

**Preliminary Design Studies for a residence in Varnavas-Attica/Greece
Design and Text by A.C.Antoniades, AIA**

There is nothing more pleasing to me to the preliminary stages of Design. The period of the first contact with the site, to try to understand the client and his requirements, his uniqueness and peculiarities, to get into the spirit of both, the client and the land and to bring the whole into harmony with the requirements

and demands of Architecture, the design discipline that only YOU, the architect, has been trained and learned to serve. Because, society, no matter what “the market” says, it is on you, the ARCHITECT, that has bestowed the right to serve and administer architecture, to be its high priest and advocate; And it is for this reason that society has trained you historically in the most “humanistically” conceived way, offering you tools of “History”, “Art”, “Science”, “Human understanding and behavior”, “technology”, “poetry”, “music”, and everything else that put together constitute the DISCIPLINE of harmony with everything that surrounds us, humans and nature.... We have said that in so many other words and in so many other times and circumstances, in so many books and lectures; we have heard it and hear it annually in great ceremonies about architecture!

And it is at the very beginning of the Design process that the service and the eternal “love affair with ARCHITECTURE” starts. But rarely anyone tells us, rarely anyone even “mumbles” how we come to the point of startSo, let us repeat on our part, once again here, that for this start to happen we have to have THE COMMISSION, no matter how small or large that commission may be.

It is this fundamental prerequisite to architecture that is gloriously missing from the discourse, the one most often neglected and left completely out of the Design curriculum in many countries and in many places; It also seems to me, it is the most “POLITICAL” of all the parameters of architecture, and the most “society” and “socially” dependent;

Because an architect who has no knowledge or “feel” how to go about it, has no chance to ever succeed in this field and he may find it handicap in his whole life. It also seems to me, that if you study a country’s way of awarding commissions for public projects, buildings and urban designs, you can find a lot about this country’s civility, state of Democracy, openness in the administration of public works, level of corruption, and finally the state of architecture, whether it is an open and democratic, in which case it produces advances and sees each project as an opportunity for advancement, or a place where everybody copies from others and spends most of the time in working out schemes under the table, bribing or back-stubbing, in order to secure some desired commission.

No matter what the overall environment may be, the commission is usually never taught, with the exception, to my own knowledge at least, of the American Institute of Architects, which for many years addresses the issue and helps young architects acquire preliminary knowledge on that subject, rather than spending their lives to find out. A most recent advancement in this area is the American Institute of Architects concern for passing around knowledge to its young members on “how to get jobs and commissions abroad”, “how to operate in the era of Globalization”.

No matter how other nationals may react to such efforts, as the search of commissions from outsiders in your own turf sounds rather unwelcome, it is a fact that North American architects, learn how to go about the most precious prerequisite aspect of Design.

I must admit, I come from a country and a generation that was never taught anything about these subjects; that I had to learn everything about this the hard way, and to actually experience many adverse experiences; Because the love to create through architecture is so intense for the “real architect”, particularly the young and full of energy, he often offers advice and services for nothing, often finds oneself supporting the thousands of others who similarly like him believe “You can get the commission through competitions”, you could get the chance to

meet prospect “big clients” if you work for a “star” architect, often even for peanuts; And even all of the above may be true for some very few and exceptionally “lucky” , the truth of the matter is otherwise; Young seekers of commissions through these routes, help , as a rule, in the “cover up” of commissions awarded to already pre-decided persons or entities-members and sons of the “elite”, political party affiliates , media and publicity “darlings” ; This is often the case for competitions in countries where the “professional” aspects of architecture are not held to high esteem, where there is a climate emphasizing “Architecture as an Art” or as something absolutely “metaphysical” etc. a climate that disorients the young depriving them keeps them from this vital ingredient , leaving room for the “insiders” , the corrupt, the ready to “copy” and the self-promoters . Sometimes the “commission expert wolves” in underdeveloped and corrupt countries are the most highly equipped to seduce through writing and words or through political influence , “product promotion” and “ready to please” mentality. The problem is extremely acute in such countries and the really young and inexperienced architects are the losers. At this time, most young architects who learn in their schools nothing about “getting the commission” and who waste hours upon hours in design work for others, for big offices and “Know-howers”, operate like soldiers who fight the “honorable battle”, rarely pleased personally , save some “peanut” positions they may enjoy, in Universities and bureaucracy.

“Getting the commission” should and ought to be one of the key subjects to be studied and taught at universities, along with the broader course of professional practice that ought to be taught by experienced and well seasoned architects.

It is a crime to a country and to a design curriculum not to utilize its experienced retirees, an indication of corruption and furtherance of the situation; Because experienced people, who don’t want to pass their experience to the younger generations do nothing else but perpetuate the covering-up of improprieties during their professional career. Many keep their mouths shut for the benefit of a future seat in the “Academy” and the annual talk they often give to equally retired adults as themselves, the herds of cover-uppers of life-long improprieties.

And if The Universities do not undertake such courses, the local societies of Architects ought to deliver them ; I really do not believe that in this day and age most countries do not teach professional practice to their architecture graduates, and I don’t believe Architectural associations and Societies of Architects do not concern themselves with the professional aspects of architecture and the fundamentals of the “professional aspects” of the discipline; Along all this goes the idea of tolerating non-architects to call themselves architects, or to permit to some non-architects and ignorants on architecture to write about it, supposedly promoting architecture to the lay people in a “broker’s” way through the “real Estate” sections of newspapers and popular magazines. Such instances are counterproductive and harm architecture in the long run.

