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Slowing Down to Create Lasting Places

Establishing freedom for the accepted status quo

As architects, we find the fundamental nature of slowing down to be innate in the setting of our current building dialogue.

This proposition forges two distinct responses, typically those from the design team in favor and the pro forma side in opposition of the passing hands of the clock.

But let us argue for the moment that slowness is not associated with diurnal time, rather with the phenomenal time tied to the creative process.

“Value added” is an oft-coined phrase that marks the antithesis of sloppy, quick-natured decision-making, yielding low-quality, subpar solutions. True *architecture*, on the other hand, establishes itself as the thoughtful response to the conditions manifest within the task at hand. Tethered only to itself, architecture establishes freedom from the accepted status quo. In doing so, it inevitably requires the time to find the resonant answer reflective of our time, our people and our place.

Why the sudden rush? More often than not, we find the current building dialogue around Denver to be one of supply and demand, speed and profit. These words, while valuable in the marketplace, should not be the defining characteristics of our creative-decision-making process. If for nothing else, the people living in our cities and our homes deserve a level of dignity and pride that is reflective of the pioneering spirit we find tangible in Denver as it has become our *place*.

Paramount to this position is that those inhabiting our city demand value, extended from the spirit of Denver, in the places they live. There is a draw to Denver that calls people from all over the world to migrate to our city and its surrounding landscape and, as a result, there exists a high demand to provide shelter and services for those entering our city. Unfortunately, the current solution of over-expedient design and construction is but a short-term patch to the problem at hand. It's easy to just provide, lease and move on. However, the current residents feel otherwise. These buildings will not last; their appeal, while already sparse, will fade.

Take a look outside your doors, even for just a moment, and the obviousness of the situation will come to light. We are beginning to see the consequences of our actions, as nearly every street corner could be dubbed “Anytown USA” as the imported style and aesthetic is evident in our neighborhoods. We are losing what makes Denver special - not necessarily in the buildings themselves, but the reflection of our city and its people in those buildings. Where is the pride or creativity that makes this place such a unique and desirable destination?

As many of our firmly rooted residents will corroborate, these memorable and sustainable places are part of not only what is reflective of our time, but also what has been cultivating this love for our

state. Colorado invests its resources and minds in an effort to fulfill this population with its highly intentioned desire for craft, care and quality - descriptors that could be applied not only to our goods and services but our landscape as well.

Slowness, is then, the art of the appropriate solution. Building and development, in particular, toe a similar yet altered line than that of architecture. One is defined by providing a need for what is on demand; the other, in our mind, focuses on supplying that demand with the necessary means and methods to create valuable, meaningful and lasting space. These two approaches, as most likely will be agreed upon, need not be mutually exclusive, but certainly requires a change in trajectory - we must all strive for a holistic, meaningful and memorable solution to the built world.

The responsibilities lie not on a single party (be it architects, developers, contractors or city planners), and, as such, we must neither accelerate to the velocity of those around us nor should we simply move aside permitting them to pass; we must slow the collective group. The time required to transform our new ideas to collective thoughts must be allowed, creating value added along the way. Our argument is that the value we create need not be measured solely by monetary means nor be the sole driver when that discussion revolves around creating our built environment.

So in this environment of hyper-globalization, what then are the advantages to slowing down? Rarely in this time are the words “slow down” met with support and admiration. To the contrary, we find that slowing down is exactly what our epoch requires. Not only are we afforded the physical time to make the appropriate decisions concerning our built world, but also we are given the necessary means to coordinate, vet and verify the decisions we've made. In the end, providing a product that is not only situated for our current needs but also is complementary to our environment and coordinated with those carrying on the life of the building is nonnegotiable. These lasting decisions provide the user the demanded respect and pride associated with truly living within a community, while maintaining the appeal and value that living here affords.

We will find the alternative - quick, unchecked and aggressive decision-making - leads to a lack of quality and character, and little more than fulfillment of product only; bare necessity must not be our baseline. No professional wants to continue to remedy the fallout of poor decision-making, creating additional, avoidable work for the future. In the built world, that means call backs, warranty claims and a general distaste for the product being supplied. Getting while the getting is good can lead us to an oversaturation of nameless, placeless architecture that merely gives a highly transient population even more reason for that transition.



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This is bigger than you and I. Think of the payoff of the upfront investment in a quality design and construction team, the knowledge base to supply that team with the needed information, the equipment needed to navigate a sometimes complex system of approvals and permits with ease and to stand by a realistic schedule. By taking these steps in sequence and not fast-tracking our professional desires, we can all benefit from the process. After all, we are in the business – whether we believe it – of providing the services necessary for our dwelling on this planet and our impact on the future of this same planet.

People care. Residents care. Occupants care. And in the end, we must all realize and accept that the pride and personal dignity we put into our architecture in both urban and rural environments matters. We must hold ourselves as architects, developers, potential buyers and even renters, accountable for the demand of a quality and specificity of place. The equation then reads as one of a lasting sense of place, indicative of our current climate and time as well as a sustainable effort to the lasting endurance of our presence. This takes time.

So as we conclude this brief writing, we hope the dialogue continues. We hope the status quo is indeed questioned – questioned by architects, by developers, by contractors and by the people who call this place home. Only good can come from this continued dialogue, and in that good we see an appropriate architecture manifesting it-

“If I had more time, I would have written you a shorter letter.”

- Blaise Pascal

self that will be an honest reflection of our place. Denver's architecture should exemplify the dignity and pride that will continue to resonate with time, whether diurnal or phenomenal, that is systemic of what we love about Colorado. We thusly take the time to find our true intentions and we find our sense of place, for as author Lewis Carroll penned: “If you don't know where you are going, any road will do.”

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*This rendering was created and provided by the project architect
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