Archipreneur

THE INSIGHTS ISSUE

ARCHIPRENEUR INSIGHTS

10 INTERVIEWS
WITH THE WORLDS
LEADING ARCHIPRENEURS

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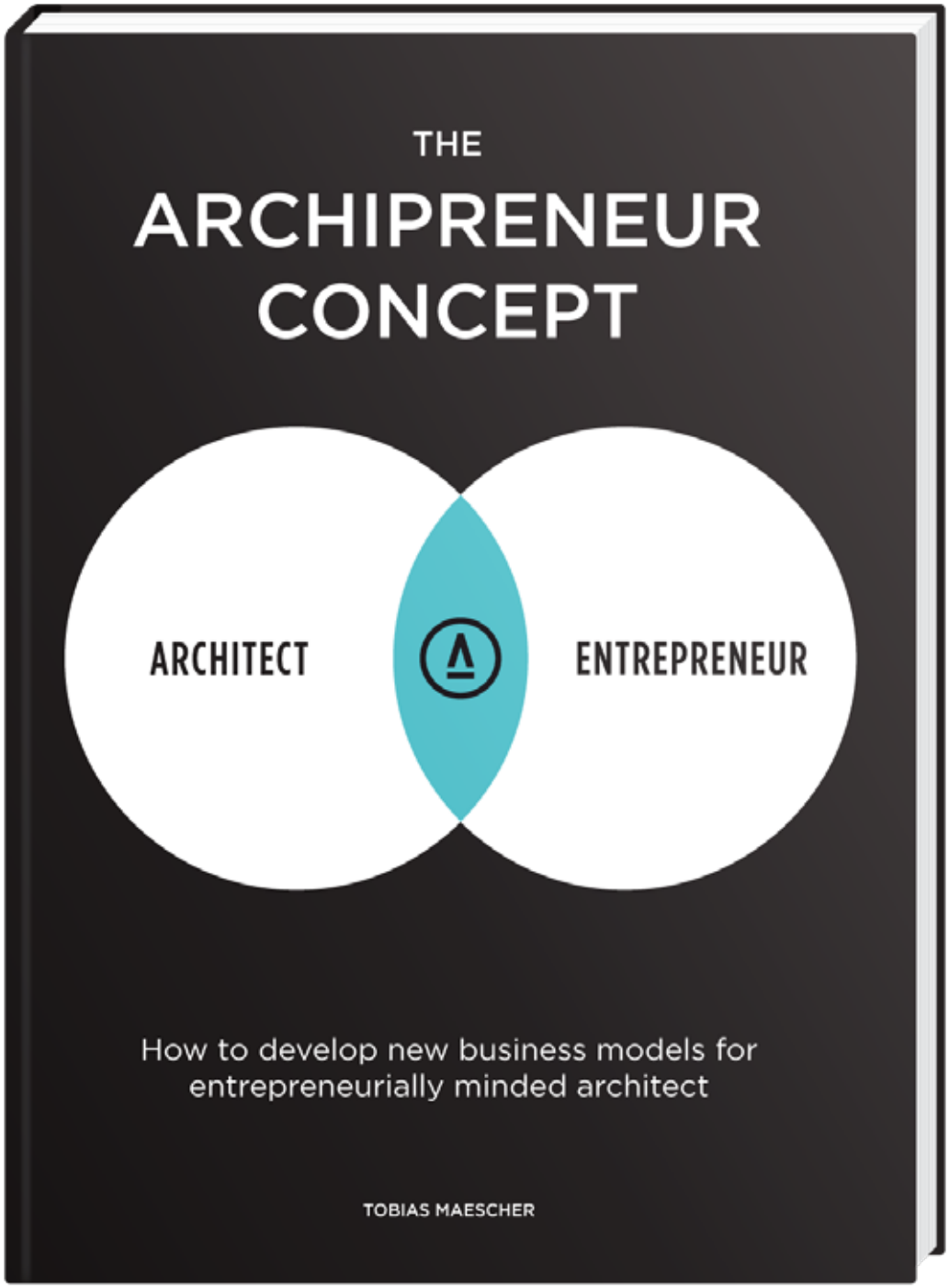

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PREFACE

The field of architecture has been rapidly changing over the last few decades, redefining the role of architects not only within the construction industry, but in respect to all aspects of our daily lives. The way architects affect cities has surpassed the idea of creating "a framework for life." More than ever, contemporary buildings are becoming immersive environments integrated into our daily rituals, our commuting habits and the way we socialize. In light of these trends, various new ways of running architecture-related businesses have sprouted across the globe.

The word "archipreneur" was coined in order to describe this new approach and a new generation of architects, designers and city builders who are embracing the influx of other disciplines and creating with a dual mindset- as an entrepreneur and a designer.

While traditional attitudes in project development still dominate a large section of the industry, many among the most successful professionals are proving that integrating new technologies, lean startup methodology, digital information and experiences from other disciplines creates products, projects and businesses that evolve, grow and stay in step with the times.

Our mission at archipreneur.com is to build an international community of like-minded professionals willing to share and exchange knowledge, educate, inspire and build cities of the future. "Archipreneur Insights" was created as a collection of interviews with the industry's top initiators and performers dedicated to pushing the envelope.

In this free issue you will find a series of seven interviews, conducted with teams, developers and professionals working in diverse areas of the construction industry. These individuals and groups share one important quality-the entrepreneurial attitude toward creating.

Enjoy and spread the word.

- The Archipreneur Team

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#01 MARTA BRANDÃO & MÁRIO SOUSA, ARCHITECTS & ENTREPRENEURS

The first interview in this book is with the founders of MIMA Lab, Marta Brandão and Mário Sousa from Viana do Castelo in Portugal. Mima Lab is a multidisciplinary office that focuses on the conception and retail of architectural and design products.
The two architects created the MIMA House and the MIMA Essential two prefabricated modular housing concepts. You can order various floor plan designs, depending on your size and budget. The design is minimal and very aesthetic ... and has also completely convinced Philippe Starck, who bought a MIMA Essential as a private vacation house.
What I love about the idea of MIMA is that the founders actually created a business from their architectural products. This is a smart way to "productize" the architectural service as an alternative to billing by the hour, but still produce great architecture.
Here are Marta and Mário's thoughts and experiences on entrepreneurship, starting a business and creating an architectural product.

ABOUT
MARTA BRANDÃO

Marta is an architect. She has studied in Porto at FAUP and in Lausanne at the EPFL. Between 2008 and 2012, Marta worked as a collaborator of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron in Basel, Switzerland. She has been involved in several large scale projects of housing and cultural buildings. Marta is currently a doctoral assistant at the EPFL Lausanne and she does research on Complex Design. At MIMA Lab, Marta is responsible for the design and development of new projects, overall graphic design of the firm, PR, communication and written information. >

ABOUT

MÁRIO SOUSA

Mário is an architect graduated at FAULP Porto. In September 2007, he joins Richter & Dahl Rocha office and collaborates with them in Lausanne Switzerland. In the beginning of 2011, Mário founds MIMA, together with Miguel Matos and Marta Brandao and dove into an investigation on housing schemes and prefab construction methods, started already in 2007. At MIMA Lab, Mário systematically comes up with ideas for new products and works hard on the design development of the established ones.

What made you decide to become an entrepreneur and develop the MIMA house product? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

We had the first idea for MIMA back in 2008 (we were still architecture students by then). At some point we've had this strong instinct that if we wished to have our own practice one day, we would have to create something new, something different from traditional architecture, and that we would have to start it at a very young age.

And so we did. By then we had the precious help of Miguel Matos, a software engineer, who has helped us transcribing our architecture thoughts into a software possible to be used by non-architects. And that was our strong initial aim: making architecture more playful and more democratic.

How do you plan to scale your business? Is the market for design prefab houses rewarding?

We keep receiving a huge amount of daily contacts since the first images of our houses have been published in 2011; it is extremely motivating and rewarding to see such great interest in our products, from people everywhere around the globe.

We are growing slowly, but taking firm steps and doing things well. Doing good architecture remains our priority. Our aim is to expand our business worldwide, but we are only consolidating partnerships when we find the profile we look for – ideally high end construction companies or architects who do great architecture and have some sort of connection with business and construction industry.

DOING GOOD ARCHITECTURE REMAINS OUR PRIORITY.

What do you find the most fulfilling about your current job as an architectural entrepreneur?

Seeing results so quickly. Having worked in traditional architecture before, we know that architects sometimes have to work for 5 to 10 years to see a concept become reality. We are also very delighted to see our clients' satisfaction after handing them their keys.

MIMA House , Photo Credit: MIMA

It is also great to realize our work is respected and featured so often internationally. Finally, it is very exciting to feel we're doing something different – opening new paths in architecture.

