Commitment

We have a duty as architects to do our best for our clients. This duty applies to more than just the clients who are paying us, but to everyone that will ever see or interact with our designs, from the owners of the building to the passersby on the street and to the people that scrub the floors. We owe it to all of them to make their interaction with our design as smooth as can be. We can't just do this job for the paycheck. We owe excellence to everyone in our society regardless of if they give us anything in return. We are civil servants, in our own way. "It's [design's] historic and idealistic purpose, to serve industry and the luxury consuming masses at the same time, of executing things easier to make and better to last with, seems to have been side-tracked" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 28). In many ways the current built environment is screaming at everyone. Our public spaces have been made hostile in the interests of capital. There are laws against simply existing within a public space (loitering); this is killing community. Teens don't have anywhere else to go so they stay inside behind screens. The government has tried to drive homeless people away to where they can't be seen, hiding their failure to our society. These excerpts from The Eyes Of The Skin perfectly illustrate the hostility of public space: "The wide open spaces of contemporary streets do not return sound, and in the interiors of today's buildings echoes are absorbed and censored. The programmed recorded music of shopping malls and public spaces eliminated the possibility of grasping the acoustic volume of space. Our ears have been blinded" (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 51). "A society of surveillance is necessarily a society of the voyeuristic and sadistic eye. An efficient method of mental torture is the use of a constantly high level of illumination that leaves no space for mental withdrawal or privacy; even the dark interiority of the self is exposed and violated" (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 48).

So, what can we as architects do? After all, this is more of a societal problem, a lot beyond our jurisdiction. All we can do is our best. Our building at a time we will make the built environment less hostile, and fulfill our duty to society.

Our duty also extends past humans. The Earth should be considered as a client in every design we conceive; after all, the earth bears the brunt of our decisions. As the designers of the built environment we need to foster a symbiotic relationship with the earth, rather than taking without regard for our host. We need to be making better decisions — for our descendants, for the planet, for the future. We the people are as dependent on the planet as it is on us. We cannot fail, for its sake as much as our own. "The fact remains that man has unprecedented control over the world and everything in it. And so, whether he likes it or not, what happens next is very largely up to him." from 'Life on Earth' 1979 - David Attenborough

Altruism

Many of us are aware of the stereotype of the egotistical architect; I want to take preemptive measures to ensure that I never fall into that self-centered pattern of thinking. The primary way that the ego of an architect has a negative effect is by prioritizing themselves over the client and refusing to acknowledge when they are wrong. "There is always temptation to impose one's own design, one's own way of thinking or, even worse, one's own style. I believe, instead, that a logic approach is needed. Logic, but without abandoning the stubbornness that enables you to put forward your own ideas whilst being persuadable to the ideas of others." — Renzo Piano, 1989. Nothing you design is for you. There is no need to insert your own tastes and preferences. Put your clients before yourself, and put your clients before the design; remember, we are civil servants. We are but a guide for the client, a chaperone through the realm of possibility. I want to design for people rather than for the sake of design. This memory of Max Dowd recounted by David Lee — a former colleague of his — embodies the direction that I want to take my career: "Architecture for him was about the people rather than the form, ... [he] found form that reflected the condition and the people that he was working with." And finally, don't just design to be serious. Get comfortable with remaining unrecognized. If you strive for notoriety hard enough you will get it, but maybe not for the reasons you hoped. It is best to stay humble. I want to do great things with my career, but I don't care if I receive any recognition for it. I will be perfectly satisfied just knowing that I am making my clients happy and the earth happy with my detailed and sustainable designs. It was reading Super Normal that helped me articulate these things that I was already feeling. Especially pertaining to great selfless, and subtle design. The following passages really hit the nail on the head for me: "Designers generally do not think to design the "ordinary." If anything, they live in fear of people saying their designs are "nothing special." Of course, undeniably, people do have an unconscious everyday sense of "normal," but rather than try to blend in, the tendency for designers is to try to create "statement" or "stimulation." So "normal" has come to mean "accumulating" or "boring" design" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 20). "I've started to measure my own designs against objects like these glasses, and not to care if the designs become less noticeable. In fact a certain lack of noticeability has become a requirement" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 28). "I always get hung up on the creator's intentions or the self-expression being set adds with the functions or the harmony inherent in that object" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 102).

