

The Art & Design of Built Environments

Instructor: Michael Colgan

Ph. 595-8071 fax 595-4261 e-mail jm,colgan@worldnet.att.net

Overview:

Art, Beauty, Architecture, Color, Love and Religion are all difficult concepts to define, provoking strong emotions, which are difficult to put into simple, meaningful terminology. When we experience, or are touched by the practical realities of these abstract concepts, however, we become acutely aware of their influence and power. Instinctively, we are more likely to burst into tears, song or poetry, become angry or behave in ways we might otherwise avoid, than we are to attempt detached analyses of these subjects. Sometimes one individual is held in their grip, while others either feel no effects, or experience very different emotions, faced with the same circumstances. As if to make an inadequate situation worse, these concepts usually mean different things to different people, frustrating debate and analysis.

Our human nature makes many people uncomfortable with realities which can be felt and experienced, but which cannot be adequately described. To help overcome this discomfort we may resort to categorization and classification, cheap but effective methods of containing complex subjects for later study. Frequently, however, no further study takes place--the classification or categorization becomes the extent of the study effort. One indication of an inability to adequately describe a particular subject is the inverse relationship to the subject's categorization. By this, I mean that the more categorization and classification attached to a subject, the less well it is understood by the classifiers and categorizers. That we seem unable to explain architecture adequately is indicated by the seemingly endless categories into which buildings may be placed and confirmed by the thousands of architectural texts and tomes, each of which, in hundreds of pages, address terminology, artistic expression and historical context, but somehow still fail to give the subject matter adequate explanation.

At it's best, architecture is fine art and technical excellence combined, at it's worst, it presents a social, fiscal or economic menace. Architecture has a rich heritage. But architecture is not just history, it is the work of today. It is also our future. When we design, developed and built something in which people live, work, play or worship, it may become architecture. Until a construct is built, it is planning, it may be art, but it is not necessarily architecture. Whether a construct is good or bad architecturally, it will often receive awards. In the world of architecture, it sometimes seems that every project, especially those with large municipal price tags, is an award winner. Does this modern reality mean that bad architecture no longer exists?

Ultimately, architectural success is not judged by architects, but by the public, those who must use these products of the built environment for their intended purposes. For students of design, another element must also be considered. That element is an understanding of the intent of the designer. Without an understanding of the underlying intent, architectural criticism is largely meaningless. However, through meaningful and thoughtful research, reading, observation and discussion, learning about architecture and design can proceed. With modern architecture an advantage exists, which does not rely on the interpretations of history--we can ask the architect or designer about their intent.

We can learn a great deal about architecture by observing, critiquing and understanding the buildings around us. The major subjects of this class will be observation, research and commentary, leading to comprehension of the architecture around us. While we will not entirely ignore architecture which no longer exists, or buildings which were planned but not built, we will focus on what exists, rather than what has been lost or was unrealized. We will also address the need for a basis of understanding of the ideas and constructs we see around us. To do so, we must address balance and proportion. We will consider Vitruvius' 10 Books of Architecture and compare and contrast this text with Tom Wolfe's book on modern architecture, From Bauhaus to Our House. Various writings and manifestos from modern architectural movements and with other assigned readings and handouts concerning contemporary issues and arguments in architecture will be discussed as time permits. And, since practical architecture cannot exist without construction, we will spend part of each week studying aspects of construction technology, considering its effect and implications on the built environment.

In addition to the academically serious issues of what Architecture, Art and Design are and what they may mean, our consideration of the more pragmatic, but strictly accountable aspects— the how, what and where of construction technology. Planning, zoning, health and safety, heating and cooling, logistics, such as vertical and horizontal people movement will be addressed. We will also consider construction methods as well as natural and manmade threats to the built environment.

Necessarily, this will be a much abbreviated study of the construction arts, but we will attempt to survey basic construction technology and types of construction appropriate and available to architectural designers today, briefly comparing this with the technologies available in the past.

Finally, gathering the information from our research, readings, discussions, presentations and courseworks, we shall attempt to define architecture for ourselves as a class and as individuals.

