Growing Pains

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TWO INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS THAT MADE THE CHOICE YOU COULDN’T make by leaving their architecture education behind and embarking on a completely new path.

Taylor is a 5th year Bachelor of Design student that left the Architecture program after his third year. Blake, like Taylor, left the program his third year but took a path outside of design completely and is interested in Permaculture education.
Do you feel like you misunderstood what architecture was coming in?

Taylor: I had this romantic notion of sitting at a drafting table and pulling out masterpieces. I took architecture classes in school, but it was very old-fashioned... purely functional, construction and graphing... no comprehension of what goes into a building.

Blake: When I was in 102 I knew someone in the architecture program so I got to see what was going on in the second year. It seemed experimental; it wasn’t about the finished project. The process was interesting. The way the design college handled the process, as looking through a lense... about intuitiveness. I saw architecture could cover everything.

Do you have any regrets about not knowing exactly what architecture was before coming in?

Taylor: I don’t have any regrets. I started the program not very design inclined, and shifted to think a different way. I value design thinking but don’t apply it to architecture.

Blake: After being through the program it became overpowering that you can’t be authentic... you have to consult with other people. You have to be the person that solves all the problems even though it is the job of other people. Everything you design is for the future... I wanted to see the results now. I wouldn’t say I have regrets though.

Was leaving the program based on any particular experiences?

Taylor: It took me the whole 3rd year to decide to leave. Second year went pretty well for me. I really enjoyed it... it was very experimental. 301 semester was a disaster. I had never really considered any other profession; I didn’t want to immediately drop. Even though it was a successful semester, I struggled. Having group members helped me through it. I just saw it as an obstacle at the end of the year. I had no regrets once I decided to leave; I fully understood what I was leaving. I moved to California and traveled on my year off. I saw this as a 9-month brief stop. I didn’t want to think about the things I was thinking about (architecture).

Blake: I felt like I was working as hard as I could towards nothing. Towards something unknown. The switch from experimental to computers... killed creativity. The Landscape project (301) opened up opportunities outside of architecture. I was out looking in... looking at myself in the program. I talked to my advisor during the project and she described something called “tunnel vision”. People work so hard and are around each other so much that they adopt an architect mentality where they dress, talk the same... as not authentic to who they really are.

How did you get interested in the Bachelor of Design program?

Taylor: I came back to visit one weekend in the fall, which would have been 4th year in the program. BDes (Bachelor of Design) was maybe a year old, we had one guy drop and go into that, finished early and went to the masters program. It was a way to finish school at the same time while still doing design work... and then you can take that and go to grad school. I guess what I wanted from my actual life changed, all because of architecture, but also because I didn’t want that type of job. I didn’t want a job that I would have to bring home. After the Kansas City project... the bluff I designed pretty much inhabited by homeless people, I felt guilt about building anything there. At a certain point I didn’t want to put more buildings anywhere. I wanted control, I saw myself designing off the grid housing which didn’t fit the architecture program.

What interested you about Permaculture?

Blake: It tears down the process between people. You don’t have to go through someone else to make something happen. It has an affect right away. You aren’t designing something for the “future”... you are working with your hands and seeing results right away. There are programs everywhere for natural buildings... you don’t need a traditional architecture degree. You learn to build your own home... it is small scale so you are able to be knowledgeable about everything you are doing... This way you don’t have to please everyone.

What tools do you use from the architecture program in your new field of study?

Taylor: The general way of design thinking. The biggest thing I took away was that it is implacable to things outside of architecture. Everything I learned was important. The biggest thing I loved about it was that you could design and light a room a certain way and that could have an affect on people, it could make people feel certain things. You have to understand people. If I hadn’t been in the program, I wouldn’t think the way I do today and make the decisions I made.

Blake: You can look at things with a new lense... you learn the ability to integrate things into a unified thing. I learned how to work with people, how to communicate what is in your head and inside yourself. I am blessed by all the years of architecture and the skillset I learned. I would not have found my route without going through it first. It was not a waste, all the hard work revealed opportunity.

by Ashley Schmitz