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Social Studies: Marketing, connecting, and communicating in the digital age |
Oil & Water: Can architects and engineers collaborate and avoid conflict? | The evolution
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HOMEFRONT

BY BECKY SPEVACK



Balance – it’s something I find myself struggling to maintain in life, and it has been that way for as long as I can remember. My experiences both being part of and working with the creative class has taught me that they are nothing if not devoted, driven possibly to a fault. Starting in high school, I would spend hours on end in my bedroom, painting into the wee hours of the morning; upon being given a studio in my future husband’s family barn, my life (and canvases) shifted there. Once introduced to glass, countless hours, days, months were spent in the hotshop refining the craft. The studios at college were often filled with artists sleeping on the floor, catching a moment’s rest where they can before waking and going back to creating.

Now, my life is spent on a creation of a different kind, yet still completely consuming. My life has grown to include the title ‘mother’ (or ‘mama’, according to Calliope). And once again I find myself wanting to give my all, to provide and teach and love and pour into her everything I possibly can. But I recognize that to be the best person, the best mama I can be, I need to be myself, need to take time for me. However, recognizing and practicing are two very different things. Balance continues to be something that has to be fought for, something to be claimed.

Simultaneously, as my daughter grows into a person, I need to remember to meet her needs, to acknowledge her feelings and opinions, even when they don’t jive with my own. When she was just a wee babe, I could throw her into her sling and carry her around as I ran errands or took hikes. As long as she was fed, rested, loved, she was content. Nowadays, she has strong preferences on how we should spend our time. A recent example occurred while on vacation about a month ago. We were

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staying on the Isle of Palms, South Carolina, in a condo less than 75 yards from the Atlantic Ocean. I *love* the ocean, and was so excited to be so close again; listening to the waves each night felt like home. On our first full day there, we geared up and trotted down to the beach, thrilled to share the sand and water with Calliope for the first time. I was all set for a day in the sun. Upon setting down in the sand, though, Calliope decided she was not very interested, thank-you-very-much, and proceeded to demand being carried, refusing to touch the tiny, shifting grains beneath our feet. Granted, it was a completely new sensation for her, but I had let my enthusiasm for my love of the ocean overshadow her potential fear or uncertainty. I hadn't even considered that the vastness of the beach and water, the new feeling of the earth shift with each step, that these experiences could cause her distress. It was a quick reminder to step back and acknowledge her needs, to restore balance within the family. I would get my time in the sand, but not at her expense.

As each issue of this magazine comes together, I try to think about what, if any, uniting themes may be found among the pages, and (in case you haven't been able to guess yet) balance resonates loud and clear in this June 2011 edition. Our cover feature – “Social Studies” – takes a look at social media tools and how various architects are utilizing them within the profession. For some of you less familiar with what is available online, I hope you find this article a useful place to start. But even if you are already an active participant in the digital world, I hope you will find some new ideas or perspective in how one can use the tools to their advantage. For all of our readers, though, I think you might agree that finding your comfort zone, finding that *balance* is key.

Additionally, as we roll out this issue, AIA Pittsburgh is undergoing the task of redesigning its website, and defining what that new site will be. There have been many discussions regarding how the site will best function, how to ensure that it meets the needs of users, and how it will be a destination that viewers seek out. There has also been much thought put into the future of *Columns*. The world is quickly going digital, with many newspapers and media outlets taking their resources away from print and onto the screen. As this new website is developed, we will be exploring how *Columns* might transition to an online publication. Again, we seek to find the balance that will allow the magazine to thrive as the best possible publication that it can be. Stay tuned for what promises to be an exciting second half of 2011! 



A RESPONSE TO DESIGN

BY ANNE J. SWAGER, HON. AIA

Fifteen years ago, I wrote a column for this magazine about my experience of being at Children’s Hospital with a very sick baby. My youngest child, Ellen, came down with a life threatening virus at 10 days of age. She had to be rushed to Children’s after she stopped breathing one evening. That began a three week stay for me which in the end really brought home the power of design.

Initially, Ellen spent a week in intensive care. Those days were the most terrifying as the doctors sorted through the possibilities of what might be wrong with her and warned us that she might not live. We spent every minute that we were allowed by her side and slept in a windowless room with bunk beds, no chairs, and only an overhead light. Grim does not even begin to describe it. When you were not by your child’s bed or trying to sleep, you got to sit in a large “special” waiting room with plastic furniture lit by fluorescent lights and rounded off by lingering cooking smells from meals cobbled together on hot plates. Unable to bear the assault on my senses, I often wandered the halls looking at the art, which was often quite wonderful.

Ellen is now 15 and very much a teenager, with many friends and lots of loud music. The virus left her with brain damage that manifests itself in physical problems. She has had five surgeries to help her walk and talk more normally and each time we have stayed with her in her hospital room, sleeping on pullout chairs.

This March, Ellen had another orthopedic procedure on both feet. Once again, I prepared to “camp out” at Children’s. I started in the surgery waiting room where I settled near a window on a fabric covered chair for the 3-hour wait. For the three days Ellen spent at the new hospital, her



room had a big window overlooking Bloomfield. Realistically, she didn’t seem to notice it but I did. I slept on a couch with a fold down cushion and I actually slept. The bed was very comfortable and the nurses used cell phones to communicate so we were spared the blaring PA system. Lighting was recessed and targeted so when the nurse came in to see Ellen I would know she was there but never fully awoke. Best of all was how responsive the nurses were. When called they came very quickly, leaving us to wonder if Children’s had tripled the staff.

I was fascinated by the Evidence Based Design seminar at Build Pittsburgh in April. John Schrott, AIA spoke mostly of his firm’s work at St. Clair Hospital but I was able to see that our experience at Children’s with the shortened hospital stay and the rapid transition Ellen made away from intravenous pain meds to oral ones was in large part a response to the design. What would not have occurred to me was that the attentive nursing care we received was more a factor of the redesign and placement of the nursing stations and less the addition of more nursing staff.

Taking care of your child in the hospital is never something any of us want to do. But if you have to do so, Children’s is the place you want to be. Careful thought was given to how families have to “live” in the space and it shows. Children’s used to have a slick branding strategy that went something like *we don’t just treat the child we treat the whole family*. While I am sure the staff tried to do so, their efforts could not overcome the drawbacks of the old hospital. But now, thanks to their architects they could dust off this slogan and recycle it because it really rings true. **C**