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A World to Design
Architects and Interior
Designers Craft Beauty
and Structure

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On the job at Gensler, Laura Zanghi (B.F.A. '11) applies a collaborative approach to designing office spaces for clients, a direct outcome of NYIT's studio culture.

A World to Design

By Rose Sumer and Michael Schiavetta (M.A. '07)

When NYIT student Mike Tobin explores a famous architectural landmark, he remembers to put down the camera.

After landing in Paris as part of one of NYIT's architecture summer programs, he stood in front of several landmarks—the Eiffel Tower, Palais-Royal, the Arc De Triomphe—great works of architecture that he had studied and idolized for years.

But as he lifted his digital camera and looked through the lens, he stopped.

“I realized then that I had spent years looking at them on a computer screen,” says Tobin. “The designer’s idea behind these buildings was to create an experience. When you’re just looking through a camera lens, you’re not learning. I had to walk through these sites.”

It’s that awareness and appreciation that define many NYIT students who study architecture and interior design. Experiencing the works of great designers is just one piece of a curriculum rooted in the social, economic, political, and ecological aspects of their chosen professions. At NYIT’s School of Architecture and Design, studio courses modeled on building workshops introduce students from both disciplines to real-world design problems and embed a

global mindset in their approach to solving them.

Tobin’s five-week trip last summer included more than a dozen of his classmates and professors. They visited Paris, Marseille, Nice, Lyon, and even spent a couple of nights at Sainte Marie de La Tourette monastery. They analyzed the urban fabric of Paris, including its history and architectural development, spanning the third century to the modern era, and kept sketch journals as they explored several monuments to understand their physical topography.



A visit to the Eiffel Tower was one of the highlights of NYIT's summer 2012 program in France for architecture students.

Like their architecture counterparts, interior design students, too, have embarked on trips to historic locales, including Paris, Venice, and London, where they toured Sotheby's to see how antique collections are assembled and sold. They also traveled to Italy with faculty members in April 2012 for the Milan Furniture Fair. There, NYIT was one of only two U.S. universities invited to display work at the SaloneSatellite exhibition, the premier event for emerging designers. Though still in its early planning stages, an exchange program for interior design students with the Musée du Louvre in France is in the works.

Associate Professor David Diamond, who has directed several travel programs for NYIT architecture students in Europe, notes that this type of experiential education, gained through direct experience with architectural artifacts, offers unique value to students. "You can show them an image of a building in a slide or a textbook, and they may or may not remember it, but when they visit it in person, the lesson becomes indelible."

Entwined Professions

For many people, architectural images are synonymous with names like Frank Lloyd Wright and his iconic buildings, including a spiral-shaped design for the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, or the Adrian Smith-designed 2,723-foot Burj Khalifa in Abu Dhabi, the world's tallest building (and scaled by Tom Cruise in *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol*).

OUT OF INDIA

From June 7 to July 10, 2012, Assistant Professor Farzana Gandhi led eight architecture students through various cities in India, including New Delhi, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai. The first weeks involved sketching structures, including the Taj Mahal. During the final weeks in Mumbai, the students had the opportunity to explore their design concepts in a studio workshop at the Sir J.J. College of Architecture. They were joined by the dean of the School of Architecture and Design, Judith DiMaio, for their final presentation.

The scope of the India excursion had two key goals, notes Gandhi. "India is a hotspot and is experiencing a building boom," she says. "There is an incredible amount of building and development in the outskirts of major cities that is in desperate need of critical analysis. The autonomous residential super-blocks are devoid of the socially and environmentally sustainable forms of living specific to local conditions. The premise of the students' trip was to study modernist and traditional architecture and come up with new ideas for low-rise/high-density housing."

"The biggest benefit for me was learning about different cultures, talking to the people, and getting a sense of where the country is going," says student Alexander MacVicar. The India experience, he notes, made him look at his NYIT classes in a new light. "India has much more history than we do in the United States," he adds. "Their tradition in architecture and construction plays a larger role."

