

How to Interview an Architect

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(Courtesy of the "Weekly Bulletin," Michigan Society of Architects)

MUCH has been written concerning the architectural profession with the idea of popularizing it with the laity, and of course, just incidentally, popularizing the laity with the profession. By that I mean that the average architect (taking, say 1926 as the norm) would feel much more kindly disposed toward the rest of the world if it paid some attention (and a little money) to him now and then. As matters now stand, the average person (based on 1932 statistics) knows there is such a thing as an architect, but the idea of ever engaging one to do anything for him never enters his head.

After a very careful and thorough study of the problem, we have come to the conclusion that something must be done about it. We have also reached another conclusion and that is that the real trouble has never been recognized before and here, for the first time in the history of architecture, this basic difficulty will be exposed and fully treated.

We all realize of course the gravity of the situation, and a mystifying and baffling situation it is—or was. The point I want to make is that in approaching a long-standing problem such as this, one must approach it with due circumspection, calmly, cautiously, and carefully considering all conditions and complexities which might color, concern, control or confuse its characteristics. It is one that because of inexcusable neglect has been allowed to assume amazing and alarming aspects, and attention to any of the multiferous ramifications of it would of course be worse than useless. One must strike at the core of our distress and if we succeed in destroying the crux of our dilemma, the horns of it will naturally drop off from sheer attrition. Do I make myself clear?

Now, having thoroughly investigated the various manifestations of misunderstanding and indifference and failure to cooperate with the architectural profession in making the world some better places to live in, we finally arrived at the basic reason for it all, and a very simple and basic reason it is. At this point, I should like to digress for just a moment.

It was one of those bright sunny days and I had been up late the night before puttering with my invention: almost everybody has an invention nowadays because inventions are going to cure the world of its headache. About ten o'clock of the morning, I heard someone enter the office, and being taken off my guard, (for no one disturbs an architect nowadays—at least not before noon), I hastened to as-

sume my professional pose, which you will admit is a bit difficult coming out of a deep sleep. Well, there stood a beautiful, young lady.

Whether to set me at ease, or to subtly apprise me of the fact that she had glimpsed me before I had as it were donned my professional armor, she smiled graciously, parting her lips slightly in the act. This of course confused me, and I stood helpless, speechless, waiting for her to say something.

After exchanging the customary courtesies and the time of day, which by the way was my first intimation that it was still morning and that I had the day ahead of me, she proceeded with the matter which she had in mind. Her name was....., representing the Co.; I refrain from revealing her identity and the nature of her occupation, not so much from a sense of chivalry as from a conviction that it would be totally irrelevant to the subject under discussion. I merely mention the incident because in the course of our very pleasant conversation, she suddenly brought me face to face with a frank recognition of the underlying cause of our unhappy situation. "Why," I asked, at a turn in the conversation which permitted my posing the query without fear of being misinterpreted, "why do people shun architects?"

For several very justifiable reasons, I cannot quote her answer verbatim, but suffice it to say that when she left the office at five o'clock that night, I had a much broader view of the matter and a consuming desire to set about at once to correct the situation. I now feel adequately prepared to release my message to a suffering profession.

Why, indeed, do people shun architects? Have they as a class committed or subscribed to anything reprehensible which should ostracise them from an outraged society? Have they by word or deed offended or transgressed, presumed or affronted, piqued, nettled or abused? Can an accusing finger be justly raised against a profession, whose banner of self-sacrifice and devotion to the uncommon cause is unparalleled in the annals of history and whose integrity is unimpeachable? No, a thousand times no.

Well, enough of that you say and I agree with you. But why do people shun architects? I'm your friend and nevertheless I will tell you. People shun architects because they have never been told not to.

Scan the list of don'ts that have played such an important part in the development of your own manly character and physique. You were told not

to play with matches or bad little boys or the ponies, etc. But were you ever by implication, allusion or device encouraged to associate with architects? How you ever got to be an architect, of course, I do not know.

And so it was that when the little girl told me that if she had known that I was an architect, she would not have dared to open my door, "Opened by mistake" said I laughing and she laughed too, although I could see she was still not quite sure of herself—or mebbe it was me. Then followed our epochal discussion in which I discovered that the real reason why people do not consult architects is because of the lack of instruction on the subject.

In every other of the amenities, or side-lines, one is by tradition, the daily newspapers, the radio, or etc., fully informed of the correct procedure. You know how to brush your teeth and see the dentist, how to call the police or fire department, how not to trump your partner's ace, how to address the ball or the president, how to avoid accidents, colds, piston-slap or tire trouble. But the only thing on architecture is how to get our book of prize-winning designs free of charge.

From this brief introduction, you will have gathered the general trend of my idea. It will be fully covered in a series of manuals which will astutely appropriate the latest developments in psychological research and will create imperceptibly in the mind of the reader an architect—urge. Once the reader has penetrated the preface, he will be overwhelmed with the necessity of finding something to build so that he may interview an architect, and as the manual progresses, it smoothes away all possible resistance by fully covering every detail of such an interview. The first of these manuals is now ready for the press. It is entitled "What A Young Woman of Say Twenty-five Ought To Know About Interviewing An Architect." Here are some random excerpts from it:

From the chapter on "Appearance,"

"If you are contemplating a cottage by the sea or on some inland lake, and are fond of boating, swimming and the like, this should be reflected in the jauntiness of your costume. Choose a bright color, leaning perhaps toward the pastel shades to suggest that there is quiet and dignity even in such a boisterous undertaking. The jacket may be of rabbit's wool with skirt of same material. A jabot plisse with frilled cuffs may be effective but you know more about that than I do. Chamois gloves, chapeau crepe Suzette, wool stockings and suede walking shoes complete the ensemble.

