

## DESIGNING FOR DESIGNERS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE

By: *Jack L. Nasar, Wolfgang F.E. Preiser, and Thomas Fisher (editors)*

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### RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR A RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

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This new book "Designing for Designers" is published by Fairchild Books and is edited by J. L. Nasar, W. Preiser, and T. Fisher, three academics of international prominence. Nasar is a professor of city and regional planning at Ohio State University; Preiser is a professor of architecture at the University of Cincinnati; and Fisher is a professor and dean of the college

of design (formerly known as CALA-College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture) at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. In the context of this review, one should note that this effort capitalizes on the many distinguished publications authored or edited individually or jointly by the editors including Nasar's Environmental Aesthetics, Preiser's Post Occupancy Evaluation, and Fisher's In the Scheme of Things.

The book marks a new understanding toward looking at the learning environments that house architecture and design programs as a new building type that deserves special attention. This is clearly evident in the article of Thomas Fisher who calls for a fresh look at buildings of school architecture as a new typology. Inciting a speculative form of curiosity, the title of this book "*Designing for Designers: Lessons Learned from Schools of Architecture*" calls for a deeper insight into ways in which designers design environments to accommodate themselves. Concomitantly, the title sums up how the book captures a considerable number of evaluation case studies that uncover merits and demerits of architecture and design school buildings.

Accounting for the relationship between the schools of architecture building forms and their users exemplified by students and faculty, this book adds significantly to the architectural library. While the first impression is that the book targets designers, a closer look reveals that it can be of paramount value to architecture, design, and planning students. It fosters their understanding of issues they study in their programs by relating those issues to their immediate surroundings. This is not only the intended reader, academics, practitioners, and university decision makers are important targeted readers of this timely contribution.

Constituted in four parts, the book introduces eighteen articles preceded by the editors' introduction, the majority of which are empirical research based and highlight the paramount value of assessing the dialectic relationships between architecture and design students and their environments. The introductory chapter is about the context of architectural education today in which the editors set the stage for debating the theme and the context within which such a building type is created. The chapter introduces a number of critical statements in order to highlight the fact that this book is the first of its kind. This is clearly evident in the argument made by the editors "*Yet, in spite of the special significance of this building type, the architecture of schools of architecture has received little critical discussion (Giovannini, 1996). Although some authors have written systematic reviews of architectural education, no book has focused on the architecture buildings themselves.*" Another critical statement is introduced to highlight idiosyncrasies inherited in architectural academe "*Architecture schools have often*

*sought new buildings by signature architects as a way to build a reputation. Although some of these buildings won design awards and praise from the critics, sometimes prior to construction and occupancy, the same buildings did not work well for the designers.*" In essence, this statement implicitly calls for a departure from the conventional practices of architectural criticism in architecture (Sanoff, 1991) that has contributed in different ways to false or superficial reactions of subjective judgments about the quality of buildings and the overall built environment.

Utilizing multiple approaches for discussing and debating the architecture of schools of architecture, buildings are examined from different perspectives including the evolutionary history of architectural education, typological analyses of architecture school buildings, systematic post occupancy evaluations-POEs, and comparative analyses of those evaluations. On this basis chapters are classified under the headings of transforming architectural education, assessing architecture school designs, and evaluation case studies.

Accommodating multiple voices of experienced and eminent academics, the first chapter includes articles from Robert Gutman on redesigning architecture schools, Daniel Friedman on architectural education on the verge, Henry Sanoff on the evolution of architecture schools, and Tom Fisher on a typology of architecture schools. All of these articles emphasize the evolutionary aspect of architecture school buildings. However, one should note the very informative article of Henry Sanoff who introduces the reader to some of the hidden aspects of the history

of architectural education by addressing the teaching/learning processes and the common methods of instruction and how they were accommodated since the days of the Academie Royale D' Architecture of the 17th century, through the French Beaux-Arts era, to the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, up to the establishment of MIT school of Architecture, the first school of architecture in the United States, and the subsequent developments in architecture school buildings throughout North America. Sanoff concludes his critical review by arguing that a building for the teaching of future budding professionals should enhance, foster, and celebrate their activities. And, one would add in this context such a building should foster the development of constructive attitudes that young graduates take to the profession. In a recent review by Scott Carlson it is argued that buildings for schools of architecture should be the best structures in university campuses. The reason is simple, that is the designers are working for clients and users who understand what their needs are, the design process and its limitations, potentials, and pitfalls.