Beauty

The most important value I hold regarding architecture is beauty. Now, my definition of beauty deviates from the standard. I say beauty is anything that makes a person feel a positive emotion when they see it. This is a very wide definition, and it will vary from person to person; One person can find beauty in something considered unequivocally hideous by another. Which is why it is so important to get to know your clients and the things they find beautiful. In Super Normal Jasper Morrison reflects on a pair of wine glasses: "If I ever catch a look at them on the shelf they radiate something good" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 28). This is what I want the entire home to do for the residents, to always exude goodness and happiness, to be a delightful atmosphere to exist within. An architectural opinion that I've had for a few years now is: If it's not beautiful what's the point? After reading Super Normal I realized that I'm not just talking about the base definition of beauty, but also the beauty of function. I believe this is because function well executed makes me feel the same joy/admiration/happiness that I would feel when perceiving something aesthetically beautiful. The following quote (once again from Jasper Morrison) perfectly describes the concept of beauty: "I think Super Normal is supposed to be a debate about beauty, not just beauty quickly perceived but beauty on other levels, beauty which takes time to be noticed, which may become beautiful through use, the beauty of the everyday, the beauty of the ugly and useful, long-term beauty" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 105).

Methods & Motivations

Most students approach Thesis with their minds set on solving a problem or fixing a systematic issue. Instead of taking this direct approach I have determined that the topic that is most likely to have an actual impact is improving myself. If I make myself a better architect now, then the impact I'll have through my career will be greater than any other project I could do this year.

I plan to establish a personal code of values to abide by throughout my career, and build an uncompromising determination to make the world a better place. I'll begin by discussing topics that are personally important to me, and that I think everyone would benefit from having more of in their environment. After I have established my personal code I will put it to the test with a "practice client" even though this exercise will be a far cry from the experience a client would give me, I feel that it is still worth doing.

In short, my goal is to make myself the architect that the future needs by evaluating current day issues/proceeding to them with theory, and putting that theory into practice.

Detail

Let us ruminate on the words of Eileen Gray as quoted in The Eyes of the Skin: "As if a house were to be conceived for the pleasure of the eye rather than for the wellbeing of the inhabitants", and Juhani Pallasmaa's interpretation of her inevitable: "... Whose design approach seems to grow from a study of the minute situations of daily life rather than visual and compositional preconceptions" (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 92). I wholeheartedly agree that we need to be putting the humanity of a home before any other design aspect. The purpose of a home is to be a sanctuary to retreat to, somewhere that the inhabitants feel wholly at peace with themselves and at ease enough to invite guests in to share in their refuge. Home is where you can shed the outer layers of the public self and return to your deep inner self. You are the home and the home is you, people who know you well will be able to recognize this. "One must hold for the human being, that he might rediscover in the architectural construction the joys of self-fulfillment in a whole that extends and completes him" (Gray & Badovici, 1929). A recent experience I had with detail came from the advanced ceramics class that I'm currently taking. Fellow graduate architecture student Sofia Lee was describing the motivations behind her design of a collection of condiments: "I made them to fit my hand, because, well, they're mine". The complete beauty of this statement amazed me, they reflect me because they are mine. How often do we get this level of personality from an object anymore? When was the last time something fit you perfectly? This is what I want to bring to architecture — personality, a reflection of the best parts of the self. The goal for everything that I design is to imbue it with as many details as I possibly can. From the carved edge of a countertop where there could have been a hard corner, to the way the door handle fits in your palm, to having the dishwasher next to the sink for easy loading. I am most interested in the type of details that you don't notice until they are gone. The following observations from Super Normal greatly inspired me in this regard, and have finally given me language to articulate what I've been feeling for years. "It's interesting to discover, after five years of using a chopping board, that we've been making use of aspects of its design without even noticing them" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 104)

"...the sudden appreciation of a form so subtly adapted to its job as to be almost invisibly integrated into the object, allowing it to perform naturally without call for praise until we are ready to notice it..." (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 104) These days we take function for granted and for the most part things work well enough not to complain about them. So taking a purely functional approach to design would be disastrous. Super Normal's almost how things work in our relation to living with them. Not just in one-off use but interactively, over the long term, in relation to everything else we own and use and the atmospheric influence all these things have on our lives" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 104)

Craft

The western world has a quality problem.

