

Architects as creators of the future - navigating the fine line between dreams and what is possible

Many people think of architecture as work that happens on paper (or in a computer program), says Landseer Collen, principal, director and founder of BPAS Architects, but the thought process starts well before pen gets put to paper (or designs get created on-screen).



Landseer Collen, principal, director and founder of BPAS Architects

“If architects only operated in a paper world, we would never get our buildings evolved beyond paper,” he says.

“Architects must be dreamers, visionaries, explorers and entrepreneurs. The principle of avant-garde architecture whereby architecture is innovative, radical and always progressing, becomes the focus in urban development when an architect designs for the future. To be able to take a commission from a client and translate that into a drawing, you first must be able to create a vision of the future. It takes imagination – plus the cognitive development of being able to think in a 3D environment.”

He says that architects not only translate a client’s need into an image, but have to be able to play with it to see what’s possible. For example, renowned architect Frank Gehry, known for iconic buildings such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain and The Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, USA, created the Dr Chau Chak Wing building at Sydney’s University of Technology based on the idea of a crumpled paper bag.

He was also said to have designed the Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles by simply crumpling up a piece of paper and saying “there’s the design”, but he [told CNN](#) that this story was just a gag invented for the TV show *The Simpsons* and that his process is far more involved. Like Collen, he says it begins with gaining a deep understanding of what the client is looking for and the parameters of the job (from the budget to the specific site). Function comes first, but then the architect also has the opportunity to bring something special to the project that goes beyond an understanding of the engineering and technology – that will “engender an emotional response”.



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Collen describes this quality of architects as “a necessary sense of playfulness” and says architectural professionals navigate the fine line between dreams and what is possible. “We have to be visionaries to understand what we’re designing – to interrogate not just the moment in time we’re being asked to design for, but the long-term vision for a building and how it will work 50 years in the future.”

This means that architects can’t view their buildings in isolation but must understand the community and environment in which they are located and be constantly thinking about how society is changing and what that means for the built environment.

“Architecture is science translated into art,” he says. “You can’t separate those two disciplines out if you’re an architect – you need them to work together in symbiosis. It’s a collaboration between the creative and physical environment. We must push boundaries to explore what’s possible. If we don’t, we’re no longer designing the future, we’re just a tool to replicate the same things in the now. We should not blindly accept limitations.”



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Architects have an important role to play

He says that architects are by nature problem-solvers and innovators, which is something that is often overlooked by those outside the profession. For example, during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, BPAS turned its architectural skills to a medical need, creating a carton cubicle that could be used as an isolation space for a Covid patient wherever it was set up.

“If that person tragically died, the box could be folded into a temporary coffin for transportation of the body without risk of contamination for anyone else, thus maintaining dignity,” Collen explains.

“We couldn’t help with the epidemiology or economic issues because those things are not our areas of expertise, but we can contribute to society with the skills we have. I think the contribution of architects to society is still undervalued, but we continue to work to show that we have an important role to play.”

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