



# Ben Clarke on Design

This month, Ben Clarke contemplates the relationship between interior design and architecture...

The relationship between interior design and architecture could be interpreted as a balance of personalities that share a similar DNA structure. Each 'sibling' has different strengths and weaknesses and although they can, in some cases, battle to outdo each other, perhaps with a little 'parental control' a greater result can be achieved when both elements work together.

Following the sibling analogy, I would definitely say that architecture takes the role of older brother as it requires the benefit of many years of study and experience, whereas interior design could be seen as the younger of the pair – a little more flighty and fun but at the same time capable of achieving results through a more experimental approach.

Interior design is definitely more open to 'trends' and has the flexibility to change more rapidly. With relatively low budgets, one can transform the interior of a space in a way that would require a substantially larger commitment and undertaking to change the architecture.

To me, the mark of a successful project is when the architecture and the interior scheme work almost invisibly to enhance your experience of a space. On approaching a property or building, it will almost always be the architecture which creates a first impression. However, on leaving the same building it will be the combination of the architecture and the interior design that will affect your judgement.

I like to think of interior design as the 'humanising' of an architectural space. Take the most basic room with four walls and a door. Onto this stark background, interior elements are layered up - softening surfaces and edges, applying pattern and texture. These elements then combine with the architectural details to create the identity of the space – i.e.: romantic, modernist, gothic etc.

The relationship becomes most apparent within vast atriums or interior voids - anyone who has walked down the entrance ramp into the turbine hall at the Tate Modern in

London will testify to the inspiring scale of the architecture but even inside this great cavern your eye is drawn to the tables and chairs in the café as you subconsciously search for elements that are at your own scale.

The most successful domestic projects result from their architecture and interior design developing cohesively stage by stage, right through to the last items of furniture and accessories. This relies upon a good relationship between the architect, interior designer (and obviously the client!). They need to understand the requirements of the space and be pulling in the same direction with each decision taken.

Many of the interior layout decisions are taken by the architect during the conceptualisation of a space and there is a great history of architects who have then developed their interiors and gone on to create some of classic icons of 20th Century furniture design – Mies Van Der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Charles Eames to name but a few.

One of my favourite designers, Joe Colombo, (famed for his futuristic mid-century designs) was a successful architect who became more interested in materials and 'shaping the environment of the future'. His furniture and interiors encapsulated the optimism of the late fifties and early sixties when many new manufacturing techniques (notably the use of plastics) were changing the way interior space could be created.

It is sometimes asserted that interior design is a poor cousin to architecture and whilst I must admit that I can't think of too many interior designers who would make great architects (!) I would definitely be of the opinion that it is best to play to your strengths and know your limitations. Personally, I have been most satisfied with projects that have been the result of collaboration between many parties - often leading to unexpected opportunities or proposals.

So, despite having a difficult relationship to balance or control, architecture and interior design have the ability to combine and enhance - transforming good opportunities into great solutions.

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