I'm sure you've noticed that the products being made these days "Aren't like they used to make those". Producers are more worried about making a profit than making a good product. This mentality has expanded to almost every nook and cranny of production since the industrial revolution. Everything from clothes and furniture to technology and homes. Almost anything you can buy has fallen into this trap; and if the product is higher quality than it's almost always an exorbitant price, leaving the poor and middle class with no other options.

I believe everyone deserves quality and beauty. In a luxury future these would be considered human rights. But unfortunately those with only money on the mind control production, which has led this prediction from Edsger Dijkstra's From Eclecticism to Doubt (published 1972A) to come to fruition: "If we aren't careful, standardization and rationalization, both excellent means for reducing costs, will only lead to providing buildings that are even more deprived of soul and individuality than those we have seen thus far" (Dijkstra & Dijkstra, 1972A). It is our job as architects to design with care and quality so that our art can be enjoyed for decades to come. It's not terrible, do not choose hardware based on things that arrive alone. Regardless of how well the physical space is designed, if the doors are hollow plywood and the surfaces veneered particle board it will bring down the atmosphere of the entire space. There is no true replacement for quality materials and skilled craftspeople. It doesn't help that these days people are encouraged to throw things away when they are slightly damaged. If things were higher quality, or at least repairable, we wouldn't be having this problem. The dumpster behind my apartment is always full of things that could have been at the very least donated to the thrift store instead of thrown away. People have gotten so used to things being disposable, we aren't taught to mend anymore. We are moving away from a culture of repair/reuse/repurpose towards a culture of waste. All of this on top of the epidemic of "Planned Obsolescence" — mostly seen in technology but encroaching on other markets. Because how do you get people to buy more of your product? You make your product degrade faster. It is infuriating. These problems bring me back to some quotes from Francesca Picchi and Naoto Fukasawa discussing Japanese terms: Picchi: "Naoto mentioned the wabi-sabi principle, which implies an idea of beauty or serenity that comes with age, when the life of the object is evidenced in its patina and wear, or in any visible repairs." Fukasawa: "In Japan, we have the word shunkan. A literal translation would be "polished by hand." It is a metaphor for something that's been used and become better after having been touched again and again. Shunkan is a polished luster; it is also a metaphor for something that has taken on a personality of its own, or improved with age. It fits comfortably in one's hand, a metaphor for something that has come to fit in our lifestyle. This same meaning is included in wabi and sabi, but the awkward beauty of something decaying over time indicates an overall beauty, which human hands cannot touch directly; nature is its entirety has weathered that thing. Shunkan expresses a beauty that occurs with time when an object survives constant use, undergoes a metamorphosis and becomes more beautiful than something that is new" (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007, p. 110).

I have a longing for a world where more people appreciate the ideals of wabi-sabi and shunkan, and the charming flaws gained with age. This culture of waste is a societal problem — not one that can be entirely solved with architecture — but I'll still do what I can. Through my career I want to promote quality, longevity, and repairability. There is a beauty that comes with life well lived, and the quality of today's products is not letting them live full lives.

Integrity

It will be very important for me to find a firm that aligns with my ethics and values. It will be hard to stick with my values as a young professional if those around me who have more say and impact don't agree with my positions. In that situation my first instinct would be to say that it's fine, that it's just the way it is and that I'll have to wait to express my values until I'm in a position with more security and power. But that's dumb. I know it would eat away at me if I allowed my values to be so easily compromised. It is simply not an option. I need to find a balance between rigid commitment to my values and spineless submission. I need to figure out which scenarios deserve my critical flexibility. Unfortunately I think this can only be revealed through time and experience.