"Bear in mind the artistic temperament of the architect and that mood plays an important part in his ability to interpret your problem. Avoid carmine nails, although if you are contemplating

a cottage by the sea or on an inland lake, a coral shade will be appropriate, Sand lightly between coats."

From the chapter on "The Interview,"

"The interview is arranged either by telephone or card. If by telephone, it should be through a third party, who after contacting the architect, suggests that Miss or Mrs. X would appreciate the opportunity for consultation with Mr. Y regarding her contemplated building project. Sometimes a fourth party enters into the arrangements, this party being Mr. Y's secretary who reports that Mr. Y is in conference, and who sets the date and time for him.

"If a card is used the approved wording is:

Miss Wanda Bild
requests the pleasure of an
interview with
Mr. Lintel

to confer with him in his professional capacity
regarding her proposed manor.

333 Syncromesh Drive
Detroit

Telephone Chesterfield 2-4-25

(If the client is married, the telephone number may be omitted.)"

At the appointed hour, the client presents herself at the architect's office. From this point on the client is guided by an apothecary conversation which runs as follows:

"Architect: So good of you to come, Miss Bild.

Client: Oh it's perfectly adorable of you to say that, Mr. Lintel. I have been looking forward to our interview with great anticipation.

(There here may ensue a round of small talk dealing with current events, bridge losses, favorite authors, or what not. Weather and the depression are taboo. At the proper moment which will sooner or later present itself, the client seizes the thread of the conversation and opens her purse.)

C. I was a little uncertain, Mr. Lintel, regarding your retaining fee, so I have filled out the check, that is, everything except the amount, and if you will let me know the figure, we can dispense with this trivial detail at once.

(The architect probably has a set fee, but if you have made the most of your opportunities, this may be reflected in the concession he makes in your particular instance. But no matter what figure he may mention, etiquette requires that you register surprise at the modestness of the sum indicated.)

Now to proceed with the interview proper. Never say, "I want to build an eight room house" or "What I want is," etc. The proper introduction to the details is as follows:

C. "You know*, Mr. Lintel, I have always dreamed of having a home of my own just like I have dreamed of for years. Even when I was a little girl, etc."

Or (but not both. Choice of.)

"Of all the things, Mr. Lintel, which I have always wanted, would be (1) to have a lovely, darl-

*This is the only place where the expression "you know" is proper, and never put the accent on the first syllable. Of course he knows, silly.

ing home, (2) to do something with that back bedroom (3) to remodel the boathouse, etc."

This list, running into three figures, including every major operation which an ambitious architect might conceivably undertake. Lack of space prevents the inclusion of further details, but we confidently predict that once these manuals are put in circulation, the vogue for architects will sweep the country and will far surpass the spectacular success of mah jong, badminton, jig-saw puzzles, etc. No architect can be without them. Order yours now. Write for liberal terms, trade-in allowances on used D'Espouey, Letarouilly, etc. Agents wanted, just imagine. See our booth at the Architects' Exhibit.—Advertisement.

Ethics or Expediency in the Emergency?

NOTE—The following discussion is quoted verbatim from the Minutes of the March meeting of the Pittsburgh Chapter.

THE meeting was turned over to Raymond M. Marlier, Chairman of Current Works Committee, for discussion of the topic, "Ethics or Expediency in the Emergency?" The first speaker introduced by Marlier was Weber.

He spoke on the difficulties of conducting a small office which depends on small jobs due to the encroachments of the designing contractor and the general lack of knowledge among the public of the duties of the architects. He proposed the three following remedies:

Petition council to grant building permits for work amounting to over \$2,500.00 only for plans prepared by registered architects and engineers.

Make a black list of contractors who infringe on the architect's proper field, this list to be circularized among the architects who will then omit them from private bidding lists.

Organize a campaign to educate the public on the duties and services of the architect.

The next speaker, Casimir J. Pelligrini, spoke as follows:

The chief evils have been caused by those who offer the owner the following inducements:

Free sketches with an estimate of cost at no obligation.

Cutting of fees.

These two procedures result in (1) unfairness to others in the profession, (2) a low impression of the profession in the public mind, (3) usually results in bad architecture.

He suggested as a correction of the above the establishment of a clearing house where reports could be made of such practices so that

Members of the A.I.A. could be disciplined.

Non-members could be notified of impropriety of their action by the A.I.A., this record to be held against them in case they later applied for admission.

Draftsmen could be put on record for future boycott when applying for positions in architects' offices.

Contractors who are reported as performing services of architects alone, or by use of draftsmen, or by hiring of architects at nominal rate, could be put on black list for future bidding.

Material men, equipment organizations, and all bureaus which supply free plans and service would be notified of their encroachment and they would desist rather than incur the ill will of the profession.

In conclusion he stated that he believed the above corrections could be accomplished without recourse to legal procedure if the members of the profession cooperated. He regretted that the relations of the Institute were not as effective with the schools as in the case of the Bar Association or the Medical Association. He believed that more teachers should be members of the Institute and in sympathy with its beliefs and problems so that they could persuade students of the desirability of becoming members when they were eligible.

Mr. Marlier then introduced Charles T. Ingham, whose purpose was to comment on the two speakers before him. He first criticized the wording of the title—"Ethics or Expediency in the Emergency". Ethics, if defined as "right conduct" and expediency as "self-interest" should go hand in hand in the