"It was an amazing experience," says student Almir Abdulovski. "Seeing people in India live their everyday lives really opens your eyes. It affects how you view design. If you don't apply the principles you see, your designs won't work."

These powerful reminders of how the human imagination captures beauty in form and structure are only the surface of deeper reasons for how and why spaces are made. NYIT architects and interior designers are attuned to the aesthetic value of a space as much as to understanding how it fits within a community and

fosters interaction among people inside and outside of its walls.

"Architecture is something everyone has an investment in," says Nader Vossoughian, Ph.D., associate professor of architecture.

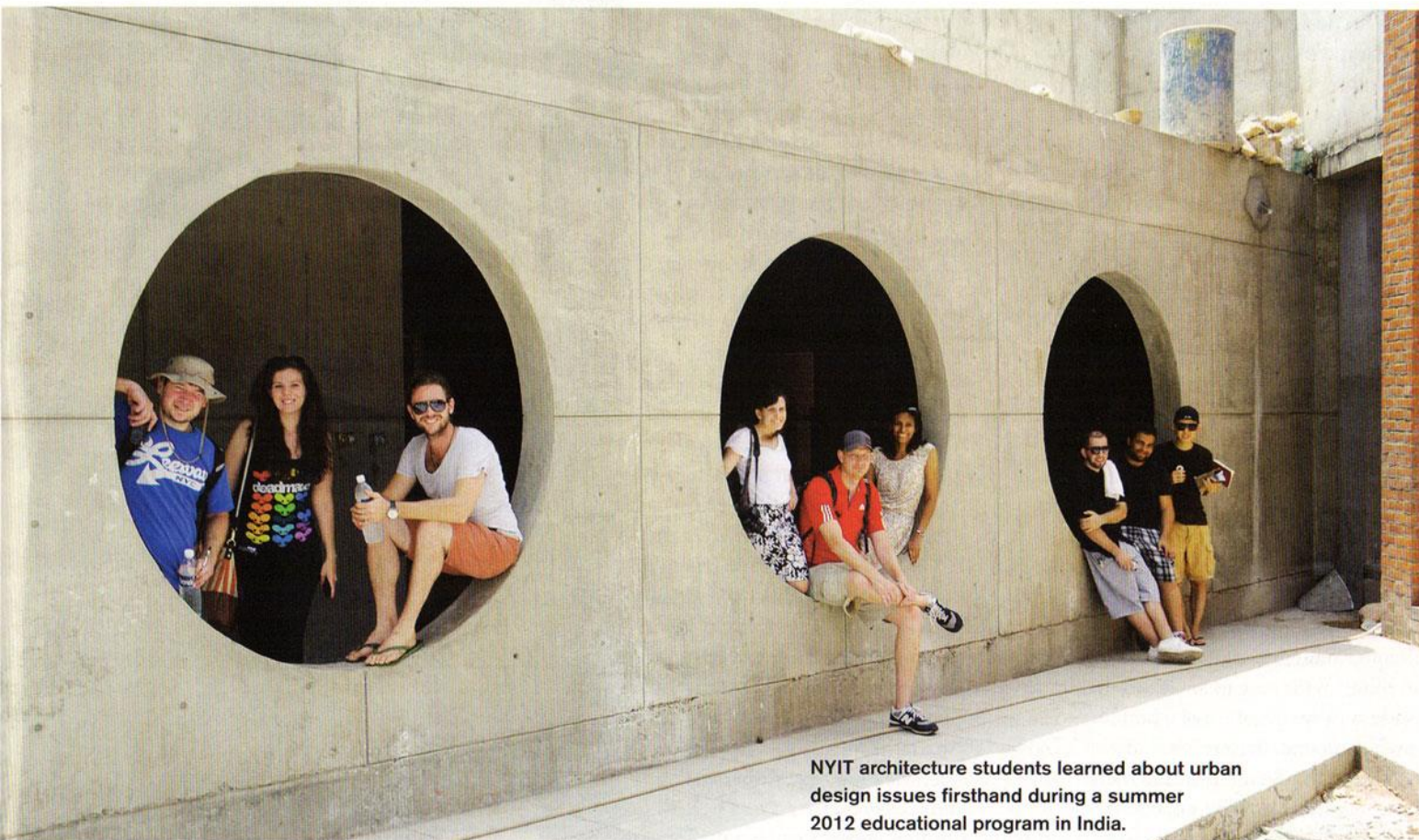
Students learn this quickly in the NYIT international design-build studios known as "sLABs," short for Student-Led Architecture Build initiatives. They spend a semester on a project that brings them in contact with community stakeholders such as government officials, business leaders, and nonprofit organizers. The first university-wide interdisciplinary sLAB project challenged students to design a solar-powered house with fuel cells. It was an entrant in the 2005 Solar Decathlon and is now displayed on the grounds of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, N.Y.