I must not be easily swayed by the ideals and opinions of others. If I am ever asked to bend my values, I must carefully consider through deep introspection what is being asked of me and decide accordingly. I must not justify corner-cutting shortcuts just because it is easier or convenient for me. I owe it to myself to take on challenges and grow from them. I must never stop learning. Do not resist new ideas just because they are new. Study them in depth and then decide if they should be embraced, modified, or rejected. I must never stop thinking for myself. No other person or artificial program is capable of making what I will make. Each and every one of us has an amazing and unique machine within our skull that is capable of magnificent things, and I believe that it is a shame to outsource creativity to something that gains no joy from it, all while alleviating our brains to atrophy from lack of exercise. In short: "What is needed most in architecture today is the very thing that is most needed in life - Integrity."

- Frank Lloyd Wright

Symbiotic

As I stated above, we all need to be considering the earth in the role of a client. We design these buildings that will have a lasting — if not permanent — impact on the earth, so it only makes sense to prioritize the world's best interests before our own, and before that of the design. "Sustainability in construction isn't a challenge — it's a responsibility." - Dr. Jane Smith, Environmental Engineer

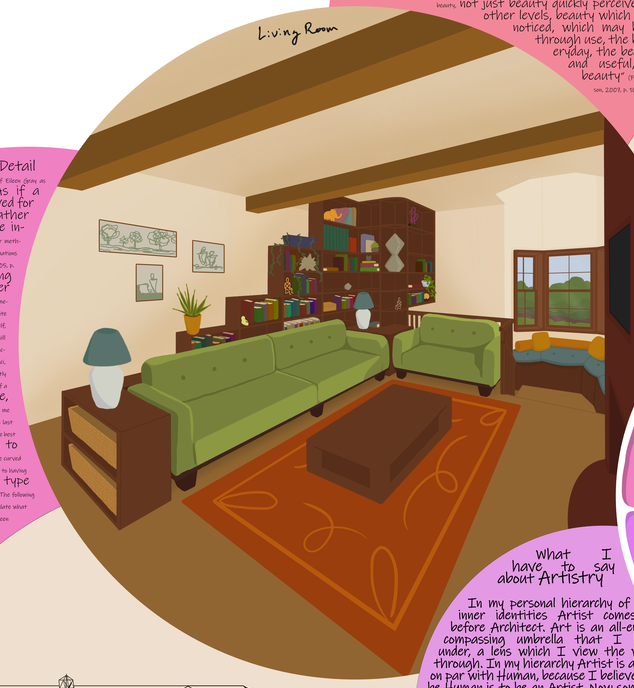
We tend to think of ourselves as the stewards of the earth — an ideal stemming from Christianity — all while forgetting that we are part of it. We are still creatures, albeit capable of much good and much harm. We must remember that "Humans are not separate from nature. We are a part of it." - Carl Sagan The built environment should blend seamlessly with the natural environment. We need to create a symbiotic relationship with nature, our designs could showcase the endless beauty that it has to offer, but instead we choose to crush it beneath our foundations. "The living world is a unique and spectacular marvel yet the way we humans live on earth is sending it into a decline." from 'A Life on Our Planet', 2020 - David Attenborough There is much room for improvement in the sustainability of construction, but at least there is room. So many solutions have been engineered in recent years, and these solutions tend to only get more affordable with time. Throughout my career I want to be a proponent for sustainability. I want to live to see the day that "sustainability" is not something we discuss anymore, because it has become innate.

