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To Build or Not to Build



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At the Committee of Adjustment I happen to meet Paul a former classmate from architecture school. It's 20 years later and we're getting our designs passed. Sometimes sobering, at other times invigorating but always a little anxious. These judicial bodies can be idiosyncratic and unpredictable. Nonetheless, approval furthers our financial survival in the work we love to do. Paul is cool and skilled in his handling of the committee. What also adds to my admiration of him is the fact that he is also a principal partner in a construction company. He is one of my heroes. I know of three other designer / architect / builder heroes and it seems the list may be growing.

Architect / designer and builder, a natural fit? The incredible expertise required to design and construct, the daunting litigious nature of contract and people management, the constant negotiations required with financiers, insurers and risk management types can send many a designer and architect running from the opportunity to take responsibility for both design and construction.

Many designers I know happily recall those optimistic days as young students and apprentices that we were always headed towards producing cool and meaningful work. Unfortunately many of those feeling have been severely tempered or squashed through years of actual practice. Now by the time designs get through the client, the developer, the bank, the project manager, the constructor, the quantity surveyor, the engineers, the neighborhood committees, the planning examinations, the building examiners and the lawyers that sometimes there little else to do but to mourn at the feeling that the baby went out with the bathwater.

To paraphrase Paul; it's about time that architects take some considered risk and learn the lessons of the early architects who were also builders and developers, in order to maintain consistency of vision, manufacture and attain reasonable profits. I knew there was correctness to this sensibility and the operative phrase was **CONSIDERED RISK**. In other words, as designers and architects, we need to change the nature of our comfort zones. That is to say to change the nature our designer business model.

I present two images. In the first image is a portion of a contemplation/massage room where I acted as designer, contractor and project manager. The room's ethereal nature reflects my client's wishes for a place where many of the physical realities every day life could be suspended. The perception of no walls, no uninvited sound and a light spectrum that changed to harmonize with one's mood. My experience in construction allowed me to make this happen within my budget.

The second image is that of a 'NuDura' workshop I attended in order to understand the building science and economics of the expanded polystyrene (EPS) concrete wall system. The attempt



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- R.C. Archdiocese of Toronto
- Art Gallery of Mississauga
- Art Gallery of Ontario
- Art Gallery of York University
- Art Metropole
- Bata Shoe Museum
- Black Creek Pioneer Village
- Blackwood Gallery
- Bradley Museum
- Creative Spirit Art Centre
- CBC Museum
- Campbell House
- Museum of Carpets and Textiles
- CNE Archives
- Casa Loma
- Centennial College
- Colborne Lodge
- Collections and Conservation Centre
- David Dunlap Observatory
- Gallery TPW
- George Brown College Archives
- Gibson House Museum
- Glendon Gallery
- Goethe-Institute
- Grange
- HVACR Heritage Centre Canada
- Halton Region Museum
- Hamilton Artists Inc.
- Historic Fort York
- Historic Zion Schoolhouse
- Hockey Hall of Fame
- Hart House, University of Toronto
- The Law Society
- MacKenzie House
- Market Gallery
- Mercer Union
- Metropolitan Toronto Zoo
- Museum of Childhood
- National Ballet
- Ontario Association of Art Galleries
- Ontario Crafts Council
- Ontario Jewish Archives
- Ontario Science Centre
- Power Plant-Contemporary Art Gallery
- Royal Canadian Military Institute
- Royal Ontario Museum
- Ryerson Polytechnical University Archives
- Salvation Army
- Scarborough Historical Museum
- Sharon Temple Museum
- Spadina Museum
- Textile Museum of Canada
- Thomas Fisher Rare Book
- Todmorden Mills
- Toronto Aerospace Museum
- Town of York
- Trinity College Archives
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- YYZ Artists' Outlet
- York Museum
- York Quay Gallery

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here is to bridge the gap between the designer and financier and or contractor. On the one hand many financiers and contractors believe designers are simply disconnected from the dirty realities of construction and project finance. Ironically I'm also attempting counter the perceptions of many designers and architects who say that those designers who are too close to construction methodologies have somehow compromised their ability (their imagination) to produce critically relevant work. I argue that the possibility of achieving the first image is made more possible and affordable by understanding the role of the second image.

In the 'old days', the designer or architect was also the builder. We don't need to reinvent the wheel maybe just change our perspective on the existing one.

[\[email this story\]](#) Posted by Rohan Walters on 02/19 at 12:54 PM

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