

r e : T H I N K . . . . .

## ARCHITECTURE + NATURE

*It is my feeling that living things and non-living things are dichotomous....But I feel that if all living plants and creatures were to disappear, the sun would still shine and the rain still fall. We need Nature, But Nature does not need us.*

- Louis Kahn

*“Resident” vs. “Inhabitant:” “A resident is a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify.....The inhabitant, in contrast, ‘dwells,’ as Illich puts it, in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place. Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness.*

- David Orr, *Ecological Literacy*

*Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.*

- Frank Lloyd Wright

*Nature doesn't have a design problem. People do....Instead of using nature as a mere tool for human purposes, we can strive to become tools of nature who serve its agenda too.....What would it mean to become, once again, native to this place, the Earth - the home of all our relations?*

- William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle-to-Cradle*

### Responsive, Responsible

Humans and all their associated artifacts are an immutable fact in nature. On our current consumptive trajectory, we are on a collision course with the environment. If we accept the definition of sustainability as “the triple bottom line” (i.e., the three E’s of “economy, ecology, equity” OR the three P’s of “people, planet, profit”), at its practical root, sustainable *architecture* is about how we come to terms with our place in nature. (We might also overlay onto our sustainability definition Vitruvius’ maxims of “utilitas, firmitas, venustas” to remind ourselves of the timelessness and applicability of these lessons). Faced with increasingly diminishing resources, creating appropriate architectural environments is beyond choice: it is essential. Designers no longer have the luxury to ignore the affects of their architectural creations on the global environment and its inhabitants. Buildings are the mediator between man and nature; the designer is the artistic intermediary charged with creating a responsive, responsible architecture.

In this context, ideas that will be considered in this thesis sequence will include:

### Architecture + The Landscape

Place-making is essential in the creation of meaningful architecture, no matter what the scale. Scale of settlement patterns and appropriateness of setting are vital issues in any successful architectural endeavor. The specifics of any given place, its genius loci, must be understood and respected. In addition to phenomenology and place, creating symbiotic relationships with the land should be the goal of all of our built artifacts.

### Architecture + The Environment

Sensitive architectural solutions respect and should celebrate the environment. This includes an appreciation for the local (geographies, bioregions, seasons, micro-climates, etc.) as well as a response to the global (energy sources and resources, etc.). Because buildings are energy consumptive, this is an arena in which architects have the opportunity to innovate. Learning from the past, learning from other cultures, and taking advantage of technological innovations, architects can design resourceful, delightful environments.

### Architecture + Its Inhabitants

Even the best sustainably designed environment will not be useful unless it elicits “delight” in its users. Creating spaces that allow people to experience joy, health, comfort, and well-being is essential. Exploring material tactility, thermal delight, and inspiring luminous environments are a few of many methods to this end, moving toward a multi-sensory architecture.



## Architecture + Materiality

Materials are the basic building blocks of an architect's language. Exploring the poetic potential of structure and materiality is the goal here. Further, it is our responsibility to understand the pivotal cradle-to-grave-to-cradle issues related to material choices, as well as the energy consumption involved in extraction as well as recycling. Form generation goes hand-in-hand with manipulation of structure and material.

## Architecture + Technology

The appropriate use of technology should be the aim of any project. This includes not only the technology used in the design process but also in construction, operation, and maintenance.

## Architecture + the Social-Cultural-Economic-Political Context

All architecture is physically contextual (whether consciously conceived or not); it is also always political (whether consciously calculated or not). The primary goal should be to make architectural proposals that are strategic rather than reactive, appropriate to the space and time of the given situation.

## The Paradigm of Architecture

The ultimate aim of this topical sequence is to understand how our creative work reflects upon, questions, and relates to the broader field of architecture. Are we advancing the discipline or simply replicating the past? Are we improving our relationship with nature, or settling for the status quo? Are we creating stimulating, responsible environments or .....? To paraphrase Corbusier, we should aim to make the bad difficult and the good easy.

Naturally, these topical issues are not discreet and they should overlap. The iterative design process will be a guiding principle.

## Planning in the Present for the Future

Buildings are among the more durable artifacts that a society produces with causal affects on the environment that far outlive their makers. As thoughtful, educated designers, we are the stewards not only of creating meaningful spaces for people but also for respecting the environmental setting of these places. Man's existence within the earth's fragile ecosystems (of which we are a part) calls for sensitive, responsive, appropriate design.

It is our responsibility to search for a fitting co-existence, a symbiotic relationship that neither impoverishes the planet nor our human experience on it.

## Schematic Schedule

### *Thesis Seminar: "re:THINK: Architecture + Nature"*

What is the Thesis (and development of a dialectic). Critical position explored through a series of "peer" reviewed abstracts and presentations. Precedent research, program, and site explorations.

### *Design Studio Fall: Ideation*

Explore schematic ideas through a series of topical charrettes. Site modeling and analysis. Conceptual design proposals. Submission #1 thesis "book." Fieldtrip(s). Juried reviews.

### *Design Studio Winter: Development*

Re-evaluation of conceptual ideas. Demonstrable development of design proposal(s). Submission #2 of thesis "book." Fieldtrip(s). Juried reviews.

### *Design Studio Spring: Synthesis*

Completion of thesis. Submission of #3 thesis "book." Juried reviews and final exhibition.

## Addendum:

I was the recipient of a four year national lighting grant from the Nuckolls Fund for Lighting Education to support the creation of lighting coursework at Cal Poly. As part of the grant activities, I will encourage interested students to explore architectural lighting as it relates to their chosen projects (bearing in mind that all thorough architectural proposals should include thoughtful attention to architectural lighting). There are grant funds to subsidize interested students (some travel and perhaps materials).

*Treat the Earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children.*

- Kenyan Proverb