Given the above, I feel very lucky I was able to built the very few buildings I managed to undertake and to eventually build in my own life; And given all of the above, I’d be very happy to suggest and urge the young, at least in this country , to avoid all architectural competitions, and to work hard with their local societies of Architects to develop a framework for the awarding of public commissions, based absolutely on merit in a recyclical fashion, as it has been

done in Japan for so many years. That is, decentralize design excellence, make a list of architects that belong to each area who may want to participate in the award of public commissions, and award them the public buildings to be built on a rotating basis, making sure that a system of points, education, previous projects and continuing education and specialization get into the equation. The competitions is not the answer, especially if you have a corrupt framework in which even design professors are permitted to participate as members of competition teams .

Greece, has a long way to go in this respect.....!

The above is in the spirit of my unpublished book
“Architecture of Merit”

Notes:

Very significant references beyond the *AIA handbook of Professional Practice* and the *AIA Code of Ethics* are in the above respect the professional sections regularly featured in the Magazine *Progressive architecture* in the form of Dialogue (i.e sections MENTORS,SPEAK OUT, etc. They feature direct advice by experienced architects and legal experts to inquiring younger professionals on subjects of their current practice -i.e how to collect overdue fees, what to do with non good paying clients, how to seek clients, etc.

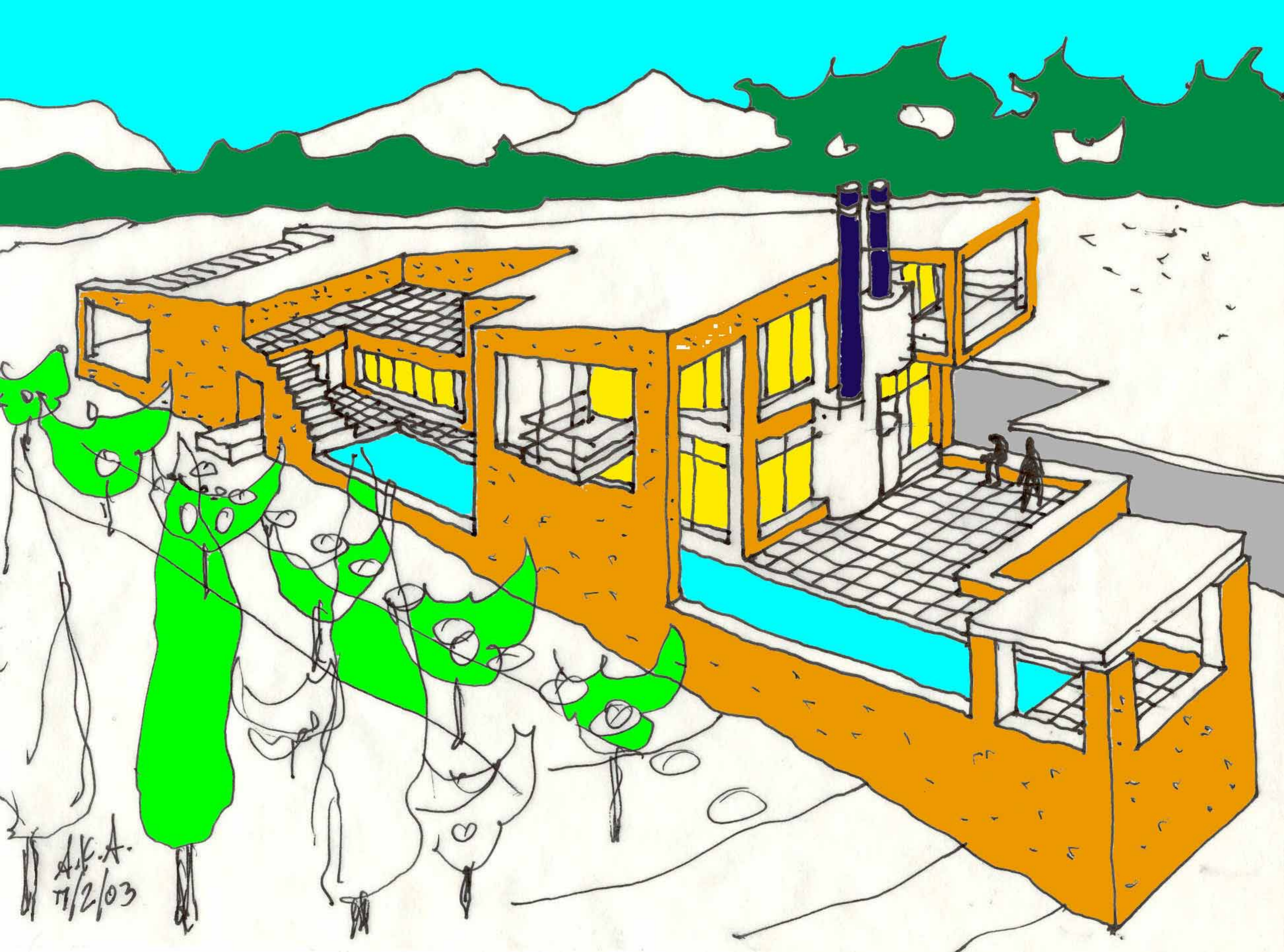
Books by architects who offer direct advice on personal experiences on how they obtained certain commissions,or on related subjects:

1.Richard Meier, “Building the Getty”, Albert A. Knopf, New York 1997

2.George Candilis “Batir La Vie”,Editions Stock, Paris 1977

and finally, a rather dated reference but extremely inspiring on the particular topic is the following:

3.William Dudley Hunt , “Total Design: Architecture of Welton Becket and Associates”, McGraw-Hill , New York 1972



A.K.A.
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