

THE ARCHITECTURE OF EXPERIENCE



KEVIN MOQUIN ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPACE AND MOOD

“Architects compose entry, living, dining, and sleeping spaces over and over again to create a home. What is it that makes this recurring combination unique every time? The answer lies in how architects shape a curated experience to the specific needs of an individual client,” says Kevin Moquin, who has an eponymous architecture firm in Portland. *MH+D* asks Moquin to tell us more.

Q. How does architecture affect one’s well-being?

A. Only part of the task of designing a home involves arranging elements that are measurable. Is there enough square feet for this living room, enough headroom for this stair, enough glass for this view? Architecture considers these elements when discussing functionality, but there is another layer of thought that goes into how design decisions make us feel and also how we react to them on a subconscious level. Our perception of a space extends beyond its calculated boundaries. Our bodies and senses react to the spaces around us in ways that are indifferent to the tape measure and calculator. Either by intention or by accident, design has a subconscious affect on our mood, disposition, and comfort.

Q. What about one’s perception of time?

A. Buildings can call to our attention the course of a year, the arc of the sun, and the passage of a day. I can arrange a bedroom so clients can wake with the sun if they are early risers, or be shielded from it if they prefer to sleep in. This offers a connection to unmechanized time, displayed not as the hands of a clock or the digits on a screen, but by the visible passage of changing light and shadow in our room. That relationship with a time frame beyond the current moment offers a comfort to the rigors of daily life. The materials architects choose to build with can also tell a story about the longer passage of time. Weathering shingles proudly display the effect of years, while clapboards painted to defy the elements hint at timelessness. The patina on a brass doorknob from the touch of a hand over the years and a worn layer of paint on a floor that exposes the former color beneath it are both enriching ways to experience time’s passage.



Q. What other subconscious aspects are influenced by architecture?

A. Windows that provide a view out to the landscape, and outdoor living spaces, which connect us to green surroundings, satisfy a deep-rooted desire to be connected to the natural world. Moving water or swaying branches passively engage our attention but do not demand it. Natural environments are calming and provide an opportunity to replenish our mental resources. Your home can actively contribute to your restfulness. The shapes we use in our spaces impact us subconsciously. Forms can be aggressive and push us away, or they can be receptive and draw us in. A hallway that is too narrow will make you want to pass through it quickly, while an alcove or window seat can be a welcoming eddy that offers the opportunity to pause. We feel less vulnerable if our bed is located in a protected space.

Q. Can you give us an example of how this comes into play in your current work?

A. These considerations of the subconscious are applicable beyond any notion of style. My own work is stylistically broad. I work in the manner that best fits my client’s tastes and lifestyle, making design decisions with the consideration of possible subconscious experiences. In a current project for a small island cottage, I designed a bathhouse a few steps away from the main cottage. There is a roof that provides shelter so the client won’t get drenched in the rain. This exterior passage could be seen as an inconvenience, but it is truly an experience that connects you to where you are in the world at that unique moment in time. You have the sounds and movement of the breeze in the trees, the smells of the sea, and the stars at night. It is an opportunity to draw the client’s attention back to the things that are unique to that specific place, which initially sparked the desire to create a piece of architecture there. **MH+D**