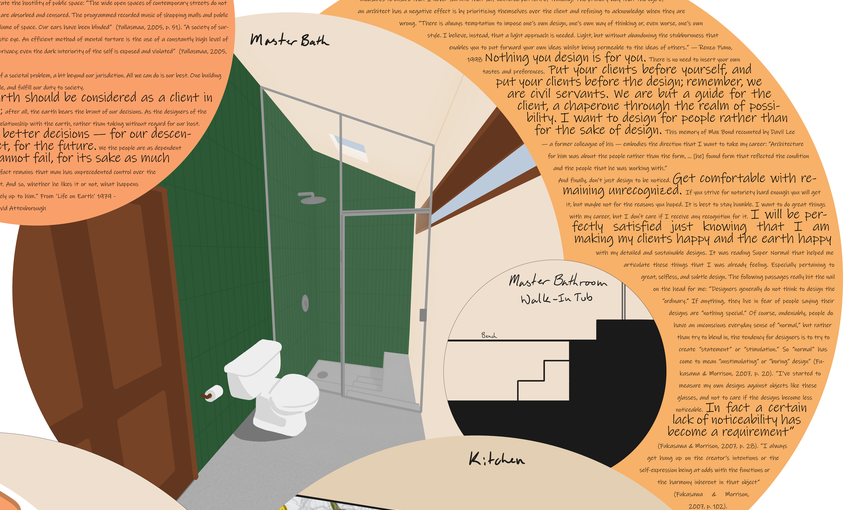
Small

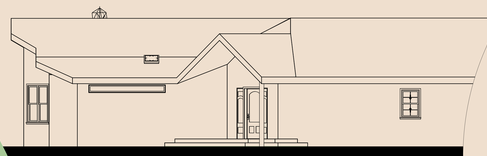
An easy way to be sustainable is by decreasing size. American homes have done nothing but grow overtime, while the amount of people living in them has decreased. I personally really hate this trend. It is rooted in the American ideal that bigger is better, that having More is better regardless of quality, and that More is the ultimate social display of success. Now, I am not advocating that we all return to living in the 800 square foot homes of the late 1700's and early 1800's, that is unrealistic. But it would benefit us all to focus on quality before size. "Mc Mansions", as they are colloquially known, represent the extreme of this trend. Ranging from around 5,000 square feet and onward they take up an extraordinary amount of space while giving the dweller little comfort in return. As prospective client Laura stated to Susan Susanka: "All we've got is square footage with no soul" (Susanka & Obolensky, 1998, p.8). The average suburban Mc Mansion is made cheaply and wastefully. They are built using cheap materials and often the bare minimum quality of assembly. I do not blame the builders for this, they are not given enough time or money to be encouraged to care about the small details of a project, or to take pride in their work. The wasteful side of Mc Mansions lies in the square footage. The two to five people that will be inhabiting the home regularly could not possibly need all that space, many rooms will probably go unused for long periods at a time. This is all before even considering the wasted vertical space. Mc Mansions often have large double-height spaces; these spaces waste construction materials and money heating them. The solution is simple: build smaller. I think every residential architect should read The Not So Big House by Susan Susanka. Her book performs less wet ink and how to design smaller, trading square footage for quality. The world could use more quality.