Studio culture is equally vital to the education of NYIT interior design students who might spend months on a corporate design assignment.

"Interior design deals with things closest to the human body," says Diamond. "Architecture mediates between this most intimate scale of habitation and the



Mike Tobin had the experience of a lifetime studying famous landmarks in Paris on an NYIT summer immersion program for architecture students.



NYIT architecture students learned about urban design issues firsthand during a summer 2012 educational program in India.

larger world. Interior design nests within architecture, as architecture nests within urban design.”

Though they are separate, the commonalities between each discipline are explored early in the curriculum. The basic skills for both majors are taught in a five-course sequence that focuses on design fundamentals, two- and three-dimensional problems, visualization courses that use AutoCAD software as well as manual drawing and model building, and architectural history and theory.

Vossoughian’s course on critical perspectives in architecture is shared by architecture and interior design students. He is also the author of the book, *Otto Neurath: The Language of the Global Polis*, written with the support of NYIT Institutional Support for Research and Creativity (ISRC) grants.

“My research into Neurath looks at architecture in conversation with politics,” says Vossoughian. Neurath [1882-1945], an Austrian sociologist, pioneered a participatory language of urban planning by developing universal graphic symbols used on everything from restroom doors to airport signs. “He believed the design

of a city is inseparably linked to the design of citizenship and asked, ‘How does a city engage the population it serves?’ ”

Building the Future

As populations boom in developing nations, policy makers are turning to architects and interior designers to answer Neurath’s question in the context of 21st-century challenges. Among the most pressing issues are carving spaces in dense urban areas, rethinking fragile waterfront communities at risk of infrastructure damage due to hurricanes and other extreme weather, and planning cities that give residents opportunities for social engagement and pleasure.

“There’s an enormous need for expertise in the design of cities and urban form,” says Jeffrey Raven, associate professor and director of the NYIT Master of Architecture in Urban and Regional Design. “The U.S. government and industry leaders are trying to push forward climate- and energy-efficient communities. Newly emerging federal policy could drive a paradigm shift.”

NYIT’s SodaBIB project offers a solution for sustainable communities, thanks

to the work of students and architecture professors Jason Van Nest, Michele Bertomen, and Farzana Gandhi. They have created a technique to use plastic water bottles to form the shingles of a roof for shelters in disaster-stricken or developing nations (see page 30).

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, the second-costliest storm in U.S. history, NYIT architecture and interior design students began Operation Resilient Long Island (ORLI), a grassroots committee working on design strategies to aid the recovering Northeast region. In March, they launched the 3C: Comprehensive Coastal Communities competition. *Newsday*, a Long Island newspaper, has named @NYITORLI “One to Watch on Twitter.” Their latest updates are found at 3ccompetition.org.

In Nosara, Costa Rica, a team of NYIT students led by Tobias Holler, assistant professor of architecture, is building a recycling and education center made of recycled wood. Since its inception, this sLAB project has raised more than \$30,000 on Kickstarter.com.

Holler and Matthias Altwicker, associate professor of architecture,

are also designing a cost-effective prototype of a single-family house for the town of Babylon, N.Y. It will be the first house on Long Island that meets the German Passivhaus energy efficiency standard, the most stringent in the world.