WE HAVE LEARNT THAT THE SUCCESS OF A COMPANY DEPENDS DIRECTLY ON THE QUALITY AND DEDICATION OF ITS EMPLOYEES; WE'RE VERY PROUD OF OUR TEAM TODAY.

How has your architectural training helped you in the actual running of your business? What specific/ transferable skills have proved the most useful?

Architecture training has taught us doing good architecture, which we believe is the key asset and fundamental differentiation factor of our company.

However, it did not really prepare us for running a business.

We think it's something that really comes with practice, with failing and improving; with being in direct contact with clients and understanding the overall process. We have learnt that the success of a company depends directly on the quality and dedication of its employees; we're very proud of our team today.

Do you have any advice for architects who are interested in creating their own architectural product? How did you finance your startup idea?

We didn't have any financial support whatsoever from our families, bank or investors. We have started from scratch, with our own savings from our first working years, and worked really hard on the base concept and design. We're proud to say we did a lot with a very small financial investment and with very hard work.

Finding good partners in the industry is crucial. In our case, we've been lucky to find in our partners Portilame very experienced and qualified producers.

MIMA House, Photo Credit: Jose Campos

Our product wouldn't exist if they weren't there, so supportive, passionate and dedicated all the time.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

We believe architecture can learn from fashion industry. Keeping its haute-couture realizations but also being clever enough to provide quicker and simplified solutions. We believe there's a whole world yet to be explored in the architecture of products.

Beyond that, we think architects have really good background and a versatile education which enables anyone to explore different fields that might be of their interest. There are many fields with potential: image making, design, illustration, film, photography, theory, teaching, consulting. It is a matter of being attentive to the market and grasping good opportunities.

WE BELIEVE THERE'S A WHOLE WORLD YET TO BE EXPLORED IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF PRODUCTS.

right: MIMA Essential, private vacation house of Philippe Starck
bottom: MIMA Essential interior – Photo Credit: Jose Campos

#02 DAVID BELT & NICKO ELLIOT
MACRO SEA, NEW YORK

The 2nd interview is with David Belt, the Executive Director and Founder of Macro Sea and Nicko Elliott, the Design Director of the company.
Macro Sea is a New York based real estate development firm whose mission is to create unexpected value in underutilized places.
I saw one of David's presentations at Studio Talk's "New Build Enables" at the MakeCity festival in Berlin. He presented his latest development New Lab, a facility in the Brooklyn Navy Yard that is transforming 84,000 square feet of space into a high-tech design and prototyping center, which will enhance the Yard's initiative to become a national model for sustainable industrial parks.
I liked his creative approach to unique urban developments and his mission to pursue projects that he finds interesting. I met David and Nicko in their latest Berlin development project in Kreuzberg. Macro Sea turned an old factory building into a new paradigm of the study abroad experience. I got a tour of the building and the design and living environment is truly inspiring. I had the pleasure of speaking with David and Nicko after they gave me their tour. Here, you can read about the Macro Sea story, and David and Nicko's approach and thoughts on developing projects, tips to start out yourself and much more.

DAVID BELT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER

David is an active real estate developer who has worked on a diverse range of projects that vary widely in size, scope, and location. David is also the Founder and Managing Partner of DBI, a firm specializing in real estate development, construction consulting and project management.
Currently, David and Macro Sea are working on a redevelopment in the

Brooklyn Navy Yard called New Lab, which will bring interdisciplinary high-tech fabrication and collaboration to a former shipbuilding facility. He is also spearheading the new development and restoration team for the Hotel Chelsea.
David has been a guest lecturer, panelist, and participant for institutions such as Columbia University, RPI, Penn Design, Community Design Collaborative, the Atlantic Conference, the Venice Biennale, and MoMA

NICKO ELLIOTT
DESIGN DIRECTOR

Nicko leads creative and technical consultants and organizes fabrication, manufacturing and construction teams to create impactful objects and environments. With emphasis on materiality and detailing, Nicko employs graphics and branding, interior and landscape design, and product design to ensure consistent design quality across multiple project platforms.
Pre-Macro Sea, Nicko worked on projects at the intersection of architecture, landscape and public art in North America, Asia and Africa. He has been a guest critic at Coloumbia GSAAP, University of Toronto and the Ontario College of Art & Design.

What made you decide to found Macro Sea and to develop unique urban projects? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

DAVID: So I've been in the construction industry for a long time and I have a project management company in New York that does development management and project management for a lot of different types of client groups. In 2008, the economy sort of collapsed, and I was really interested in – instead of doing projects for other people – trying to do my own.

I WANTED TO DO JUST PROJECTS THAT I WAS INTERESTED IN.

I felt like I was getting very bad at project management because I didn't like serving clients anymore. I wanted to do just projects that I was interested in. So I sold a part of the project management company to some of the guys who worked for me, and I told them that they would take it over. Then I started Macro Sea.

We had just done a project in Rome, and when I got back to New York, I thought it's one thing to take a beautiful building in Rome and do something with it, but I wanted to take a shitty strip mall in the US and make it a cultural place. Because the economy was failing, there were all these empty malls and strip malls. And so I worked with artists and architects, and we started doing renderings of repurposing these places and looking at what to do with the parking lots of the strip malls, because they're big.

So that's when we came up with the idea of doing swimming pools out of dumpsters. We did those as a test in Brooklyn and we got a lot of press, which opened a lot of doors. So it was really like 2008, 2009 that we started experimenting with different types of projects. And I still was involved with the project management company, but I wasn't running it on a daily basis.

So Macro Sea became your number one business?

DAVID: Well, not my number one business. But it was a vehicle to do more interesting things and be able to take more risks. But now it is, but at first, it was much more of a collaboration with people and experimentation.

Macro Sea's student housing development in Gneisenauerstr. 27, Berlin © Chris Mosier

Could you tell us a bit about your approach to real estate development? How do you normally start your creative urban projects?

DAVID: Well, it's either one of a couple different ways. It's either that I see a building that I want to do something cool with. So I am looking for a program because I can really see that something special should happen to a particular building or a place in the neighborhood.

Or, I have a program that I want to play with, like, I think there is a better way to maybe do student housing. So then I put together a proposal for a group like this (CIEE), and then we do a real estate search and try and find a building that we think could be adapted to try some new things in.

Or sometimes Nicko or Rebecca or somebody from the company has an idea, and we pursue that.

So at the beginning it's purposely not very structured. But once we take on the project, it's not a coincidence that it gets done. We work really hard … We're rigorous and focused and we really, really push. Because we work so closely with my project management company as well, we're able to execute at scale, and we know we can put in good cost controls, so we can get it done on time and on budget, instead of just being in the vapor.

What are the current projects you are working on?

DAVID: Right now, we're finishing this project in Berlin.

We have a beta version of New Lab, but we're building a very big new version of New Lab. That's under construction right now. It will be finished next year. We are doing a real estate search for a new project to do something similar to what we did here in Berlin, but one that we will operate.

So Nicko and Rebecca and I are looking at buildings in other cities in Europe and in New York. What else are we doing? Those are the main ones for Macro Sea. And then I'm also involved with DBI in a couple of hotels, and we just finished a theater in Brooklyn.

IT'S EITHER THAT I SEE A BUILDING THAT I WANT TO DO SOMETHING COOL WITH.

What do you find the most fulfilling about your job as a developer?

DAVID: I get to work with really good people, so the most satisfying thing to me is working with the team and surprising ourselves with what we can do. As I told you earlier, Macro Sea is pretty small.

But, for example, Rebecca works with us as our general counsel and she's never had another job. She came straight from law school. But she's now negotiating contracts in four different countries, doing partnerships with the City of New York, and law firms report to her.

And it's been very satisfying to me watching her grow. And working with Nicko, and having him challenge me on things design-wise that I ordinarily wouldn't do, but then really liking them in the end.

So it's really about working with people that are great and working with young people and watching them mature and watching them grow – and blowing my mind.

The entrance area is a large open space with meeting areas and lounge zones. with a bar: It's a nice mix between secondhand and new design furniture pieces. © Chris Mosier

Do you have any advice for "Archipreneurs" who are interested in developing their own project?

DAVID: I've been giving talks at a lot of architecture schools, graduate programs, and I always say the same thing, which is, "Don't be afraid of money, and don't be afraid of the spreadsheet. And if you want to build good things in the world, you have to just see the financial piece as a design constraint."
So I always think to myself that architects are so much smarter and more qualified than most developers, but they're so afraid of business, and they just say that's not their thing. They're not going to be able to build shit with that attitude. They're going to end up doing signage for an airport or a little design detail for some big firm.

"DON'T BE AFRAID OF MONEY, AND DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE SPREADSHEET."