The second part of the book is exclusively developed by the editors. It encompasses two interventions, one about assessing designs of schools of architecture, and the other about lessons learned and the future of schools of architecture. While the position of the first intervention within the book seems logical, that of the second was expected to be an ending chapter. However, perhaps the editors wanted their reader to get their message earlier and clearer before going into in-depth evaluation cases.

The third part includes nine contributions in

the form of evaluation case studies from the United States. They highlight the value of post occupancy evaluation as a branch of environment behavior studies that has evolved as a distinct field of research following the early environmental analysis and building appraisal studies of the 1960s in the United States and England. While revealing aspects of successes and failures in the school cases examined, an important finding is manifested, that is the wide spectrum of issues, approaches, tools, mechanisms of assessment. Using Preiser's et al. terms, they range from the simplest indicative types of studies to the most intensive diagnostic types (Preiser et al., 1988). The work of Star Architects which is typically sought after by university administrations is now under scrutiny and examination. While the results of some of the assessment studies in this chapter reveal that star or signature architects manage and articulate building forms well enough, in many cases they failed to address how these forms are responsive to the needs of students, faculty, and staff of schools of architecture.

While some scholars may argue that the results of these evaluation case studies juxtapose architectural criticism against rigorous assessment, the position taken by this reviewer is that it is not a matter of either or, but both criticism and post occupancy evaluation are needed as each addresses a different audience and aims to uncover specific aspects of building qualities. However, the value of POE studies lies in the argument that they are performed for important reasons that go beyond the academic exercise and the purposes of criticism in architecture. They are to correct unforeseen problems in buildings in use, to fine tune the building through continuous

feedback mechanisms, to document successful aspects of building performance, to give reasons for expansion, remodeling or building new constructions, and ultimately to improve the quality of future design decisions by updating planning and design guidelines of similar building types. In essence, the value of this chapter and in fact the whole book lies in the fact that the conclusions outlined convey an important message and insight into designing future buildings for schools of architecture.

The fourth part encompasses evaluations of schools of architecture in Turkey by Ebru Cubukcu, Australia by Gary Moore, and Sweden by Cara Andersson and Nathan Perkins. While the effort of editors in including these cases is applauded one should note that three evaluation cases are not enough to go beyond the Anglo American discourse, it was expected to see more cases from outside United States as a considerable number of architectural programs was established and in parallel, a considerable number of architecture school buildings was built over the past two decades throughout the Middle East, Far East, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. This indicates that perhaps POEs and assessment studies are not part of the research culture in these regions. In this context, one should note an important comprehensive study undertaken by Hisham Gabr and Khaled Al-Sallal on evaluating the premises of the department of architecture at the United Arab Emirates University, UAE. Such a study is published in *People, Places, and Sustainability* edited by Gabriel Moser et al. (2003).

Designing for Designers is a conscious endeavor toward systematically addressing the relationship between architecture students

and faculty and the physical environment that accommodates their needs, wants, and activities while at the same time reflecting or translating their aspirations in a visually pleasing and user responsive environment. While discussions have been centered in recent years on improving the quality of architectural education and design studio pedagogy (Salama, 1995 and 2006, and Salama and Wilkinson, 2007), one should accentuate that such improvements will not be realized until the architecture of school buildings is designed in tandem with the thinking of the experiences that take place inside them.

One of the futuristic aspects of this book is that it opens an avenue for future studies on linking different teaching methods in classrooms, lecture halls, and studios, and the qualities and characteristics of spaces and places that house them while fostering architecture students' performance and faculty productivity. Strikingly, these issues have been addressed extensively over the past few years in pre-university education by..., but never at the level of schools of architecture buildings. Has not the time come to address this understanding with respect to buildings of schools of architecture?

In the view of this reviewer, this book opens another avenue for a radical rethinking of the criteria required for accrediting architectural programs by NAAB-National Architectural Accrediting Board in the United States, and other agencies operating worldwide. The reason is that most criteria place emphasis on the quality of programs, curriculum content, knowledge delivery methods, quality of faculty teaching and research, learning outcomes, and standard spatial requirements in relation to the number of students with little or no interest

in the spatial qualities of the building that accommodates all of that. One would end here by this question; can NAAB criteria involve a post occupancy evaluation study of buildings accommodating architectural programs?

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