“A holistic approach is essential for urban design to look at natural and manmade spaces, as well as economic and social factors, as part of a complex urban ecology,” says Giovanni Santamaria, Ph.D., visiting assistant professor of architecture, who teaches NYIT’s design studios. He guides students on how to investigate and critically design spaces as systems that integrate several dimensional scales as well as teaches them landscape to building issues while using digital mapping and design programs.

“There are new ways of mapping natural and social phenomena, and proactively integrating these into the evolution of a design,” Santamaria says. “Students learn to think about how to analyze a floating process or the reaction of a building to an environmental disaster.”

Architects and interior designers have a number of efficient, cost-saving technologies at their disposal to respond to the growth in urban design. AutoCAD is one such computer software program

for designing accurate building models. BIM (Building Information Modeling) is another that serves as a collaborative tool for working on digital drawings of the physical and functional aspects of a space. The making of a building typically involves a multi-faceted team of architects, interior designers, engineers, and construction builders; BIM enables them to work together simultaneously on the same design drawings.

“It’s key to use technology that is both sophisticated and sustainable,” Santamaria adds.

During the fall 2012 semester, he and Adjunct Professor Janet Fink worked with NYIT students to redesign a boxing gym in Freeport, N.Y. They created a proposal that included sustainable elements such as daylighting, radiant heating, solar thermal water heating, permeable paving, and recycled materials as well as outdoor gardens and a nutrition education lab.

“My goal in class is to keep the energy alive in terms of critically thinking and experimenting,” Santamaria says. “This can be hard to do in the real world when you work on a deadline.”

Interior Focus

When pharmaceutical clients call upon Laura Zanghi (B.F.A. ’11) to design office spaces that promote collaboration, she sketches ideas using AutoCAD skills developed in NYIT studios shared by architecture and interior design students.

“The work space is going more toward open plan and no more offices or cubicles,” says Zanghi, an interior designer for Morristown, N.J.-based Gensler, where she works with three other NYIT alumni. “Our clients want spaces filled with natural daylight where people feel comfortable.”

Jeffrey Raven, associate professor of architecture, foresees a growing demand for architects specializing in urban planning and design.



Giovanni Santamaria, Ph.D., visiting assistant professor of architecture, teaches NYIT students to consider the economic, financial, and social aspects of designing for a community.

At NYIT, Zanghi was the recipient of a scholarship from the Friends of NYIT’s School of Architecture and Design, a group of alumni that offers financial support to outstanding students. She spent much time in the wood shop studio, where students pooled creative inspiration.

“We learned laser cutting and how to build models using different materials in the wood shop,” she says. “When I was doing work in there, sometimes an architecture student would see what I was doing and offer an opinion.”

Imbuing interior design students with problem-solving skills and sensitivity to clients is a recurring thread of the program. During the fall 2012 semester, an interdisciplinary group developed proposals to help elderly residents feel comfortable and safe in their homes. The project was funded by a \$6,000 NYIT ISRC grant and entailed interviewing residents and using their feedback to suggest new design elements. Their ideas included kitchen cabinets that can be raised and lowered, safety devices,



JEFF WEINER

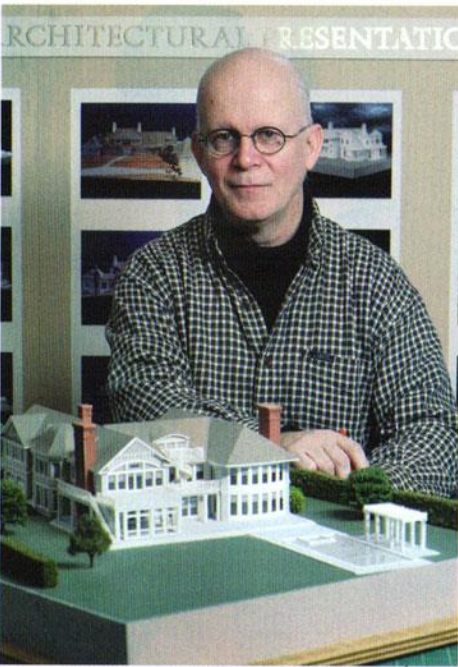
and modified home layouts to offer easy access and mobility.