And if they could just take that extra little step further where they feel empowered to understand the business end of things – which is not that complicated – they'll serve themselves well. It is complicated, but on a scale of the other types of complexities that most architects or designers have to deal with on a daily basis, it's really much simpler than that.

So my advice is: just try. Just get started, and just buy a cheap building that you can afford. Or put together money with friends. Or just get started, and don't be afraid because the people who are successful are willing to fail and so you should be too. It is like there's no risk to failing or just pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. The risk is not doing that.

But how would you finance a first development project? Would you partner with somebody, or do crowdfunding?
Any tips on how to manage that?

DAVID: Well, so we've done all of that, right? I did not come from a wealthy family or any money at all, and so the way that I started was by leveraging the fact that I had relationships with people based on the other buildings we had done, and they knew we could execute.
At that point it takes being willing to ask them for money for a crazy idea. And a lot of people helped me: they've lent me money to buy buildings, they've supported projects. We've also done crowdfunding, and I really believe in it. So we're friends with Fundrise.

I interviewed Ben Miller before and he said that New Lab was one of the most interesting projects he crowdfunded …

DAVID: Good. Yeah. I really like Ben and Dan, and I really believe in them. And I believe that they're going to do very well. And I believe that crowdfunding is going to have a big impact. And so if you live in a neighborhood and you see an empty building and you can get your community together and raise money together and own it together, it's an interesting thing, right?

The students' dorm rooms' interiors are a stylish, raw material mix with self-manufactured plywood furniture, steel beds and Hay furnishings. On every floor, you will find a kitchen and a lounge, where you can hangout and meet friends. © Chris Mosier

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

DAVID: I really don't know. Maybe, Nicko, do you have any idea? I'm sort of a one-trick pony. I have one answer which is, no matter who you are, de-commoditize yourself.

So architecture is often a commodity that you can buy, and so if you have an idea and want to do something special, then it's not something you can just buy on the market. And so do more of that, and don't be afraid of the money part. But I don't know.

Nicko, what do you think? What do you think the future of architecture is? I don't think that's the future of architecture. That's what I would like.

NICKO: I think it'll probably shrink. It'll become more and more of a luxury item because there's so much that can be automated and outsourced these days.

The ability to build coalitions and tell stories – that's always going to be the thread running through future of architecture and that's something that can't be removed while so many other parts of the job would be lost to technology.

"AND SO, WITHOUT VISION, NOTHING HAPPENS."

DAVID: So, before, you needed your creative, class European, American designer, right? And now, developing countries, because of the Internet, people can collaborate from anywhere.

NICKO: The one thing I would say is that the importance of the relationship of designer to the project and it's stakeholders. That personal relationship – the ability to build coalitions and tell stories – that's always going to be the thread running through future of architecture and that's something that can't be removed while so many other parts of the job would be lost to technology and to algorithms, etc.

DAVID: And the thing is that money follows vision, right? And so, without vision, nothing happens. And so I agree with Nicko. The architects or the designers who are able to maintain a clear vision will never be a commodity, right?

The common spaces are also designed equally stylishly, with a love for detail and materials. It is really a unique creative development and a benchmark for student living. © Chris Mosier

#03 A NEW WAY OF PRESENTING SPACE IN THE INTERNET WITH *ARCHILOGIC*

Archilogic Founding Team: Pascal Babey, Frederic Schwarz, Kaspar Helfrich & Tomas Polach
© archilogic

The next interview is with four architects from Zurich, Switzerland. The founding team of archilogic.com: Pascal Babey, Frederic Schwarz, Kaspar Helfrich & Tomas Polach.
The guys at Archilogic developed a technology to turn 2D floorplans into 3D models. I think it is a hugely important idea that could stand to revolutionize the way in which real estate and architectural projects are designed and presented. You can test their 3D app below in the post and fly through a model of the Farnsworth house.
Archilogic was created in 2014 as a spin off from the ETH, Zurich. They recently closed a $1.5 million round from angle investors in order to grow and scale their business. It will be very interesting to see where their innovative methods of communicating space will lead.
Here are Pascal's, Frederic's, Kaspar's and Tomas' thoughts on the intersection between architecture and technology, as well as how to build a business and his own view on the future of architecture.

ABOUT
THE FOUNDERS

The Archilogic founders studied together at the ETH in Zurich and started AERO architects after graduating from uni. In 2014 they founded archilogic.com and combind their knowledge in architecture with technology to bring the physical and the virtual world together.

Please tell us a little bit about your startup, archilogic.com. What is the idea behind it and what services do you provide?

KASPAR: We belief that a new kind of architecture comes of a new kind of communicating architecture. New medias, from the central perspective to photography to renderings, changed the way we thought about space. It is our goal to bring space to the web. This will then allow anybody to communicate and change the spaces he lives in. We strongly belief in the democratic power of the internet, a power that we want to bring to architecture.

PASCAL: To reach this ambitious goals we develop tools that first of all are able to show a space in the internet, create the model of this space without prior knowledge and play with this model without CAD skills. The funding for this journey is provided by investors but also by professional users that use our technology to communicate space. We have a wide variety of customers from architects, to property portals, brokers, developers, architecture blogs or just general media.

What made you decide to become an entrepreneur and found archilogic.com? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

KASPAR: The four founders studied together and even during our studies it was always clear that we wanted to be independent. Before Archilogic we created AERO Architekten. We built furniture, galleries, houses and tried our luck in many competitions. Then Tomas Polach, our old friend stopped by and showed us the first prototype of Archilogics technology. There is no such thing like a no-brainer, but it took us about two seconds to drop what ever we were working on and put all our energy in this project.

Tomas, also an architect, spent most of his time programming what is now the platform we belief might change the way space is communicated. He writes code since the age of nine and taught 3D software at ETH.

...IT TOOK US ABOUT TWO SECONDS TO DROP WHAT EVER WE WERE WORKING ON AND PUT ALL OUR ENERGY IN THIS PROJECT.

You and your co-founders also run the architecture office, AERO architects. Are you still practicing architecture, or is archilogic.com your main focus at the moment?

FREDERIC: We currently finish our last building. But our main focus is clearly Archilogic. A tech startup is not something you build part time. There are many things that are somehow similar to designing architecture. For example the fact, that you often have to think about very small and very big things at the same time and also that time is a huge factor. But there are other things that are very new. While architecture is measured in years, technology is measured in microseconds. The high speed things develop in technology is a challenge and at the same time extremely rewarding.

What do you find the most fulfilling about your current job as a startup founder?

KASPAR: I was drawn towards architecture because of the vastness of possible tasks in this field. Interestingly enough, founding a tech startup seems to create an even more diverse set of challenges. The time from design to impact is now reduced to days and the reach is more global than local. Still, the final question, if it all works out and if we made more right than wrong decisions remains.

TOMAS: I would say that the most fulfilling aspect of our current endeavours (I wouldn't call it a mere job) is the potential we are working with. But as always, there are two sides to this medal.

How much does your 2D to 3D modeling service normally cost?

PASCAL: If you do it by yourselfs, it is for free. If we create your model we charge $0.55/m2

How do you plan to scale your business?

KASPAR: We will enable other people to upload their own content onto our platform. We are will focus more and more on the publishing of content and enabling people to work with the models then on the production of the content.
Still we are trying to make it as fast, cheap and simple for people to get from a 2D floorplan to an awesome, web based, interactive, semantic 3D model.

How has your architectural training helped you in the actual running of your business? What specific/ transferable skills have proved the most useful?

KASPAR: Studying architecture is just the greatest thing there is. The skills learned there are actually quite good for management. You learn to from a vision, present this vision or break it down to smaller tasks. The knowledge about buildings, space, construction, typologies, history and representation of architecture are of huge value. I am not sure if a team that consists solely of programmers could teach a machine to understand architecture.

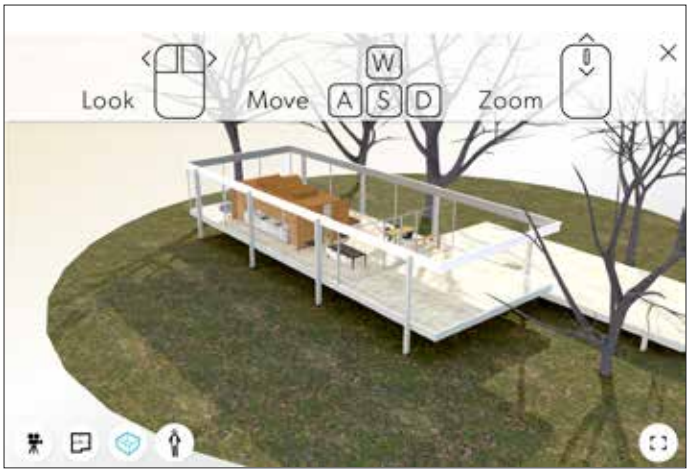
Do you have any advice for architects who are interested in starting their own business? How did you finance your startup idea?

