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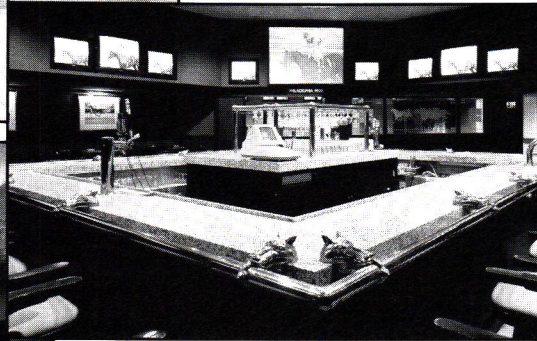
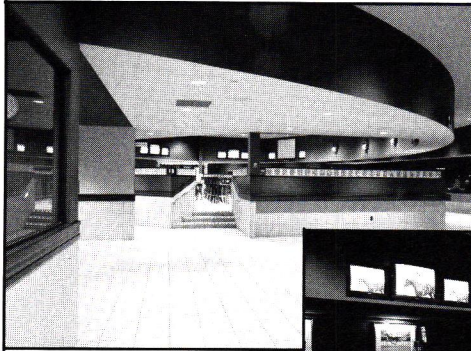


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Above: Ladbroke's third Offtrack Betting Facility in Harmarville.

Arch.: Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Assoc.

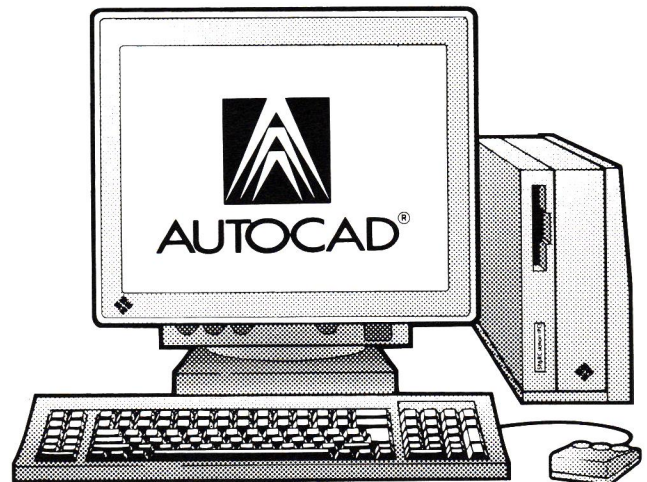
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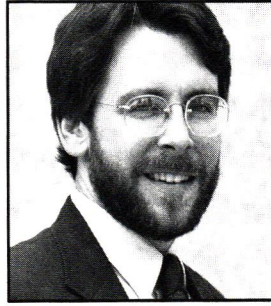
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View Point: Specialization is for Insects

Rob Pfaffmann, AIA, President



It's usually the second question after someone discovers you are an architect at a social event: "What kind of architect are you?"

We have all experienced this innocent question from non-architects; the general expectation is that we must have a specialty. The answer they expect: "I do houses" or "I do hospitals." People expect a specific answer because they are accustomed to the proliferation of specialists in everyday life. The examples we all can relate to are in the medical profession: Cardiologists for your broken heart. Neurologists for your burned-out brain.

Given a choice, I suspect most of us do not want to specialize; it is the nature of our education as architects to be generalists; to explore the full breadth of our profession from a simple cottage in the country to a complex megastructure in the city.

Based on recent reports from AIA National, the organization has decided that the increased fragmentation of the profession into specialized areas of practice should be addressed in the coming year. What is the state of specialization in architecture? Should we encourage it? Is it affecting the long-term viability of our profession?

The internal debate is an invigorating one. We can go on and on about the impact of complex technologies on our profession and the services we provide. We can talk about the need for increased teamwork: site selection specialists, programming specialists, estimating specialists, preconstruction consultants, lighting designers, color consultants, acousticians, even architect selection specialists! Will this list grow until there is theoretically nothing left of our profession? Or are we left closer to the romantic idea of the architect as poet? Others say we will be freed to be the generalist orchestrator of all these specialities.

This side of the debate sees the architect returning to a clear role as leader, freed from the overwhelming feeling of "knowing virtually nothing about everything!"


The external influences on this debate are more complicated and political. Someone outside the profession (a client, an interior designer, a construction manager, a political bean counter) asks why the architect should be the team leader—after all, he's just interested in "decorating the shed."

In a recent book by the New York Building Arts Forum entitled *Bridging the Gap: Rethinking the Relationship Between the Architect and Engineer* the debate rages on with no clear answers except a consensus that communication, understanding and teamwork will mitigate the negative effects of modern misunderstandings about architecture.

The AIA should be commended for attempting to put this issue on the front burner. However, I'm afraid about the potential conclusions: If you're a laboratory designer you get one set of services from the AIA; if you design houses you get another. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the amount of information needed in our profession; I'm just not sure I want someone else to sort it out for me.

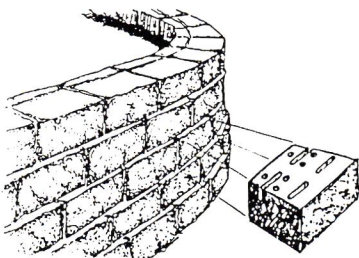
Other questions will come up: In trying to keep pace with the exponentially spiraling technical requirements of building, do we professionally recognize specialities? Do we require continuing education for membership? Will others answer them for us by taking the lead (new professions of Interior Design, Construction Management, Facilities Management, etc.)?

The trend to specialization is getting stronger. Our current generations will determine whether the profession is relevant into the next century or whether it will become an obscure, exclusive cottage industry called upon as a minor consultant in the building process.

As one of my college design critics used to love to sniff, "Specialization is for insects!" 

On the Cover The McCormick McCarthy-designed Pittsburgh Corning Corporation headquarters in Plum Boro shimmers in the sunlight. Story on page 6. *Photo by Dennis Marsico.*

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