

## Go Big or Go Home! The Future of Architecture

The AIA California Council Board of Directors is **Big**. In fact, we have the largest AIA Board in the country at 59 strong. The number is derived from proportional representation that reflects the AIA's largest component with 11,000 members. The fact that the AIACC Board meets face-to-face only three times a year made our July meeting all the more important to me as Prez. In marking a midpoint of my leadership term, I wanted each minute to count - and then some! I wanted the meeting to **resound in relevance**, to **burst with action and ideas**, and to **resonate across the entire landscape of the Architectural profession**. Yup! I wanted to **Go Big!**

The topper (for an agenda already packed with major issues) raised more than a few eyebrows when I first floated it as a notion. Let's **end the meeting with a bang** – not a whimper as folks slip out the door – **a rich exploration of the very soul of our beloved profession**, the intersections between architectural education, business, licensure, and the AIA. Let's explore the complexity of the path of Architects with its many handoffs and twists. This path begins with the earliest glimmer of interest in kids, then shifts for the self-selected few to the academy, which is followed for some by the launch of an architectural career and licensure, and toward leadership in firms, in communities, in the profession, and the AIA. Yowza! That's a lot of ground to cover and a territory filled with stories of all sorts. Connections and disconnect, both smooth sailing and friction.

**The Future of Architectural Practice.** Now, that's a **BIG** topic!

Why push the AIACC Board meeting envelope? The answer gets to the "why" of there even being an AIACC Board. While of necessity our Board spends much time "running the org," the core **WHY** that motivates us as volunteers transcends the budget, the bylaws, the 100+ programs underway. For many, we see our role as **stewards of the profession** itself. Through that lens, the question about this big conversation becomes: **if not us, then who?**

To push our Board's envelope to that lofty realm required lifting our focus, looking both up and out, connecting the dots from the present to a future we would design. To make this transcendent shift required a different approach to our meeting. Rather than simply talking among ourselves, I opened our meeting to the profession at large – "**repositioning**" us **both spiritually and physically** when we moved into a beautiful auditorium on the Woodbury Campus to join colleagues gathered (over 100 strong) for a panel discussion: "The Future of Architectural Practice." I was thrilled to see that we were joined by an additional couple of hundred on Facebook, live. The stars were aligned!

We were fortunate to have a stellar moderator in Architect and journalist, Ann Gray FAIA, joined by **Ingalil Wahlroos-Ritter AIA**, Professor and Associate Dean of Woodbury University's architectural program; **Leanna Libourel AIA**, a relative "newbie" Architect whose memories of the path from idea to college to career and licensure are fresh; **Andrea Cohen-Gehring FAIA**,

Senior Principal of the large firm the DLR Group; **Michael Lehrer FAIA**, who leads a mid-size firm; licensure expert, **Michael Armstrong**, leader of NCARB; and AIA leader and small firm principal, **Ric Abramson FAIA**. Truly, this was a stellar collection of minds and a fitting match for Going BIG!

What unfolded was truly amazing – an enlightening, soulful, passionate, and at times **poetic and inspirational tapestry** of stories, of facts, of opportunity, and of optimism! The insightful commentary was supplemented by a richly flowing background of live tweets coming from all over California, a second channel that captured particularly powerful or poignant or witty snippets. Wow! This was all I had dreamed of - **an immersive experience** that captured the diversity of people, backgrounds, perspectives, and organizations that reflected the current state of our profession.

The outlook was so positive and upbeat overall that it left me feeling brighter and lighter, while at the same time the challenges, particularly emphasized by an audience contribution from Doug Noble FAIA – were not made light of. What is particularly cool is that the entire event was captured (and has already been **savored by over 600**) on line, hopefully by people that range from kids getting an early pulse test on the notion of “Architect – moi?” to those deep in the process of academia, to those contemplating licensure’s challenges and thrills, to seasoned professionals wondering about the future of our profession in the sea of change and rapid evolution that is occurring daily all around us. To whet the appetite of those who have not dipped into this well of inspiration, a few quotes:

- @IanMerker Ann Gray FAIA compares her ethical approach to being a kosher hot dog. Brilliant
- @AmeliePhaine Being profitable today is more possible than before because of technology, but it still takes a heck of a lot of grit & endurance! (Michael Lehrer FAIA)
- @nathandea Is the licensure process still viewed as a hazing ritual? Or should we promote licensure as a celebrated process and achievement
- @IanMerker Seasoned professionals are holding outdated and negative impressions of the profession. Let go (Michael Armstrong)
- @Britt\_AIA How can firms better address the career pinch points where people leave or decide not to become licensed
- @yakyak59 "There's no such thing as an unlicensed architect - you are either an architect or you are not" – (Leanna Libourel)
- @Britt\_AIA “A lot of people respect architects, **architects** have to respect themselves, and be better communicators on what we do” (Michael Lehrer FAIA)
- @BrianARCH How do we harness our EPs to break us out of our current and dated professional model?
- @evelynmlee We are teaching a discipline that can cross disciplines
- @Markenglisharch Ingalill Wahlroos-Ritter is very optimistic about the future of the architectural profession. Never as diverse as today.
- @mdney “Architectural thinking is indeed magical thinking” (Michael Lehrer FAIA).
- @BKasdan "The tools are changing, but the paradigm of architectural practice has remained largely the same" (Michael Armstrong)
- @willwrightreads How do we expand our scope of service? How do we expand our impact?

- @AmeliePhaine What is the future of the practice of [architecture](#) ? It's not a one-time discussion... always keep asking and exploring answers!
- A license is a contract between you and the public – that you will protect them (Michael Armstrong)

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It all came together! **We went big at the AIACC July Board meeting**, and the payoff, in my humble opinion, was big! Engagement. Passion. Optimism. This is an example of the nudge theory at work - a modest change in the status quo, if aligned in the right direction can adjust the trajectory and help lead to a ripple effect that ultimately helps shape the future. I hope that these **BIG conversations continue** as part of the AIACC’s normal “operating procedure” every year, as rich multimedia events that embrace both those physically present, those live on a feed, and those who afterward are pointed toward, or perhaps stumble into, a discourse that helps them discover how incredible rewarding and meaningful our profession is.

***How cool is that?***

**Comments? Drop me a line.**

**Michael F. Malinowski AIA**