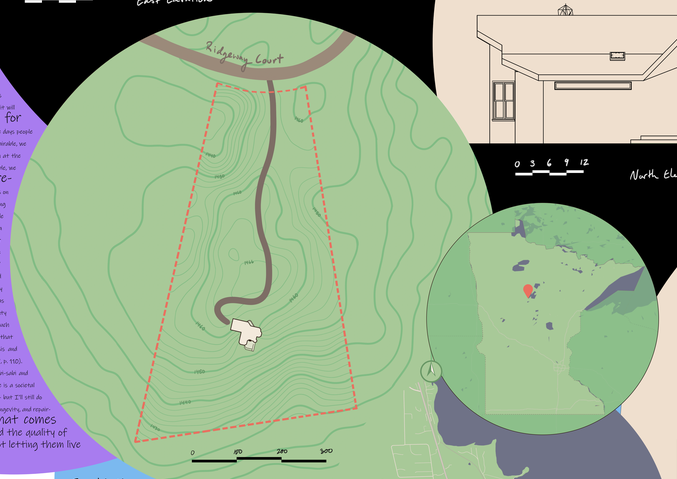
Eco-nomical

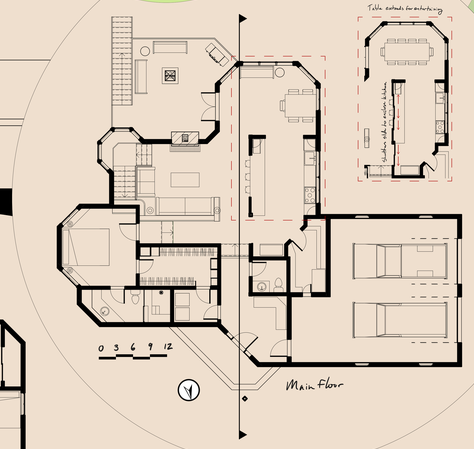
For our capstone project we designed a senior-focused multi-family residential project in the heart of Bismarck. Because of the oil fracking and natural gas extraction industries being what supplies such prominent jobs in North Dakota, the people are largely against anything marketed as "sustainable", because they see it as a threat to their livelihood. However, sustainable building practices are not harming their industries, so when in relation to architecture it is a slightly misguided fear. So, when working in this area and others like it, it is important to truthfully present any sustainable propositions for the building, but when doing so you must leave out the key buzzwords so you don't trigger a negative response. Even if a client doesn't request any sustainable measures, it is sometimes possible to include them on the basis that it will save them money in the long run. It helps that sustainability can be incorporated into the dwelling and the lifestyle in so many different ways. As time goes on we see so much improvement in these methods, as well as an eagerness from the public to utilize them. Hopefully one day it will be standard practice to include sustainable features into all new construction.

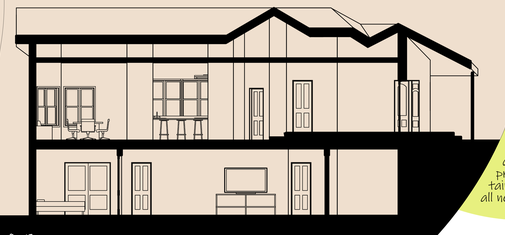


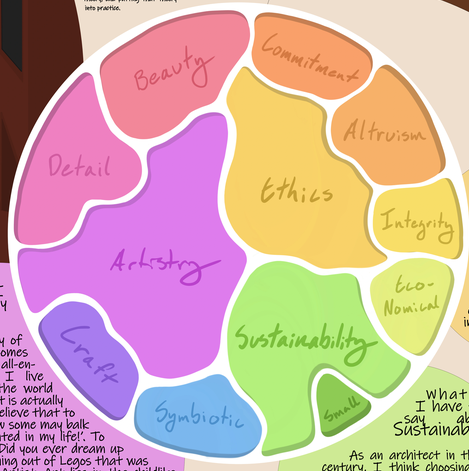












What I have to say about Artistry

In my personal hierarchy of inner identities Artist comes before Architect. Art is an all-encompassing umbrella that I live under, a lens which I view the world through. In my hierarchy Artist is actually on par with Human, because I believe that to be Human is to be an Artist. Now some may balk and rebut: 'But I've never painted in my life!'. To that I ask: Have you created? Did you ever dream up stories as a child, or build something out of Legos that was all your own? Then you are an Artist. Art lies in the childlike wonder and play that we all had, some people — who society would define as "real" artists — were just more encouraged to feed their creativity.

Now, what does this have to do with architecture? Everything. To design is to make art; meaning that every single architect is an artist whether they know it or not. We carve spaces and paint them with light, carefully organize every space so that it is pleasing to the eye and ear, and influence the emotions of those who experience our art. If that's not an artist I don't know what is.

What I have to say about Ethics

Most people go about everyday life not thinking about ethics because its role in life is more innate rather than consciously considered. However, in the case of architecture it is necessary that ethics be purposefully involved, there is too much at risk.

What I have to say about Sustainability

As an architect in the 21st century, I think choosing not to build sustainably is incredibly irresponsible. Haven't you heard? The planet is dying and we still have time to fix it. I think you may be ignoring this because it seems too large, unachievable, difficult. Get over it. Any step in the right direction is beneficial no matter how small. You've got a job to do, and it's more important than you realize.