TOMAS: Just start! You will learn the rest on the road. Also, prototype a lot and ask everyone what they think about your work. As an architect you probably are used to get critique, you probably even rely on it. There are many ways to finance a startup. Angel investors are great way to get your idea started. They give you enough wiggle room to form your idea. But the three f's (friends, family, fools) can do that as well. As soon as you realise that it gets serious you should get a pro on board. Someone that really knows how to plan and control your finances. That's definitely not something you learn at architecture school.

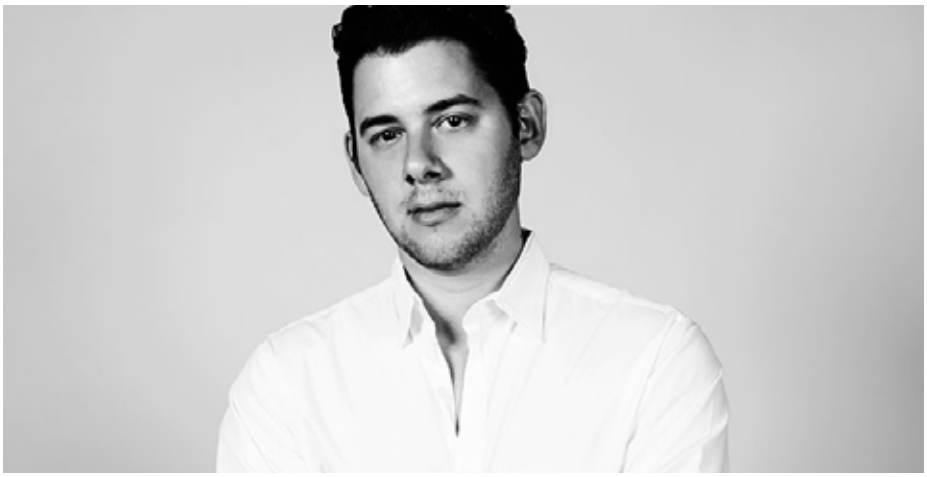
JUST START! YOU WILL LEARN THE REST ON THE ROAD.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

FREDERIC: Compared to other industries the construction industry is basically still pre-internet, pre computer even. We do things like they were done for hundreds of years, even if we do them on a computer. This gives much room for innovations or disruption.
User generated content and economies of sharing are a huge trend and built companies that are worth more than states. In architecture we know these practises since quite some time. Actually some of the most beautiful buildings ever created were not planned by architects but by 'users'.



#04 DESIGN+DEVELOPMENT: HOW TO CREATE AESTHETIC AND ECONOMIC VALUE WITH *ARI S.HECKMAN (ASH NYC)*



This Insights Interview is with Ari S. Heckman, Co-Founder and CEO of ASH NYC, a company that blends the world of interior design with property development. ASH NYC also designs products and furniture for improving brands and developing hospitality experiences.

I like their approach to architecture, as I think that, for developers, their first consideration for architectural projects is normally driven by the rate of return and the design budget, including how the budget may be reduced. By bridging the gap between the worlds of design and development with experts from both in one company, ASH infuses their projects with aesthetic and economic value. I think this is a useful way to create sustainability and eventually make our cities better places.

Here are Ari's thoughts on design, development and bridging the gap.

ABOUT
ARI HECKMAN

Ari Heckman oversees the various components that make up ASH NYC. He is responsible for directing company strategy, as well as sourcing acquisitions and new business. Ari was previously the development manager at Cayuga Capital Management in Brooklyn, New York and a development associate at Cornish Associates in Providence, Rhode Island.
Ari was raised in Providence, Rhode Island and graduated from the College of Architecture, Art and Planning at Cornell University.

You graduated from the College of Architecture, Art and Planning at Cornell. What made you decide to move into real estate development? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

I grew up in a family that was involved in several disciplines related to building—my mother an interior designer, my father an amateur real estate owner and my grandfather a modernist architect. I knew enough about what they did to know that I was interested from a young age in being the person who actually initiated the project, i.e. the developer, rather than one piece of the entire process. It was my grandfather who sternly told me that architects don't get to make many decisions and that the developer drove the ship. My schooling was very interdisciplinary in that it involved planning, architecture, economics, law, etc.

Your company, ASH NYC, bridges the gap between the worlds of interior design and property development. Could you tell us a bit about your work and your approach to it?

In short we are developers who are also designers, or vice versa. We tend to take on projects where we think we can have an impact, create value, etc. via design. We are our own client on our development projects which means that the design team as an equal seat at the table when major decisions are being made. It means that design is given true, equal importance to all the other considerations during the development process. We also do for-hire design work for external clients.

IN SHORT WE ARE DEVELOPERS WHO ARE ALSO DESIGNERS, OR VICE VERSA.

How do you normally start your creative urban projects?

In addition to being designers/developers, we are placemakers, and we take our role in impacting the urban environment very seriously. We are only interested in projects that we feel improve their host community, that make a positive impact on a neighborhood, etc.

Redevelopment of the old Wurlitzer building in Detroit, Michigan © ASH NYC

We are drawn to renovations of historic buildings, often ones that are vacant or have some kind of undesirable. We find that people really enjoy connecting with a well-adapted historic building.

What projects are you currently working on?

We have a few great ones at the moment.

We are restoring the old Wurlitzer organ building in Detroit, Michigan, which we are converting into a 106 room hotel.

We are also redeveloping an old Catholic campus consisting of a school, church, rectory and convent in the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans with a local partner.

We have a large residential project in Bushwick, Brooklyn, where we are converting an old glass factory and building two new buildings on either side of it. And we are redeveloping an office building in Providence, RI into residential and retail. That is on our real estate side; on the design side we are doing many, many projects around the country for a wide range of clients.

What do you find most fulfilling about your job as a creative developer?

On a macro level, most fulfilling is obviously when a project you've been working on for years opens its doors and finds success, but every day has a unique set of challenges and personalities. In development I think it is somewhat unique the range of characters and disciplines one experiences on a constant basis.

THE BEST ADVICE IS SIMPLY TO GET STARTED.

Do you have any advice for "Archipreneurs" who are interested in developing their own project?

The best advice is simply to get started. It all seems very daunting and abstract but one most throw themselves into it if there's a real interest. I always recommend people buy a small multi-family building that they can afford and make the improvements the envision so that at the end of the day the building is functioning better than when you found it.

Interior shot of the existing church © ASH NYC

Historic development site in the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans © ASH NYC

How would you finance a project in its first stages of development? Any tips on how to manage it?

This remains a challenge for us, and probably always will be if we seek projects that fall outside the typical, which in the US is very suburban focused and not generally mixed-use. We think those things are natural and valuable but they remain somewhat abstract in this country (although that is changing.) We generally acquire property all cash, so that we have time to plan the development and complete the design and permitting work before we go and get a construction loan. This allows you to set your own pace and not be under the pressure of servicing debt for any longer than you need to.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

I think it is likely that more and more firms and people take the direction we have, which is less of distancing the architect from the success or failure of their project but actually making them involved in it on a meaningful and ongoing basis. I have many friends who have or are becoming developers which one can do as soon as they decide to! It is obvious, but I think people realize when they're in control, they're able to make much more of an impact than when one is a consultant. And I hope that if architects and design minded people are impacting development and urbanism in a greater way, our buildings and our communities will only get better.

top: Interior rendering of a loft © ASH NYC
bottom: Redevelopment of a old glass factory in Bushwick, Brooklyn © ASH NYC

#05 KEVIN CAVENAUGH, DESIGNER & DEVELOPER

Kevin in his loft in "The Ocean" project – a converted auto repair shop
© Guerilla Development
The frames on the back wall hold napkin sketches of some of Kevin's projects. Most were never built. Some were. Others still might in the future…

The 5th Insights interview is with Kevin Cavenaugh, the founder of Guerrilla Development in Portland, Oregon.
Guerrilla Development undertakes both new construction and adaptive reuse projects in areas that other architectural companies may overlook. Guerrilla believes that their projects bring positive change to neighborhoods through their social experiments, disguised as buildings, and a special sensitivity to what makes Portland Portland.
Guerrilla don't build anything they wouldn't themselves work, live, eat or sleep in, as evidenced by the founder living in one of his mixed-use projects and the work team working in another mixed-use project. The Guerrilla team lives and breathes Portland and is content with changing the world 3,000 SF at a time(!)
I stumbled upon the Guerrilla Development website after reading an article about Kevin's first project, "Box + One". I really liked the way the company as a whole uses uncommon elements for designing their buildings, such as garage door windows for loft apartments that are on the first floor.
This interview will be especially interesting for those of you who are thinking about developing your own project. Enjoy all the tips and knowledge Kevin shares about the creation and place-making of boutique urban infill developments.

