps explain what architects do. The media Wordsearch works with is fundamentally digital but can be used to produce books, brochures, websites, presentations, exhibitions and movies. Its clients are architectural firms, developers, public bodies, and cultural and educational organisations.

Peter Murray, Chairman of Wordsearch, trained as an architect but went directly into publishing and journalism. Wordsearch evolved over 20 years ago from his frequent frustration at seeing good architects failing to deliver projects because of their inability to explain their work outside their peer group. The company works on major projects all around the world – Moscow, Mumbai, Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong and Shanghai, as well as London, Birmingham and Edinburgh. These include Battersea Power Station, Masdar City, ICC, and The Russia Tower. A diverse range of clients has included the London Architecture Biennale, CABA, Taipei Financial Corporation, Max Fordham, and exhibitions such as Cities of the Future.

www.wordsearch.co.uk

Malcolm Reading Consultants

Malcolm Reading Consultants provides independent advice and hands-on support to clients involved in capital projects. This can range from drawing up feasibility studies and business cases, to resolving project problems, master-planning and acting as the client's representative throughout the course of the project. The advantage for the client, who may never have commissioned a building previously, is that they have someone at their side who is focused on their objectives. MRC specialises in cultural, educational and regeneration work and was one of the first consultancies to work with the Heritage Lottery Fund, securing nearly £60m of funding in the last twelve years.

www.malcolmreading.co.uk

SEED Foundation

This is a social enterprise that explores and promotes new design approaches to meet the challenges of sustainability. SEED believes this encompasses the responsible design of objects and services, but that designers need to go one step further: learning to work with other professions, considering infrastructure, and collaborating with

communities. The new role of design must explore how the combined design of innovative products, services and partnerships can impact on lifestyles and behaviour.

In a context where designers must always respond to the needs of a client however, how can this be done? SEED thinks that current economic scenarios offer business opportunities for designers who are prepared to adopt new entrepreneurial skills and new ways of working. They are currently piloting their first enterprise as a demonstrator of their ideas, to see if it is possible for a designer to take on this new role, break out of the traditional client/designer relationship and earn a living by solving social and environmental problems. Working with Camden Council, this new enterprise is exploring the value in food waste.

www.seedfoundation.org.uk

Fifth Floor Gallery

This gallery in Los Angeles recently held an exhibition called **Looking For Work**, featuring furniture by architects. A response to the pace of construction slowing drastically, the show was work by many architectural designers who have turned their attention to smaller objects to satisfy the impulse to design as well as cope with the economic downturn. Some have forged out completely on their own while others supplement their time in the spatial design field by creating these beautiful but useful objects.

www.fifthfloorgallery.com

City repair

The City Repair Project was formed in Portland, Oregon in 1996 by citizen activists who wanted a more community-oriented and ecologically sustainable society. Born out of a successful grassroots neighbourhood initiative that converted a residential street intersection into a neighbourhood public square, City Repair began its work with the idea that **localisation** (of culture, economy and decision-making) is a necessary foundation of sustainability. By reclaiming urban spaces to create community-oriented places, the projects seeks to engender greater neighbourhood communication, empowerment of communities and nurturing of local culture.

www.cityrepair.org

EXYZT

Initiated in 2003 by five architects, EXYZT is now a multidisciplinary collective of about twenty people: architects, graphic designers, video artists, photographers, horticulturalists, builders and a DJ. The collective has made a speciality of temporary installations governed and nourished by the contexts of time and location, including the Southwark Lido at the 2008 London Festival of Architecture, Dalston Mill for the Barbican Art Gallery's 2009 exhibition Radical Nature, and the "occupation" of the French Pavilion at the 2006 Venice Biennale of Architecture.

www.exyzt.net

Schedule

Dates for submission of entry forms, fees and work

Thursday 19 November 2009

Deadline for Entry Form(s)/Fee(s) for all projects

(including *Directions Plus*)

Entry Forms/Fees should be sent under separate cover

– **not** with your entry – to:

RSA Design Directions Registrations
8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
UK

Monday 16 November
– Friday 11 December 2009

Submission period for all project entries

(except *Design Directions Plus**)

Entries will be accepted at Brooks Transport Services Ltd on any weekday within the dates stated between 08:00-18:00, excluding weekends and bank holidays. Entries arriving after 18:00 on Friday 11 December 2009 may not be accepted

Please remember that all entries should be sent or delivered to:

Brooks Transport Services Ltd
Unit 2/15
Second Avenue
Bluebridge Industrial Estate
Halstead
Essex CO9 2SU
UK

All Entry Forms/Fees should be sent or delivered to:

RSA Design Directions Registrations
8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
UK

**Design Directions Plus* – Submission date for entries for these projects is:
Friday 8 January 2010