



Building Blocks

What architecture can teach us about advertising

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In advertising we obsess about this thing called Great Creative, which I define as work so fresh and surprising, so perfectly executed, it elicits an audible gasp or spontaneous applause.

It's what we all aspire to.

For inspiration, we often look to Cannes or Communication Arts. But I suggest we also look at architecture.

Like advertising, architecture is an applied art. It can be admired for its pure aesthetic, but it also must function in a practical way. Great Creative, in architecture as well as advertising, has to work on both those levels, while astonishing us at the same time.

The other day, I was chatting with a colleague, Peggy DeCoursey, about one of her favorite buildings: Greene and Greene's Gamble House in Pasadena, Calif. In a thoughtful e-mail, she wrote: "All those merits that make the house a wonder are traits any ad campaign needs: vision, vigor, discipline and determination. The house is well thought-out and harmonious. It's strong, it has endured and still does its job. It

offers great value—costly up front but not in the long run. It stands out, sets styles (not just imitations but adaptations of its ideas and means). It challenges the rules and changes the conversation."

I love that last part especially.

Think of any great work of architecture, and you'll find lessons that apply to advertising.

Consider, for example, the Beverly Hills Civic Center, designed by Charles Moore and completed in 1990. It's a library, firehouse and police station tucked in around the Spanish baroque tower of the original 1931 city hall. In addition to the buildings, there's a maze of stairways, colonnades and cut-out arches amid camellias, palms and vines. Mainly sandy beige, the spaces glitter with brightly colored checkerboard tiles and shimmering pools.

The finished design is quite different from the original, "as boarded" version. Eight different mayors made constant changes to Moore's designs. But the result is still dazzling.

Which teaches us: If the original vision is simple, big and clear

enough, an idea can retain its integrity. Little changes can't sidetrack a Big Idea.

These delightful public spaces are places people want to be. Charles Moore always felt it was important to "make buildings in which people feel they belong." It's a good goal for us as well. To create campaigns where people feel they belong—advertiser and audience alike.

Moore urged architects to "do everything we can to increase the human energy put into our works, so those works can repay it. Collect as much energy as we can, starting with our own care and then trying to include the energies of the site, and of the local history, as well as the spirit of the inhabitants, their dreams and images and ambitions and care." Sounds like the best kind of market research and client contact. Really listening. Really caring.

Finally, Moore said, we should add "our own energies and care and love, and even joy, if we have it in us."

Joy. Yes, joy. Let's build that into our work. It can be Creative. And it can be Great. ■

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