ABOUT
KEVIN

Kevin Cavenaugh is a designer and developer from Portland, Oregon. He has created a practice based on the principle of wearing as many hats as possible in the construction of a building. >

He typically serves as developer, designer, long-term owner and property manager. He has most recently completed three buildings in Portland neighborhoods that use unconventional materials, exhibit strong environmental sensitivity, and bring lively uses to the street. By serving as his own developer, he can decide which risks he wants to take. By owning the buildings after they are complete, he brings the discipline of reasonable operating costs to the design process. And by serving as the property manager, he generates feedback for his future development/design projects.
His buildings includes such innovations as a well that brings water from 300 below ground (thus requiring less energy to heat it and cool it), an edible green roof that will serve as a food source for the fourth floor restaurant in the building, an arcade to reflect other buildings in the neighborhood, and sliding window-shading panels designed by 26 different artists.

As a fellow, Kevin studied urban planning principles, especially the regulatory framework that tends to dampen innovative ideas, and landscape architecture.

What made you decide to become a developer after graduating from architecture school? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

There was no "ah ha!" moment for me. I've always had an entrepreneurial predisposition, even as a youngster. So being deeply attracted to design didn't keep me from constantly anaylsing a project through the client's lens. Why would somebody develop apartments instead of retail? Why would somebody build such small units? Or big units? Why in the world would anybody use vinyl windows?!

WHY IN THE WORLD WOULD ANYBODY USE VINYL WINDOWS?!

I wanted to learn, so I would take our clients out for coffee and ask all of these questions, and more. I would ask, "What is a CAP rate? (I still don't truly know.)" and "What is a normal debt-coverage ratio?" All the while I was buying old and beat-up single family houses in the rough part of town. I would fix them up, rent them out, then refinance them. On occasion I would sell one because I needed to replenish my funds. I ultimately realized that the big commercial developers that I was taking to coffee were doing what I was doing – only with bigger buildings and with bigger dollars.

Could you tell us a bit about your approach to project development? How do you normally start your "boutique urban infill developments"?

Not one project at Guerrilla Development is like a previous project. I am frustrated with the current spate of developments in Portland (and America) – they are very formulaic and unimaginative. They do projects based on what worked the last year .... or decade. It is frustrating.

Thus I like to experiment in everything I do. Sometimes a project is more of a programmatic experiment, like The Ocean (a micro-restaurant adaptive re-use of an old auto repair building). And sometimes a project is more of a design experiment, like The Zipper.

Project: Box + One © Guerilla Development

Because I enjoy the experimentation more than anything I have found that I cannot have clients. I have to be my sole client, and thus a property developer. If you paid me to design a building for you either
1) I would be afraid of doing something too wild and I would produce something staid and diluted, or
2) I would do something truly wild and it would leak.
Either way you'd be disappointed with me and with my work.

THERE IS NO SECRET RECIPE. IT'S ALL ABOUT CREATIVITY AND HARD WORK, MIXED WITH A LARGE APPETITE FOR RISK.

You uploaded your projects' spreadsheet analyses on your website. When it comes to costs and figures, developers are normally very secretive. Why have you chosen to share yours?

Developers, at least in America, exist just below crill on the food chain.
They (with some wonderful exceptions of course) are greedy and they have no long-term vision, other than how big their next yacht will be. There is no magic to good real estate development. There is no secret recipe. It's all about creativity and hard work, mixed with a large appetite for risk.
Since I never do the same project twice, I have no problem if anybody else mimics one of my buildings. It has never happened, but if it did I would be flattered.

Plus, every time I think I have a truly creative and original idea I find out that it has already been done. Years prior. And better. It's difficult to let one's ego get too outsized when there's such fantastic work out there. (It's the minority of work of course – but it's still inspiring. Always.) Thus I have no problem sharing all of my data – the financials, the floor plans, everything. The only thing I won't share is the details of my commercial leases, as that would entail sharing financial information from my tenants, and that wouldn't be kind.

What do you find the most fulfilling about your current job as a developer?

Um … everything. Seriously. I love Mondays. I draw all the time. I am thinking about projects all the time. It's the funnest thing ever.

**How has your architectural training helped you in the actual running of your business?
What specific/transferable skills have proved the most useful?**

I have no idea. I am not a good business operator and an even worse manager of people. I have discovered this the hard way. Thankfully everybody that has ever worked for me has been wonderful and they have filled the gaps of my poor management style. Architecture school taught me how to design and how to be a deeper conceptual thinker. It didn't teach me how to make payroll at the end of the month …

Do you have any advice for architects who are interested in developing their own project?

I used to lecture at architecture schools as much as

Project: The Zipper © Guerilla Development

Project: The Ocean © Guerilla Development

possible, being almost evangelical in my approach. I would holler "Follow me! Development is so freeing! You'll love it, I promise!" One day a buddy of mine, fellow architect Francis Dardis, pulled me aside and said, "You can't keep saying that Kevin. You are wired differently than most. What you find professionally exciting would give me a heart attack!"

How would you finance a first development project?

That's a trick question. My first project was in 2002. I could never finance a project in 2015 (post recession) the way I did in 2002, when money was much easier to obtain from banks. Now I advise new developers to have access to big sacks of money. Hundreds of thousands. If a bank isn't attracted to you (…. and they likely won't be. Not without a strong track record) they'll need to be attracted to somebody on your team. My advice is to find that somebody first, then create the project.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

In America architects only design between 3% and 5% of the built environment. I have no idea if this number is waxing or waning, but it is sad nonetheless. I would like to see architects be less passive in their roles and with their profession. For me that means real estate development. But it could mean any number of other variations on the trade. Architects are holistic thinkers. I am at my best when I use my right brain and my left brain equally. Architecture school hones both of these hemispheres in a way that's not common in other professions.

FOLLOW ME! DEVELOPMENT IS SO FREEING!

I often, while lecturing to young designers, show a slide of an Amsterdam prostitue, soliciting men from behind a plate glass window. I tell the audience that they (we) are all like that woman. They are working in the service industry. But it is their job to own the conversation. It is their responsibility to say "no" when a client is too demanding. But don't be fooled – they are indeed providing a service. And in 2015, at least in America, the architect's seat at the table has grown smaller and smaller, and their voice in the room is feint at best.

Please. Don't passively let that happen to you. Or to this noble profession. It's ALMOST the oldest profession in the world.

Project: Ode to Rose's © Guerilla Development

#06 WILL HUNTER, ARCHITECT & UNIVERSITY FOUNDER

The 6th interview is with Will Hunter, Founder and Director of the new London School of Architecture (LSA), which proposes a different type of educational enterprise. The LSA wants to make architectural education more affordable, with emphasis on 'real world practice' and preparing talented graduates for tackling the vast changes that the architectural profession is currently undergoing.

Here are Will's thoughts on architectural education, alternative routes for architectural professionals and the future of the profession.

ABOUT
WILL HUNTER

Will trained as an architect at the Bartlett, University College London and at the Royal College of Art. After five years at The Architectural Review, he stepped down as executive editor in February 2015 to focus on setting up the LSA.
Will has contributed to many titles including Wallpaper*, Blueprint and the Financial Times, and has previously been editor of the monthly magazines of The Architects' Journal and Building Design.
He has taught architecture at both London Metropolitan University and the Royal College of Art, at the latter as a design unit master and chair of the architecture school's public lecture programme. He has judged numerous competitions, including the Global Architecture Graduate Awards (which he founded) and the RIBA President's Medals dissertation prize.
Will was the creative director for the RIBA conference Guerilla Tactics 2014 and is currently editing a monograph on Peter Salter's Walmer Yard housing project in west London (AA Publications).

What made you decide to found the LSA? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

The original idea came in 2012 when the tuition fees cap in England was raised to £9,000 per year. I was worried about the effect this would have on access to architectural education. A group of like-minded collaborators and I started to explore different financial and pedagogic models for educating architects. Ultimately we sought to forge a new relationship between practice and academia to enhance both.

Could you tell us about the LSA's approach to architectural education? What do you want to do differently, compared to more the traditional architectural education courses out there?

We're offering a two-year post-graduate programme in partnership with London Metropolitan University and 50 architecture practices based in the capital city.

A lot of courses that have a practice component deliver it as a block – so a year in practice, then a year in the school. In our course, they run continuously, so first-year students spend three-days per week in practice and two days per week with the school. The students earn a minimum of £12,000 for their three days in practice, and this covers both years' tuition fees, which are £6,000 per annum, so it's effectively cost-neutral to study with us.

