Hands: A Users Guide

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The design process itself is slow. With each new project brings a new client, context, and opportunities. We begin with large gestures that we build off of, but often we have to deconstruct what we have to continue moving forward. It’s also not just about this constructive/destructive process, but also jumps between conceptual and pragmatic. Design, as I’m sure we have all heard at one point, is not linear. It’s a system of tangents, perpendiculars, and parallels that we constantly traverse in search of our goal. We may gain experience from previous projects, but there are always new twists and turns to be maneuvered throughout a project.

Computers have tried to speed up the design process. With the process moving along quicker, clients are expecting more work and sooner. Even though programs can help you design buildings quicker and with accuracy, it all depends on the computer skills you have. Like drawing, it takes time and practice to become fluent in any program. Sometimes you have to tune out that ticking clock, and do what you believe is best for the project. If you believe that the best way to represent the exterior is a series of drawings, get out that lead pointer and sketch away. Maybe the interior is sensitive to lighting, and the best way to show it is a quick model. You might even want to imagine your building in its potential surroundings and make a photoshopped collage. Whatever it takes, you are the designer so you will know the best way to represent your work. In the age where instant results are wanted, design needs to be accepted as one area that cannot be rushed.

Perceptions can only be formed through time and participation. Photographs may capture a single instance, but it is lacking so much more. The conversations of those passing by, a flicker of light, or even a random detail that catches your eye cannot be quantified in a single image. Buildings are more than a pretty façade that ends up on the cover of a magazine. It’s about space, the experience, and quality, but is also unique for every person. We may try to represent our ideas with computer graphics and drawings, but only once we experience the building for ourselves do we truly begin to understand our perceptions of it.

Both hand drawing and computer graphics have their advantages. I could go ahead and make a list, but that is something you need to discover on your own. It’s part of your own iterative process, learning what works, and what doesn’t. Representation is the backbone of any architecture project, but it is our process that guides our projects. Through iteration, we develop knowledge that not only expands our projects, but our views, styles, and thinking as designers. As our satchel of tools becomes filled, our own knowledge expands. As architects, our projects represent different iterations of ourselves. Process, iteration, and the tools we use, are all interlinked into how every designer thinks. What makes everyone unique, though, is how they use them.