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Brave Proposals

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BRAVE PROPOSALS

A conversation with Carlos Bedoya



DATUM: I think we should start off with the question that pertains to our theme: what do you think is sexy?

Carlos Bedoya: In our office we have a lot of critiques about the fashion nowadays of immediately having renderings. Although you haven't already defined something, which could be pretty dangerous, it is a superficial way right now in society to see things (the way they are rendered). We don't have enough time nowadays to go deeply into things and we just touch the surface.

I think it's a very interesting topic. Yes, it has a lot of meaning because on the one hand it could be explaining in that (rendering) sense but maybe talking about what could be sexy. I could say that something for me which is sexy is being intelligent, smart, etc. It's a lot of things because it is a good smell, a good taste, a good feeling. I could say that all these elements are part of something that should be sexy. I mean, it could be even a relationship with a woman and a man or whatever. I think that when you fall in love, it's because you see all these qualities in one person or in one specific thing. So I think it is the same in the case of architecture: something that has all of these qualities, that are making little things into a whole, are the kind of things that turns something into sexy.

D: Could you talk about how you found your firm and how that whole process came about?

CB: It was nothing that was planned. I don't know, at least in my case. I think that since the beginning I had a goal that I wanted to find my own office, my own practice. I didn't know when, or how, or with whom. I started to work with a Mexican-based office and in this place I met my three partners. I started to work in 2002 and one of the partners, Victor, was already there.

Later, Will and Victor quit the office. They started to work with another office and do work on their own. I kept working for two or three more years. The last year I was there, Wonne (the Belgian partner) started to work at the same office as me.

We became friends and we started to do things together. In the mean time, we decided to start doing things such as competitions, small commissions, and we started to work in our different houses.

All of a sudden we decided to rent an office, because it was going to be cheap to share a space, and start to work together and share projects. So I started to work with Abel on one project or with Victor on another, and Victor started to share this project with Abel. All of a sudden we started to share all of our projects and realized we were all working together. Because although we were working in teams, suddenly everyone started to give each other their opinions and we started to work as a team. It happened very naturally. This is how we started to work as an office. It was nothing that was planned, it was something that just happened.

What I think is interesting about the firm is that we started being friends, which is a little bit different if you plan to join with somebody to make your office. There is another kind of relationship. I think in our case it was useful.

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D: You and your other three partners are all from different regions. One is from Argentina, yourself and another from Mexico, and one from Belgium. How have you seen those different countries or cultures combine into one firm?

CB: I think that it has been pretty useful; we complement each other. Instead of having problems and differences of thoughts that one way or another separate you from each other, it is the other way around. We realized that every point of view gives us

the possibility to grow and learn more about the other. Because in the end we have very different profiles and backgrounds. For instance one partner studied in Belgium and then worked in a very pragmatic firm. Everything is organized with a grid and it is very straightforward. I used to study in Mexico and then I moved to Barcelona to do my Master degree so there was a very deep study in terms of theory, because they couldn't build that much. Abel used to work a lot in the construction field. In the end, I think that the four of us together made Productora. It's not like in other cases where you know that it's pretty divided and defined by each of the roles of the people in the office. Here, in this case, I think that Productora couldn't exist without the four partners.

D: Just looking through the texts and publications that you have published, how does this aspect of design relate to your firm's overall mission? Do you have a mission to produce text or how do these writings help your work develop?

CB: I think it's a way to rethink your work. For instance, we released our first book five years ago. It was like another project for the office. It was like doing a house or a building, it was the same to design this book. We got involved completely in the content and format of the book. The book is in a very particular format because it's divided into parts. One part that is just drawings, photos, or something that expresses feeling, environment, concept, or idea. The other part of the book was talking about the projects, such as floor plans, sections, more technical information. It helped us to try to make us stop and think about what we were doing in that precise moment: what were our intentions with our architecture? What were we trying to communicate as our idea?

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It was a way to try and organize our ideas. You have to try and organize an archival of projects and see what are the differences and what are your interests. It's impossible to know what your intentions always are. You discover what they are. This helped us to understand where we were standing in that specific stage. It's a way to explain and understand yourself in order to say something.

D: How do you connect and foster relationships with artists?

CB: One way or another - to be next to other professions, careers, and backgrounds - it allows you to open up your mind and have

other information that allows you to be a better architect. I think that this is an advantage. We were always next to the art world and it allows our clients to be a part of this background. The artists were our first clients. They allow us to do the kind of architecture that we believe in. Some of our friends that are engineers and lawyers don't have as clear of an understanding about the aesthetic and brave proposals in terms of architecture. They allow us to develop what we live in.

D: What do you think is the role of the natural environment within architecture, specifically relating local context to implementation?

CB: It is essential in the design of something. Yesterday we went to the I.M. Pei museum in Des Moines and it was a beautiful museum, but it doesn't have any meaning because the relationship between the building and what is happening around it could be the context in terms of the people who are going to use it, the amount of money, or whatever. Talking about environment means talking about everything which is around the building. I think that this relationship is essential for the design of anything. We tried to, one way or another, establish a dialogue between our work and what is happening around us.

D: One last question: what is your favorite thing?

CB: I think to be a good architect you need to know how to appreciate anything. You're going to have to design all of a sudden dining rooms or know which type of environment you enjoy, even to drink a good wine and eat good food; to rest in a beautiful bed in front of a beautiful landscape. I don't have something specific, sometimes I really just love to have a good meal and be in a beautiful landscape.

Carlos Bedoya is a founding partner of Mexico City-based architecture firm Productora with the goal of producing "clear and legible projects with a clear gesture/sign"