

The Psychology of Architecture

We design and build structures primarily for our personal shelter and to contain the millions of needs and requirements we have in order to live in a civilized society.

We have homes, libraries, schools, factories, stores, churches, synagogues, mosques, fire stations, prisons, hospitals, and a multitude of other buildings of all shapes and sizes.

Something we don't often think about is what those buildings tell us about ourselves. In other words, after all is said and done, it's our buildings that will tell those a hundred years from now all about who we were, how we lived, how we treated ourselves and each other.

In 1969, I visited Europe. In Rome, I stayed in a Pension near The Terminal Railway Station. It was a third floor walk-up in a wonderful Piazza. At that time, the City of Rome was digging to build a subway system for the city, but it had come to a halt right there in the Piazza. The enormous pit was surrounded by a solid wood fence at least seven feet high. From the den window of my Pension, I could look down into the pit and what amazing sight did I see? Roof tops. An entire city of roof tops below ground. It was astounding. It was so ancient that I have no idea what era they could have been from. After all, the streets I was walking on in present-day Rome had been used by The Caesars. Even The Roman Forum was at present day street level. Can you imagine the stories those newly exposed ruins held? What the people were like, how they lived on a daily basis, what were their priorities, who on Earth were they?

I find the psychology of architecture a fascinating study. Architecture ultimately determines our behaviors and interactions. It can be used purposely to control crowds and noise levels. A gymnasium is high ceiled and allows noise to bounce loudly off the walls. A museum, on the other hand is designed more toward visual reward and generally to allow a minimum of noise.

In my opinion, a home must be designed to elicit the best qualities of the people who are living in it, as well as to create a harmony of the residents with the natural surroundings of the structure. A home is a place to let ones hair down, to feel safe and relaxed. A home must be designed to 'human scale' so that one does not feel overwhelmed by the structure around them. I like to make the substance of the structure so comfortable for the owners that it almost disappears from their consciousness while at the same time surrounds them with the feeling of security and beauty people long for.

In order to create this type of ambiance, I like to add touches of materials such as glass block, slate flooring, or window walls throughout to bring the outside in, allowing for natural light, natural textures on floors and walls, and natural ways for the residents to control noise coming from outside and limit the usual noise of appliances inside. I like to specify radiant heating, and tankless water heaters, and other methods of natural climate control to keep the home comfortable in all weather conditions.

My favorite style of architecture is Art Deco, especially the European interpretation. In my opinion, even a high rise such as the Empire State Building or Rockefeller Center

both being built during the Art Deco period of the Twenties maintain a human scale due to the Exterior design and architectural features that call down to us and invite us inside. And then, upon entering, the clean lines of the design and murals or other features embrace us and urge us to explore further what the building has to offer.

I love the Art Deco homes of that era. They embrace us with their curves and glass block and make us want to come home. Even the buildings of that style in concrete, stone, and stucco with horizontal steel railings so reminiscent of luxury liners in shape are graceful and inviting. All of them designed to human scale.

Even in designing additions or renovations, I try and incorporate the same principles. I want the new component to look as though it had always been there, so often times I will add some architectural features to the existing façade to marry the existing to the new.

At the forefront of all of these designs, is my careful attention to the psychology of the personalities of my clients and the purpose for the building. My thirty years of experience has taught me that once we work through even a complex design, it is usually the simplicity of the natural qualities of both the local environment and my clients' needs that emerge and bring my clients truly home.