

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE?

THE CONSUMER HOME

BACKGROUND

Architects and architecture are increasingly becoming a marginal profession as society heads into the next century. The problem the profession finds itself in stems, in part, from a tradition within the modern movement of architecture. Architects became uncomfortable with the idea that architectural design could be a marketable commodity. Architecture is considered by many architects to be the 'mother of the arts', and is intended to make the world a more beautiful place. It is not to be a commercial tool responding to the popular tastes of a particular group or time. This mentality turned the profession towards the institutions, corporations and wealthy patrons. The profession essentially ignored the housing industry, resulting in the loss of both great amounts of potential income, and the opportunity to become a more familiar and intimate part of the lives of many people. The profession has alienated itself from the lives of most individuals.

We do not live in a society which is ignorant of the presence of design. On the contrary, design plays a major role in the lives of many people. However, most people are not particularly interested in who designed the IKEA table they have just purchased, nor do they care about who designed their car. They simply like the product and purchase it on those merits alone. We, as a society, purchase and consume design in everything we buy. The problem for architects lies not in the public's perception of the value of good design, but rather in the public's poor perception of the value of architecture.

METHODOLOGY & SCHEDULE

A. CRITICAL ESSAY (JULY 1998 - OCTOBER 1, 1998)

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE ?

The critical essay component of the project will focus on what processes, both economic and social, drive architectural practice today, with the goal of gaining insight into how architecture can remain important and relevant in today's product oriented society. In addition, the

economic, market and social factors which contribute to the process of product development. Comparisons will be made with the architectural design process, taking into consideration the same factors. It is further hypothesized that the results of this investigation will provide key insights into how an innovative architectural firm could begin to approach architectural practice from the point of view as architecture as a product.

ii) Case study Analysis

A) A close examination of a company which demonstrates how the service of design is concealed within the product and marketed to the general public. The goal of this study is to determine some of the means by which a product, which is sold through conventional means, is created. The study will provide some 'real world' insight into the process at work.

B) An examination of the service of the architect and the product of the building. Close attention will be paid to recent trends in the development industry with particular attention paid to a company or firm. Developers are coming up with many new ways to sell and market their products. Through close examination of some of these methods, insight will be gained into how architecture might be packaged for consumption by the general public in much the same way as the typical developer home is.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW (March 1998 - October 1998, *ongoing*)

Conran, Terence. The Essential House Book: Getting Back to Basics, Crown Publishers, 1994.

Crame, James P. Design Plus Enterprise: Seeking a New Reality in Architecture, American Institute of Architects, 1994.

Foot, David K. Boom, Bust & Echo, Toronto, Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 1996.

Gutman, Robert. Architectural Practice: A Critical View, Princeton Architectural Press, 1988.

Hubbard, Bill Jr. A Theory for Practice: Architecture in Three Discourses, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996.

Lyndon, Donlyn & Charles Moore. Chambers for a Memory Palace, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997.

Portman. John. The Architect as Developer. New York. McGraw Hill Book Company. 1976.

C. DESIGN INVESTIGATION (October 1998 - January 15, 1999)

PRODUCT ARCHITECTURE: CONSUMER HOUSING PROJECT

The design investigation will endeavor to provide an architectural example of consumer housing. The consumer home can be bought off the shelf. It is sold not to clients, but rather to a buyer or consumer. It can be customized within pre-determined limitations in order to adjust to the particular tastes of the buyer. The consumer home is governed by current market forces in the industry and must compete, on par, with the products of the competitor in order to be successful. The product will be aimed at the \$125,000 - \$175,000 home buyer market.

This design investigation proposes that an architectural solution can be found which will meet both market and consumer demands. In addition, the building will be an example of affordable and meaningful architecture which is accessible to the general public. The goal is also to demonstrate that architecture, when thought of as a product, is equally meaningful and important to both the architect and society.

The site for the project will be within the inner-city areas of Calgary, as defined by the City of Calgary Planning Commission. The location is significant because of a common perception amongst this consumer category that inner city property, though desirable, is not affordable. From an urban design standpoint an inner city site in Calgary offers the opportunity to fill in one of the many gaps in the urban fabric of the city.

To make the project feasible it will be a multi-unit dwelling of four to eight units, depending on the site. The project will endeavor to provide each unit with equivalent, or superior, amenities to those found in a typical developer home in the range of \$125,000 - \$175,000.

Components include: Market Analysis & Feasibility Study (October 1-15, 1998)
 Site Selection (October 1998)
 Programmatic Requirements (October 1998)
 Conceptual Design Development (Oct 1998 - November 1998)
 Architectural Resolution and Details (Dec 1998 - January 1999)

D. PRESENTATION WORK (January 15, 1999 - March 1, 1999)

The presentation will keep with the theme of architecture as product, and will seek to portray the project in a means conducive to marketing the project to a general audience. As such, the documentation presented must be easily understood by an audience unfamiliar with the techniques of an architect. At the same time, however, the presentation material will try to introduce the general public to a way of viewing the project as architecture.