One of the main innovations of the school are the "Design Think Tanks", where groups of practices and students collaborate for six months on a piece of speculative design/research around a shared agenda. The themes for this year are extremely varied, from "unstable cities" to "new knowledge", and

Some of the 30 students who will start at the LSA this October
© Emma Gibney

I'm super excited to see how these evolve.

We don't have our own building but use the city as our campus. In the first year, the Design Museum in Shad Thames is our main spatial partner, where lectures and crits will be held. And our new HQ is at Second Home, the extremely cool new workplace for entrepreneurs and creative businesses designed by Spanish Practice Selgas Cano.

ONE OF THE MAIN INNOVATIONS OF THE SCHOOL ARE THE "DESIGN THINK TANKS"

In the second year, all the students will be with the LSA full time, and we'll be renting a studio for them. Their thesis projects will all be based in London. Instead of it being taught using a unit system – where students sign up to a particular direction set by the tutors – our students must develop in the first year a clear critical trajectory for their second year that is individual to them.

You also launched the research group "Alternative Routes for Architecture" (ARFA) to explore different models for architectural education. Could you tell us about the research of that think tank?

ARFA emerged out of an article I wrote in The Architectural Review. Perhaps a dozen people were involved, most of whom are faculty today. In a way, it was a slightly defective think tank in that it didn't produce a single publication. Instead it morphed into the school.

At one of our meetings [Professor] Nigel Coates (Nigel Coates Studio) said he didn't like the name ARFA and Deborah Saunt (DSDHA) came up with the London School of Architecture. Naming the project really helped – it turned it into something real we could all work towards.

One of the LSA's P.R.I.M.E. values is to be "Entrepreneurial". What are your thoughts on combining architecture and entrepreneurship?

The barrier to studying architecture is not just the high tuition fees but the subsequent low salary expectations – people pay a hundred grand for an

MBA because they know they'll earn a million back. I think one of the agendas of the school is not only to explore how you design buildings, but how you design a practice too.

We've constructed the school's Practice Network to bring in a wide range of contributors on this. On the one hand, five of our practices – Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, Allies and Morrison, Grimshaw, Scott Brownrigg and Aukett Swanke – are in the top 20 biggest practices in the UK, and bring huge insight into how you grow and maintain a successful enterprise and innovate at scale.

ARCHITECTS HAVE A HUGE CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE TO THE WORLD IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

On the other hand, some of our smaller practices are acting in really interesting and entrepreneurial ways – SUSD is operating as a creative development consultancy to connect architecture, communities and development, for example, while Studio Octopi has just financed its design for a floating swimming pool in the River Thames through crowd-funding.

As a school we are definitely interested in articulating the value architects bring to our core competency – the design of space – while also exploring adjacent territories where our creative skills can have an impact.

Do you have any advice for architecture students who want to prepare for the rapidly changing architectural profession?

A good place to start would be to read two new books – The Future of the Professions by Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind and Open Source Architecture by Carlo Ratti and Matthew Claudel – both of which discuss the challenges and opportunities for the profession, particularly in relationship to technology and society. And I'd strongly recommend reading Peter Buchanan's series of essay The Big Rethink – unmissable.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

"Traditional practice" is too big a terrain to concede and I'd really like to see that as one of the biggest opportunities for up-and-coming architects. It is imperative that we retain – and enhance – our position in the design of the built environment.

Put at its simplest, our discipline is the one most capable of synthesising complex forms of information into beautiful and functional spaces and places. Architects have a huge contribution to make to the world in the 21st century – particularly in shaping how we can live sustainably and happily within ever-denser cities and within the Earth's resources. I hope the London School of Architecture produces work at the forefront of these debates.

#07 HOW TO TRANSITION FROM ARCHITECTURE TO DEVELOPMENT *WITH BRANDON DONNELLY*

Brandon Donnelly is an architect-trained real estate developer and blogger who lives and works in Toronto, Canada. I am a huge fan and constant reader of his blog Architect This City, which was named by the Guardian (UK) as one of the best city blogs in the world. He writes about cities, real estate development, technology and transportation. Brandon is also Co-founder of The Dirt – A free condo review platform that helps people find the best places to live.

Here are Brandon's thoughts on architecture, development and entrepreneurship.

ABOUT
BRANDON DONELLY

Brandon Donnelly is a real estate developer/entrepreneur and blogger based in Toronto. His passions are cities, real estate, design, and technology.
Brandon is currently the development lead at CAPREIT, which is one of Canada's largest residential landlords. Prior to this he worked at TAS and Morguard Investments where he managed urban-focused residential (condo), office and retail development projects. He's also cofounder of condo review site Dirt (thedirt.co).
Brandon studied architecture and art history at the University of Toronto. He also has a master's in architecture and real estate development from the University of Pennsylvania, and an MBA from the Rotman School.
In his spare time, Brandon advises a non-profit called The Laneway Project. He also loves the gym, snowboarding, and Ontario wines.

What made you decide to become a real estate developer after many years of studying architecture?

I already had inklings in undergrad that I was interested in or wanted to eventually become a real estate developer. My goal was to figure out some way to combine architecture and development, despite everyone around me telling me that I should just pick one.

I decided to go to the University of Pennsylvania for grad school precisely because they had a real estate program I could take (at the same time as my M.Arch) and because they seemed very open to the idea of cross-disciplinary study. The business school is a major force on that campus.

I wasn't sure exactly how it was all going to shake out, but I ended up taking a summer position for a real estate consultancy in Dublin, Ireland and that pretty much solidified my career path in real estate.

MY MISSION IS TO MAKE BUILDINGS BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND FEASIBLE.

What do you find most fulfilling about your current job as a developer?

I love how multi-disciplinary it is and I love that my work has the opportunity to positively affect the built environment. Developers often have a bad rap (I know from the comments on my blog), but for me development is that perfect middle ground.

I never wanted to be an architect that designed beautiful but infeasible projects that could never be built. And I never wanted to be a developer that built terrible projects whose only goal was to make money. My goal is to be an integrated thinker, that was a big topic when I did my MBA at Rotman. My mission is to make buildings both beautiful and feasible.

How does your architectural training help you in your business. What specific skills are the most useful?

I understand design, space, drawings, and the construction process. As a developer you have to be a jack of all trades, passing between things like design and construction and finance. And my view has always been that the more you can master all aspects of the development process, the better off you'll be. Creative solutions often straddle multiple disciplines.

Do you have any advice for architects who are interested in transitioning from architecture to development?

Well, you pretty much have two options. You can either try to convince a real estate firm to hire you or you can go out and do your own small development project. In both cases, I think you should figure out someway to shore up your business/finance knowledge. That could be through just reading, online courses, or maybe even a degree in real estate. This is something I worked really hard at when I was in grad school – shaking the prejudice that I didn't "understand the numbers." To be honest, this is the most common question I get from readers of my blog.

So much so that I've often thought about writing an eBook to help people get into the field. Development has historically been an entrepreneur's game, and so there isn't a lot of structure in terms of recruitment and entering the field. The barriers can be pretty high, particularly if you plan to start out on your own. But it's definitely a rewarding career.

You started the blog 'Architect This City' and the online review platform 'The Dirt'. Are you planning on following your entrepreneurial path in online business in the future?

I'm always interested in exploring how technology can be leveraged to improve the real estate industry. I love technology and I think it's pretty clear that it's going to continue to seep into every aspect of the economy. So I'll always be doing things online and I think everybody else should be answering the same, regardless of the industry you might happen to be in.

How do you view the future of architects? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) do you see major opportunities for architects?

I wrote a post on my blog about how a lot of agencies (software, design, and so on) are starting to (or at least want to) move towards actual products. Instead of just providing services to outside clients, they're building their own products in-house. And I think that's really interesting, because it's one of the ways you could categorize architects and developers. Architecture is a service business. By contrast, most developers are in the business of creating products (such as an apartment that somebody buys or rents). I think we're seeing a lot of architects rethink traditional practice and I think we'll see more architects get into products.

#08 *CLAUDIA LORUSSO,* ARCHITECT & SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

This interview is with Claudia Lorusso, Architect and Social Media Manager from the beautiful Bari, Italy. Claudia has always been passionate about social media and technology, so after graduating with a degree in architecture, she started to work for archilovers.com and the Archipassport Network.
Her position at archilovers provides a great example of how technology can create jobs in field of architecture. Developing and implementing their web marketing and communications strategies is an area that architectural firms should think more of in the future; we can no longer deny the importance of digital PR.
Let's now hear Claudia's opinions on that. Here are her thoughts on architecture, new technologies and social media.

ABOUT CLAUDIA

Claudia was born in Italy 27 years ago. She graduated from the Polytechnic University of Bari in Architecture and has always been passionate about social media, technology and startups. Just before graduating, she started working for a multi-platform company, proving her skills in Marketing and Social Media, Facebook campaigns, digital PR and community management.