“There is a professional responsibility for interior designers,” says Martha Siegel, associate professor and chair of the Department of Interior Design. “They are accountable for the health, safety, and welfare of occupants. If they are specifying a finish to go into a doctor’s office, for example, interior designers must ensure it meets fire safety regulations. You can’t just put up pretty wallpaper.”

A Model Career

Inside his studio, Gary Lawrance (B.Arch. ’82) keeps an array of tools within arm’s reach: paper, mat board, cork, foam, X-Acto knives, metal rulers and T-squares, Elmer’s glue, and paint. He uses them to craft architectural models in much the same way he did more than 30 years ago at NYIT.

“In those days, every design course required us to make paper models for presentations,” says Lawrance, whose latest creations depict stone facades, latticed pavilions, columned porches, and landscaped gardens. They can scale up to a couple of feet in width and height, selling anywhere from \$2,000 to \$20,000 depending on the level of detail.



Gary Lawrance (B.Arch. '82) is pictured with a model that he made for a residential home designed by architect John Laffey (B.S. '89).

Ninety-percent of the business of Lawrance Architectural Presentations in Stony Brook, N.Y., is designs of residential

DESIGNING WOMAN

Johanna (Han) Schroder [1918-1992] had smashed the glass ceiling before the term made its way into public discourse. The founder and intellectual force behind NYIT’s interior design program was one of two independent female architects among nearly 3,000 registered male architects in the Netherlands in 1954.

Schroder grew up in what is now a historical site and museum, the Rietveld Schroder House, in Utrecht. In 1924, when it was built on the fringe of a grass field, it was a model for the active lifestyle desired by Schroder’s mother, Truus, who collaborated on the bi-level structure with architect Gerrit Rietveld, a member of the artistic movement De Stijl (Dutch for “The Style”).

The house symbolizes the movement’s utopian ideals of spiritual harmony and order. It is an open-plan space with floor-to-ceiling windows and walls meant to slide out by day and divide rooms at night. Its design diverged from the European homes of the early 20th century that featured narrow hallways and compartment-like rooms. Schroder’s living space was malleable, offering her widowed mother the flexibility and independence to raise and educate her children.

“An interior should allow for behavior of various kinds,” noted Schroder in her personal writings. “The strength and beauty of this background will affect the user and gradually make him see, think, and behave differently.”

Schroder would apply this philosophy to a teaching career in the United States, drawn by a restless urge to start over and a curiosity for American life. After a stint for an architect in Los Angeles, she sought academic positions on the East Coast. She taught at NYIT from 1967 to 1979 and overhauled the interior design curriculum to compete with New York’s best design schools.

“She was a gifted individual, so enthusiastic in both her classes and work,” says Janet DeCecilia (B.F.A. '70), who studied with Schroder at NYIT and later served as coordinator of the department when her mentor left to teach at Virginia Commonwealth University.

“Han grew up in an experiment, and it influenced her whole life,” says Martha Siegel, chair of the Department of Interior Design. “She shaped NYIT’s program to train students to think of an interior environment as a 3-D space that is transformable and relates to other spaces.”



The Rietveld Schroder House in Utrecht, Netherlands, helped to shape the ideals of Johanna (Han) Schroder, founder of NYIT’s interior design program.

homes, but his first model to attract attention was a master plan for a City University of New York campus. Michael Spector, a prominent architect, happened to be giving a lecture at NYIT’s Old Westbury campus in the late 1970s, when he glimpsed the precision and craftsmanship of Lawrance’s model on display and offered him an internship.

“Architecture requires you to be good in math and design,” says Lawrance. “It’s like two different sides of a person in one. You

have to be both an artist and engineer.”

Lawrance has parlayed yet another interest nurtured at NYIT into a side career—architectural history. His bachelor’s thesis was “Long Island’s Gold Coast of the Gatsby Era.” He writes two blogs: “Mansions of the Gilded Age” and “Houses of the Hamptons,” and is the co-author of *Houses of the Hamptons, 1880-1930*.

“To succeed in this field, architecture has got to be your passion,” adds Lawrance. “It’s a labor of love.” ■