



November, 2004:

Through two decades of Architectural practice, I have enjoyed the responsibility of designing more than 800 projects. It's been a great privilege to share the trust and friendship of so many clients, as I sought to understand their unique goals and values, in order to design responsively.

I have shared the enthusiasm of creative clients, who saw the benefits of intelligent design as a means of catalyzing their businesses. I have explored core values with thoughtful clients, who used the design process as a tool to rediscovered their organizational purpose and structure. For some, I have merely facilitated the drive for expedience (economy at any cost). A few, I have counseled not to build.

Time and again, we have wrestled the ageless dilemmas of design: purpose, quality, cost, time, image, flexibility, durability, etc. Time has distilled my own perspective. Twenty years has been long enough to see the outcome of decisions made in this crucible.

Good design, like good parenting, pays off. The reward of parenting lasts a lifetime - far beyond the period of investment. Buildings also last a lifetime, but only those carefully planned and properly constructed provide enduring value, function, and pleasure.

I now begin each project by asking my client to identify the 3 most important goals that must be achieved, in order for their project to be successful. Typically, they cite functional and aesthetic goals, and nearly always emphasize time or budgetary criteria.

I then ask my client to envision the future - a decade from now - and from this vantage point, to retrospectively identify the three most important considerations that made their architectural project successful. At this point, they become philosophical, and identify corporate mission ideologies. They consider how their building must encourage interaction between people, how it must stand as a powerful symbol of their enterprise, and how it must be able to grow and adapt to change. As my clients become inspired by their own vision and drive for excellence, they almost never emphasize time and budgetary constraints as the most important criteria for successful design.

I have great respect for my client's time and budgetary criteria, but I have even greater respect for their mission - their reason for building. Successful design must bring opportunities to fruition, and not merely satisfy constraints. The vital question is not "what can we do?" but rather "what should we do?" If a project lacks clear vision and purpose, it should be re-defined or halted. Other than shortsighted parenting, there is nothing more costly and disappointing than shortsighted design.

My architectural practice is devoted to serving clients who are mission oriented, and open to broad consideration of the opportunities and challenges of architectural design. I do not distinguish between large and small projects, nor do I avoid the "reality" of project constraints. I seek a partnership with my clients, in which we each contribute our best available resources toward the realization of common goals.

In the future, I may not design as many new buildings. I will continue to invest vision, thoughtfulness, and pride in the ones I do.

Timothy Gaus, AIA
(on the twentieth anniversary of this Architectural practice):