

## On accepting Master Architect

March 27, 2010

### Robert Ivy to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Alpha Rho Chi National Convention

Thank you. This wonderful title of Master Architect came as an unexpected gift to me. In thinking about the honor, several words come to mind:

**Humbling** It is humbling to represent you

**Overwhelming** It is overwhelming to think of the list of my predecessors, including Dr. Nathan Ricker, Cass Gilbert, John Wellborn Root, Eliel Saarinen, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Richard Buckminster Fuller, and I.M. Pei.

**Moving** How moving to be one of only eight people to hold this title.

**Rewarding** It is especially rewarding to allow me to spend time with all of you.

So I reiterate my thanks to the leadership (including Vicki, Chooch, Steve, Erin, and Scott); to the students and alumni here and especially to the representative delegates who voted me this honor. I will try to live up to this trust.

Clearly, I am Not I.M. Pei. Yes, I was a good student of architecture and hope that I was a good architect, with projects and an office that I am still proud of. But I was never a design star like Mr. Pei and others have been.

Instead, I believe you chose me for sharing the value of design, with our professional community and with the larger world. You have heard me state that design has the power to change the world, and I believe it.

Obviously, design cannot do everything. It lacks the immediate weight of Healthcare. But it is important to state clearly and unequivocally, design matters.

The world needs the skills of all of you, and of all designers—including architects, landscape architects, interior designers, planners—now more than ever. Demographics demand it. Think about the population of the United States, where 450 million persons will inhabit this country by 2050, an increase of almost 150 million persons. Consider China, witnessing the largest mass migration in human history, in which 250 million people are moving from countryside to city. All have to be housed and educated.

The work of designers will make an immense difference. Our buildings have the power to change our world for the better, enhancing productivity, making people healthier, even happier. In the process, we must build sustainably and sensibly, creating not just buildings, but whole cities that shelter our bodies and feed our souls, that will let us work and play, even give us hope. The changes that we can see around us, in such places as the Richmond waterfront, where a network of recreational trails now occupies land that used to house a gritty industrial center, bear witness to the power of design to change cities.

All is not new building. We require a knowledge and sense of preservation, not for its own sake, but to retain the memory of the past, and for

sustainability. What, after all, is more sustainable than retrofitting a structure that is already in place and requires a minimum amount of new materials?

We need improved building types, including a new generation of better schools, places that don't just house children and young people, but enhance their abilities to grow, places that are light-filled, places to stretch.

For the last decade we have been through a period of technological innovation, and that needs to continue. Projects that are more efficient will help us all at a time that utility costs are rising and energy use needs to stabilize. At the same time, we need new ways of organizing the processes of design and construction, with designers integrating teams of talented professionals. Clients and project users should be part of the mix.

As global warming has accelerated, it is clear that we need better preparedness for natural disasters. Haiti alone will occupy our talent and resources, perhaps throughout our lifetimes. New Orleans remains far from solved. Unfortunately, other natural events lie waiting and unforeseen.

Although we have spent years focusing on a few, talented architects, in the future we need a greater concern for the total community. Designers will need abilities in reaching out to social groups, including the users of projects, and they will need to watch and listen effectively.

And finally, we need a sense of beauty, in public spaces and places, to elevate and enrich the human experience. We need places that can inspire us to become our better selves. Design can point the way.

Be assured, what you do matters. It literally builds the world. The very room we occupy was planned by professionals, as was every major building, on any major street in this community. All, all, were planned or built by us. We need to be able to share that vital story of the power of design with the larger world.

In this organization, you are learning valuable skills in communication and leadership that will help to achieve these goals. Like me, you should see that there are various paths to follow, not just the traditional roles we have esteemed. There are only one or two people born in any given generation like I.M. Pei. Instead, there are many more born like you and me, and we all have important work to do, whether designer, specifier, planner, writer, facility manager, teacher, or client.

It is in that spirit that I accept the designation as Master Architect: Know that design matters.

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