Learning Goals:

In this class, students will explore theoretical and practical aspects of architecture and attempt a basic understanding of the roles and perspectives of architects and designers in the planning, design and construction of the built environment. Students will learn the basic thought processes and some techniques associated with the planning, design and construction of buildings and will attempt the practical and spiritual appreciation of the exploration of exterior and interior three dimensional space we call Architecture.

1. Students will gain an appreciation of architecture and architectural design and will be able to discuss and present their own researched concept of what architecture is and what it means to them as designers and as individuals.
2. Students will read 3 major text books on architectural criticism and be able to discuss and summarize their reading in essays and class presentations.
3. Each student will offer a topic for discussion and then will present an update of their research and reading, discussing implications of interest or importance to interior designers. By the end of the class, students will have developed the skills needed to find, research and present architectural topics for group discussion. This will be evidenced by their mid term and final papers, which will be discussed and presented in class.
4. Students will develop a basic understanding of construction methods and be able to describe their similarities and differences. Students will also be able to suggest different methods of construction, appropriate to 5 architectural construction situations.

Professional development:

Satisfactory completion of this class will help students develop the skills required to communicate and develop design ideas to architects, designers and others employed in the construction arts.

Evaluations:

Coursework, projects and presentations will comprise 70% of the class grade, 15% will be assessed through attendance, information sharing and overall class participation, 15% will be assessed through spot quizzes and examinations.

Student Responsibilities:

Class attendance is essential, more than 2- unexcused absences may lead to grade reductions, or a failing grade. Coursework must be completed on time. Excused absences require clear, valid reasons. The Student Handbook regulations will be utilized.

Course Structure:

The class will include lectures, coursework and fieldwork. Class hours will be devoted to lectures, project work, discussions and presentations; homework will consist of research and essay writing, reading and critical observation. Students will need to spend a minimum of three hours per week, reading and developing architectural comprehension in addition to classroom hours.

Note: Week 1 begins Jan 18th, 2000. Week 11 is Springbreak. Final exam presentations May 9th (confirm)

week 1	Introduction to architecture; Overview of designs & concepts	HW. Reading assignments, essay #1
week 2	Introduction to construction; Overview of construction methods 500 word essay #1 due	HW. Select research topic, readings
week 3	Planning & Zoning I; discussion topic, What is architecture?	HW. Tom Wolfe, Bauhaus pp1-120
week 4	Construction & Destruction in architecture; Design obsolescence	Hw. Essay #2; Videos
week 5	Building needs, air, heat, light & fire control; Bauhaus discussed 500 word essay #2 due	HW. Individual research
week 6	Building systems I, structural stability; Design Concepts	HW. Vitruvius, books I, II, III, IV
week 7	City and Infrastructure Planning; Discussion on Vitruvius I-IV	HW. Research; Vit, books V, VI, VII
week 8	Design, holistic & licensing approaches; Midterm Exam (concepts)	HW. Vit, books VIII, IX, X
week 9	Construction Technology I; Class summaries of Vitruvius & Wolfe	HW. Essay #3; project selection
week 10	Construction Technology II; Formal & vernacular architecture 700 word essay #3 due	HW. Architecture of Hawaii I (vernacular)
week 11	Spring break, no classes	Hw. Individual research
week 12	Construction technology III; Very Modern Architecture	HW. Architecture of Hawaii II (formal)
week 13	Planning & Zoning II; Building systems II	HW. Project work; Final essay (1,000 wd)
week 14	Architectural detailing; Design research presentations	HW. Projects
week 15	Form & function, space planning; Interior design specialization	HW. Projects; assigned reading
week 16	Structures & space planning; The future of Architecture (discussion) 1,000 word final essay #4 due	HW. Research & Projects
week 17	Final Exam (Project presentations & research paper)	

Summary of required work for grading:

PRESENTATIONS: #1 Design Concept (week 8, midterm) ; #2 Research Topic (week 14); #3 Project (week 17, final).

ESSAYS: #1, Architecture individually defined (due week 2); #2, Architecture, planning & society (due week 5);
#3, Classical and contemporary architecture (due week 10); #4, Architecture and technology (due week 16).

RESEARCH: Individual research & a report on architecture (styles, history & personalities)