What made you decide to become a social media manager for archilovers.com (A social network for architects?) Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

Oh this is a nice story.

I still was an undergraduate student when I received a message on my Archilovers profile from my current CEO, he found me on the platform because at that time I was an ordinary user. Ok, maybe not that ordinary, because unlike others I completed my profile with all information about me and especially my social links. Four years ago people in Apulia were already using facebook, but few of them were using it "business" wise. At that time I was also using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Linkedin of course. And that was the key.

After a brief exchange of messages with my CEO we set up a meeting, and I was shocked when I discovered that the Headquarters of Archilovers, Edilportale, Archiproducts and Archiportale were located in my city. I never knew that, not even suspected it.

A while later I was coordinating all of the communications that were passing through our social channels, giving tips to the people that were helping me with 21 channels of the network.

CONFUCIUS SAID "CHOOSE A JOB YOU LOVE, AND YOU WILL NEVER HAVE TO WORK A DAY IN YOUR LIFE." IN MY CASE MY JOB HAS CHOSEN ME, AND I COULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANY LUCKIER ...

What do you find the most fulfilling about your current job as Social Media Manager?

Since I started working with social media a new world opened to my eyes, and that's changed my life. Literally. When you work with social media you could find yourself checking emails at 5.30 am, or check if people have left comments at your latest post, how many retweets or likes it has received. It's all about communication with people. People is the real value of social networking and the relationship that you build with them. But, I'm not doing that for my company. In each post, in each answer to our followers there's a part of me. I'm doing that for myself. Confucius said "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life. " In my case my job has chosen me, and I couldn't have been any luckier and glad to combine my passion for social media with what I love most in the world which is architecture and design.

How has your architectural training helped you in your current job? What specific/transferable skills have proved the most useful?

Before entering the Architecture Faculty I graduated from the Classical Lyceum. I studied ancient languages (Latin and ancient Greek). It is said that they helped to thinking in a logic way. I think the same about the architecture faculty.

If I am now a problem solver, a team-worker and proactive maybe I should thank my training as an architect. Not to mention my current good taste for architecture, interiors and design products, of course.

Do you have any advice for architects who are interested in marketing their practice or projects via social media? Which tools and resources are the most effective?

As for a brand, the presence of an architect or architectural firm is essential on social networks, more than ever before. But launching a Facebook page or a twitter account is perhaps the last step of a process that before this step, should have affected the marketing strategies that generally you want to pursue: identify goals, choosing which are the most appropriate channels, developing a content strategy and creating an editorial calendar. Like any other marketing initiative social media are far from being cheap in terms of time and budget allocation.

Being on platforms specialized in architecture as Archilovers, which already has a large community both on the site and on social networks could be a very useful tool for architects and designer. In a few words, engaging the media of this particular field could represent a good start. Without forgetting that a good project without good pictures equals a bad project.

Do you think it is possible to acquire new clients with a good online communication strategy?

Yes I do. The online population is growing, and the most popular sites where people spend most of their time are search engines and social networks.
Bringing the communication on social networks it's like screaming in a square full of people, with a huge difference: you don't seem crazy.
But more important than acquire a new client is the possibility provided by them of being close to the client, being in touch with him. For both a single architect or a firm being on social networks means they can guarantee their clients high quality answers in a quick time.

BRINGING THE COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS IT'S LIKE SCREAMING IN A SQUARE FULL OF PEOPLE, WITH A HUGE DIFFERENCE: YOU DON'T SEEM CRAZY.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

This is a tough question. Architecture is one of the most ancient jobs in the world. A lot has been already invented, but I'm quite sure there is a lot more that should be done. I'm referring in particular to the 3d-printing industry, the augmented reality and self-made architecture. Those three topics are in their very early stages, and I guess very soon they could affect the "traditional" architecture practice.

#09 *ENZO MAIORANO,* CO-FOUNDER OF ARCHILOVERS.COM

This week's interview is with Enzo Maiorano, the Co-Founder of Archilovers.com, Archiproducts.com, Archiportale, Edilportale and the Archipassport Network.

The founding team started their first Internet platform in 1999. Since then, their architecture & design network has consistently grown and expanded. Their newest company, archilovers.com, is a social network for architects and designers worldwide, with over 900,000 registered users.

ABOUT ENZO

Enzo was born in 1972 in Puglia (Southern Italy). He earned a degree in Building Engineering in Bari and in 1999, achieved a Master of Science in Construction Management in Coventry (UK).

He worked for one year as a Construction Site Manager and Executive Designer at Pizzarotti, one of the most noteworthy General Contacting companies in Italy. He co-founded the Archipassport.com Network, of which he is currently the Chief Design Officer, Marketing Manager, Executive 'Architecture and Design' Editor, and Business Developer.

He is passionate about the sea, architecture and design, and is the author of numerous projects including the headquarters of the Archipassport Network and other stunning residences overlooking the beautiful coast of Puglia.

Please tell us a little bit about your international architecture & design network. What services do you provide for the creative community?

We have a mission: to use the internet as a medium to connect people, projects, and products in the Architecture and Design field. Our aim is to improve efficiency and productivity in all design and construction processes.

We created a network of four web portals: archiproducts.com, archilovers.com, edilportale.com, and archiportale.com. They make up an active platform where leaders of the construction sector – architects, businesses, manufacturers, service companies, and customers – interact in a really stimulating way.

Our business model is based upon "leads", qualified contacts which represent a link between the offer and demand of products and services, between architects and manufacturers, companies and architects, businesses and manufacturers. We strive to create contacts that spark the right business opportunities.

What made you decide to become an Internet entrepreneur and start archilovers.com and your other websites? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

Standard answer: we felt a real lack of communication and information in the building sector between 1995-2000. This became the turning point for us to create a single, trusted source of information geared towards architects. It was to be a resource for information (specifically building regulations) where you could also buy and sell architectural products.

Actual answer: the endeavor came from the need, back in 2000, to find a buyer for an antique floor made of traditional Apulian stone from one of our houses that was being demolished. We couldn't find a proper place to post the ad, so we decided to create one ourselves. For the record, that floor is now installed on the terrace of my summer home!

WE COULDN'T FIND A PROPER PLACE TO POST THE AD, SO WE DECIDED TO CREATE ONE OURSELVES.

How has your architectural training helped you in the actual running of your business? What specific/ transferable skills have proved the most useful?

Thanks to all of our planning and building experience, we were able to create a web platform which implemented the language typically used by architects (our main target). It was a portal by architects, for architects. Furthermore, our engineering background allowed us to approach the creation of the start-up and ensuing business organization from a technical vantage point.

Creativity is a necessary quality if you want to start a business, but a certain degree of technical knowledge is also crucial. A company must have solid foundations, follow clear and straightforward procedures, be flexible and likeable, and have the ability to reinvent itself at a moment's notice.

Very often we develop our services and new business areas as if we were planning a building.

Archilovers HQ in Bari, Italy – Photo Credit: Archilovers

Do you have any tips for architects & designers who want to build or expand a business online?

In my opinion, it is becoming increasingly difficult to create a relevant community because the bar for evaluating new projects is becoming increasingly high, so big investments are becoming a must. If you don't have a huge budget, at least try to come up with a simple, yet groundbreaking idea that you're sure will take off!

The architecture and design field is still in need of radical innovation, so there's definitely room for creation and improvements.

THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN FIELD IS STILL IN NEED OF RADICAL INNOVATION, SO THERE'S DEFINITELY ROOM FOR CREATION AND IMPROVEMENTS.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

I'm especially fascinated by augmented reality and think there's still so much that can be done with it. When utilised in the planning process together with BIM files, it has the potential to exponentially maximize the efficiency and control of a project. It also facilitates communication between the client and architect.

#10

HOW TO START YOUR OWN ARCHITECTURE FIRM WITH *ERIC REINHOLDT*

This week's interview is with Eric Reinholdt, an architect and entrepreneur from Maine, USA. Eric is also passionate about combining architecture with entrepreneurship, a union of which led him to write his book, Architect + Entrepreneur: A Field Guide to Building, Branding, and Marketing Your Startup Design Business.
Eric wrote this book because he wished that he had this sort of guide when he started his own firm 30X40 Design Workshop. So this interview will be particularly interesting for those of you who are thinking about starting your own architectural practice or interior design business.

Here are Eric's thoughts and tips on architecture, entrepreneurship and starting a practice.

ABOUT ERIC

Eric Reinholdt is an award-winning architect, mountain climber, designer, guitar player, paper cutter, blogger and author. He is the founder of 30X40 Design Workshop, a residential design studio bordering Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island just off the coast of Maine. This is where he lives and practices in a modern Longhouse, designed by him with his family.

