Representation Matters

By Kelia Todd

As designers we hold responsibilities as detailed viewers of the world around us. Aside from ensuring the safety of those who inhabit our spaces, the design decisions we make can have a huge impact on the people of the world through interior design.

Our profession is unique because we must consider not only the construction of the built environment but how the space impacts people and their behavior in said space. It's our responsibility to always consider the users and provide a design solution that produces the intended experience the client dreams of. This is where diversity becomes extremely important. It is difficult to design and satisfy everyone, however, it is even more difficult to design for those who have experiences and obstacles vastly different from ours especially when addressing problems that some groups of people might not identify as issues.

Being in school and working as an intern, often I get asked for my opinion on projects meant to be utilized by people in my same demographic: young college students. This is beneficial for the company because often times these projects are headed by men and women far removed from college and are aware that trends and technology change rapidly and knowing that my college experience in 2018 varies greatly from theirs'. Representation is very important, how do we expect to truly design for the people if the one's making the design decisions only represent half of the population. Additionally, clients and users are more susceptible to trust people that look like them.

Throughout this semester I have witnessed the consequences of a lack of diversity and education about people outside of one's culture and socioeconomic class. Currently, in our senior capstone project I'm challenged to identify a problem in a struggling Columbus neighborhood and create a design solution. Being the only African American student in Ohio State's class of design, I am often the one offering insight into the lives and needs of people in poverty and low-income neighborhoods and not solely because I can personally relate but because I have prioritized creating a diverse network of people around me who have shared their obstacles and life experiences with me.

In our current political climate and throughout our history, it is evident that people are hesitant to work to solve problems that do not affect them personally. We need representatives of the entire population to advocate for those who often times do not have a voice, who go unnoticed and ignored. A key principle of "good design" is designing for everyone this includes the impoverished, the transgender, minorities, the elderly communities. Employing people from varying backgrounds brings about new perspectives on life and design itself. Style and design trends vary vastly across countries and cultures and real people with real experiences can teach us a lot more than precedent images and inspiration photos.

Diversity in the design and architecture world is growing but there's always room for improvement, we can always be better for ourselves and our clients.

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