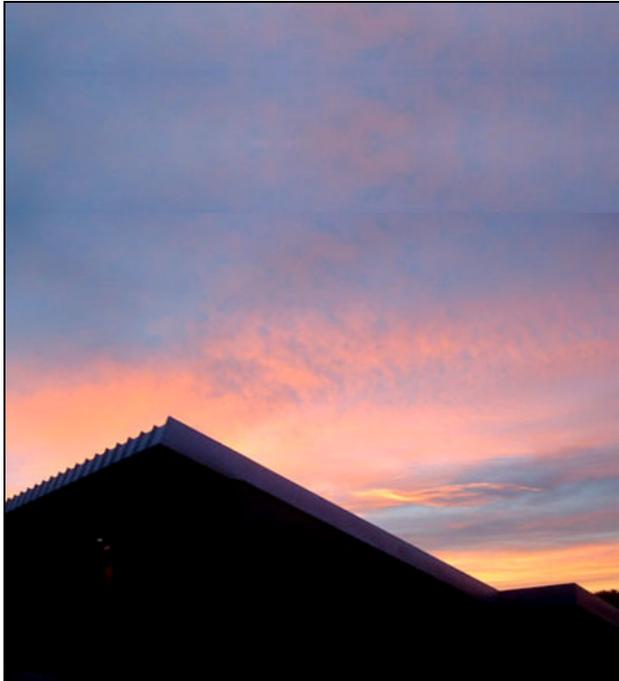


ART BUSSE

... transforming the way you feel through inspired building design



Welcome

In the pages that follow you'll see the houses I've designed and built. You'll hear what journalists, architects, poets and homeowners have to say about them. You will also find out more about me, and, through my essays on architecture, the related ideas that my building design work has inspired.

But first I have a few questions for you ...

How is it that redwood forests evoke the same sense of sanctity as do the great cathedrals of Europe? Why does the vastness of deserts make us aware of time? How is it that we feel welcome in one room, but look for the door in another?

In other words, how do the environments we inhabit, both natural and built, influence our internal landscape?

The shape and dimensions of space, the play of light through it, the colors and textures of the materials that form it, when taken together have a subtle but profound effect on how we feel, on our sense of ourselves in the world. Nowhere is this more true than in our own homes.

This understanding presents an opportunity to decode the effects of space on the human spirit, to become fluent in its language, and through inspired design, to sing the songs of that language that will bring us closer to health, wholeness, and grace.

My home designs of late have been experiments in this field, and the results have been very exciting. Check out these [projects](#) for yourself, and/or read on to find out how I developed my unique approach to building design.

...I stumbled upon an important truth about architecture through my work as a builder years ago. It all started in a back yard in Berkeley, California. I had been hired to add a small free-standing garage-like structure at the back of a two story craftsman home. It was to be used to store gardening tools. I had poured the concrete slab, erected three of the four walls and sheathed them in gypsum panels. Over head there were only the bare roof rafters, widely spaced and pointing upward toward the sky beyond.

I was working alone and stopped for lunch, taking a cross-legged seat in the middle of the concrete floor facing the end wall with my back to the opening. As I reached for my sandwich I was overtaken by a profound sense of serenity, timelessness, and well-being bordering on the religious. It was a most unusual sensation and I struggled to understand what was happening. Here's what I came up with:

Being closed in on three sides made me feel cloistered and safe, while having no wall behind kept me from feeling trapped. The walls around me were at just the right distance to reflect back my inner state to me, and so augment it. Any closer and I would have felt crowded. Any further and my sense of self and place would have dissipated. It felt very personal, as if the space was full of me and nothing else, so that by experiencing the space around me I was experiencing my own inner state.

It was noon and the light was streaming straight down from above filling the space with a bright, soft light diffused through its reflection off the irregular surfaces of the grey concrete floor and gypsum walls. The light seemed to fill up the space like vapor would and added to the feeling of floating in something beneficent. The rafters above called my attention up, and the overall effect was one of goodness falling from above, filling me up with a feeling akin to love and then raising me to a higher place as it returned skyward.

It hit me that this was what communing with God through prayer was supposed to feel like. Incredibly, my lunch break had been turned into something profound by virtue of the lucky combination of variables in the construction

of the shed. I stepped out of the space. The feeling subsided. I stepped back into the space. The feeling returned. I went and got my client and had her sit where I had sat with no explanation. She felt something very similar, and agreed to stop the project while considering my suggestion to give up on it as a tool shed and keep it as a meditation retreat.

The experience stayed with me, and I started paying closer attention to the places and spaces I found myself in, while planning to make a more serious study of the effect when the opportunity arose.

Ten years later I had my chance with a series of houses that I designed and built for resale in the Oakland and Berkeley hills. If you'd like to follow the adventure further, click on this [projects](#) link.

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