



Koning Eizenberg's diagram offers up the rich, if untidy, complexity of designing for "workaday urban living."

ARCHITECTURE ISN'T JUST FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

In Koning Eizenberg Architecture's forthcoming book, Julie Eizenberg makes a case for infusing the design of everyday spaces with the needs and desires of urban dwellers.

Over the last twenty years, American cities have started to fill in. Though this is not, unfortunately, a substitute for spreading out, it does reflect an enthusiasm for urban living and urban landmarks. The potential of contemporary architecture to contribute notable buildings for special occasions, such as museums, theaters, and city halls, is highly valued. At the same time, the ability of architecture to enhance workaday urban living is less well understood. The buildings of daily life might, or might not, be as declarative as those for special occasions, but their role in the city is important nonetheless.

Most American cities are works in progress, and that is what is wonderful about them. Inhabitation, likewise, is a dynamic activity. Buildings for programs of urban living, from housing to work place to recreation center to school, are inserted into an evolving context. In our experience, life is neither tidy nor compartmentalized—no matter how zoning regulations attempt to systematize it or aerial photographs propose to order it. Hauling the kids from school to guitar

lessons, darting in for a forgotten aspirin, juggling work and social commitments mean that urban living is characterized not by a sustained ceremonial experience but by a myriad of repeated interlocking images, sounds, and smells. These collected sensations somehow stitch together to form an urban setting.

Many of the fragments of urban living are uplifting, and many are disappointing—been to any nice drugstores lately? In any event, the organization and appearance of these parts does not seem to give a picture comprehensive enough to inform design decisions. Like most, if not all architects, we have undergone quite a bit of training to distance ourselves from conventions of popular culture and everyday living. At the same time, we are asked to document and analyze a context to justify why we should ignore it or, conversely, why we should fit in. Perhaps we are overly focused on the physicality of a context and need to take a closer look at how life is actually lived within that context. To do so means that we must trust what we experience as much as what we learn.





The brief for the West Hollywood Community Center (facing page) called for separate facilities for teens and seniors, but the community's desire for inclusivity—established through a participatory process that focused on “mutual education about issues, parameters, and options”—signaled to Koning Eizenberg that an integrated, intergenerational program was more appropriate. At PS#1 in Santa Monica (this page), the architects learned from the children that, “Not every lesson about the world is extracted from guided instruction.” Design for education “must support implicit learning with a rich architectural setting.”



Urban restructuring that encourages mixed-use developments (including affordable housing), incorporates environmentally sustainable goals, and expands public transportation improves the framework of urban life. Architecture is more specific, taking a particular program and adding the delight of nuanced space and form. Architecture has the potential to infuse social connection and provide a simple joy of living on a routine basis.

The role of architecture in contemporary cities can seem dwarfed by generic marketplace development and low insti-

tutional expectations. In these cases, architecture is relegated to ornamental trim or clever details. On the other hand, what energizes the American built environment is simultaneously the cocksureness of commerce and its ability—or its failure—to generate durable beauty. It is essential to recognize the business of development, including the role of financing and the practices of construction. The building industry is huge and risk averse, to be sure—but knowledge enables change. Understanding industry parameters means they may be addressed effectively and releases architecture to do more.



At Harold Way Apartments, a 50-unit complex in Hollywood, Koning Eizenberg negotiated between economic moves and the things that “make it nice to get up in the morning” and “hang around on the weekend”: a zigzagging courtyard and cement-board-and-wood-batten cladding.

There are developers and institutions willing to invest in new ways of seeing and doing, changing conventions by example.

It is not surprising that the present tense is our preferred realm. We like people. We like it when people get a kick out of architecture or when they question design motives. We like the ad hoc, the discovered, the legitimization of the unexpected. We like it when owners and visitors add their own mark: people should feel welcomed, not obliged. The workaday context is full of opportunities for deliberate acts of architecture. Reframing expectations generates new prospects: schools can provide rich environments that celebrate living and learning,

not just places of instruction; multiunit housing can be about the quality of the experience of coming home, not just about private space. Making architecture for daily living is a bit like making an indie movie. Real life is a satisfying subject.

Julie Eizenberg is a founding principal of Koning Eizenberg Architecture, a Santa Monica-based firm founded in 1981. Reprinted from *Architecture Isn't Just for Special Occasions: Koning Eizenberg Architecture*. Copyright 2006 by The Monacelli Press. Published by permission of the author and the publisher.