His architecture is simple, modern, site-specific, and craft-driven. It features local materials and familiar forms juxtaposed against modern, open floor plans with minimalist detailing. The work celebrates humble materials, subtle contrasts and finely crafted details.

What made you decide to become an entrepreneur and found the 30X40 Design Workshop? Was there a particular moment that sealed the decision for you?

I was working for a small six-person firm which was struggling in a slow economy. Rather than thin the ranks, everyone agreed to take a 20% pay cut. As part of the agreement we were given the option to continue to work a full, five-day work week or work four days and take the fifth to pursue outside work. That was the moment when I realized I had to build something of my own and when I began laying the foundations for 30X40.

On my daily commute I listened to podcasts: Pat Flynn's Smart Passive Income, The Tropical MBA, This Week In Startups and Internet Business Mastery and I read The Four Hour Work Week by Tim Ferriss which changed my life. Together these resources inspired me to think differently about what an architecture practice in today's economy might look like. I think too often we buy into the myth that working for someone else – being an employee – offers job security. But, the change in my personal work situation really made me question that idea. I realized that I couldn't count on an employer to offer me job security, I had to create it for myself.

What do you find the most fulfilling about your current job as an architectural entrepreneur?

Without question it's the freedom I have. I set a work schedule that balances my professional pursuits with my family life. I choose which projects and commissions I'll accept. I'm free to experiment, to set the course for my business, to pivot when things aren't working, and to capitalize on successes. Overall, building a business has been an extremely liberating experience for me.

As architects we've been trained to see only one way to practice architecture. It takes root in school and it's nurtured throughout the architectural internship. This is because so many professionals have relied on the consulting model to deliver architectural services. Yet there are so many other options to explore beyond trading time for dollars. Consulting is the least scalable business model that exists.

OVERALL, BUILDING A BUSINESS HAS BEEN AN EXTREMELY LIBERATING EXPERIENCE FOR ME.

How has your architectural training helped you in the actual running of your business? What specific/ transferable skills have proved the most useful?

I'm afraid to say traditional architectural training has little to do with the day-to-day operations of my business. The rift between business and design has persisted because the allure of an architectural education is wrapped up in form-making, visualization, representation, and concept generation not business acumen.

All of these skills are extremely valuable, and none that I'd trade away, but, the goal of any academic institution should be to educate the "whole" professional and to practice architecture requires a basic working knowledge of business. Consequently, I had to seek business training out on my own. For me, listening to business podcasts was my "commuter MBA."

To the degree that business training was lacking, lateral thinking and problem solving skills were wholly ingrained and well developed and those talents have served me well in business. The ability to analyze, dissect, and communicate the solution to a problem from a variety of perspectives is an asset to any business.

YOU TRY THINGS, FAIL, PIVOT, AND TRY AGAIN. ONCE YOU FIND THE THING THAT WORKS, YOU BUILD ON THOSE IDEAS, ADD FEATURES AND START TO SCALE IT UP.

Do you have any advice for architects who are interested in starting their own design business? How can you start without any money?

Start today...! I suffered from analysis paralysis for a long time, fearing I'd never be able to save enough working capital to make a run at starting a business. I was determined to spend as little as possible to make it work. Honestly, you don't need much to start: a laptop, an internet connection, and a smart phone. With these things you can start almost any business you'd like. Having a client or two will bump up your chances for success, but it's certainly not mandatory. In my book I advocate the lean startup methodology (check out: The Lean Startup by Eric Ries) whereby you develop a minimum viable product first and then sell that idea to consumers. By doing this you don't invest heavily in any one idea, you test ideas in the marketplace using real consumers. You try things, fail, pivot, and try again. Once you find the thing that works, you build on those ideas, add features and start to scale it up.

This method requires very little capital to begin a business because once you have a product a consumer wants you establish cash flow and make the business about filling that need at a reasonable price with built-in profit. This works with services as well as products.

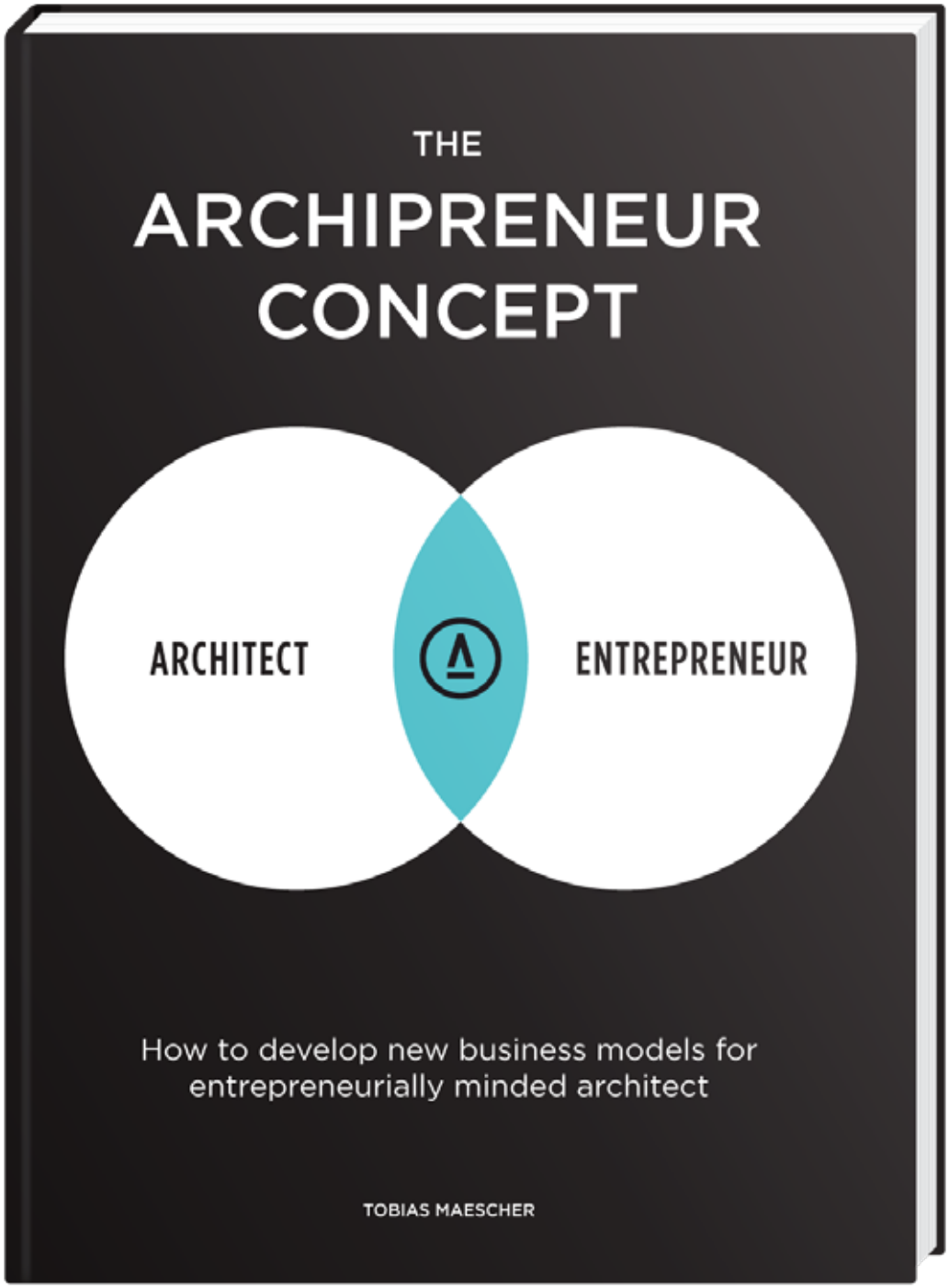
To do this, use the resources you have on hand. Don't quit your day job (yet), work on your business during your commute, during your lunch break, and in the evenings. Wake up at 4:30am every day and tick off items on your to-do list. You'll be amazed at how much you can accomplish with consistent effort each day.

How do you see the future of architecture? In which areas (outside of traditional practice) can you see major opportunities for up and coming architects?

I'm truly excited about the possibilities confronting architects today. I feel fortunate to be practicing now at this crossroads of technological innovation and globalization. The integration of technology in architecture really excites me; we've only scratched the surface of what's possible – smart facades, wearable sensors that interact with building components, 3D printing of structures, virtual environments, gaming, UX design – the list of fields where architects can play a role is growing every day.

Understanding how people use space in commercial and residential environments and how design can be impacted by these patterns is a huge opportunity. Just as the way we document and design has changed, the way buildings are constructed is poised for a monumental shift too. Problems of density and resource conservation need designed solutions – who better to solve these problems than architects?

Architect + Entrepreneur is a story about possibility; I hope in a small way that it helps to effect positive change in our profession.



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