

arcCA 08.1, “90s Generation”

### “Two Generations: a Conversation”

David Erdman and Thom Mayne, FAIA

**Thom Mayne:** The [unintelligible] generation clearly includes a few people who are so unwilling to burden their project with any other stuff, tectonic, social, cultural, functional. But there will be a time when you’ve exhausted your project and only you will know. No one can advise you, and I’m certainly not going to do that.

You asked something about moving towards architecture, and the answer was quite simple. I said, “Well, why don’t you just become more architectural?” Being more architectural meant burdening yourself or obliging your work, so that it deals with more categories. Whether it be gravity, functionality, space, organization—wherever you want to go is your business. But it needs to do more. And I would have said, oh, from the ‘60s on, really . . . If architecture’s going to survive, it has to operate on multiple levels. And it gets quite complicated. It’s tectonic, it’s economic, it’s constructional. And it’s difficult to produce in our society today.

Sooner or later, as the work becomes realizable, or you’re interested in its transformation into something that develops outside of its own notion of the sculptural or the sensuous or the provocative and the effects of the thing itself, which I see more as a manifestation than as a subject.

I said, “Well, at what point is the work really not generating what you say it’s generating, having to do with some infinite set of possibilities, and when, in fact, can you be”—and it’s necessary to be brutally honest with yourself as an artist. But you in fact can anticipate . . . And Pollock still [unintelligible] such a great example, because you could claim after the first—1944, 1945—after the first time he threw paint, how many paintings later before you’ve lost the spontaneity? It could be partway through the first painting. Or it could be the fourth. It depends on how you’re—the notion of some sort of perception, [unintelligible] the actualization of something. But for sure by the twentieth, you could say it’s come full circle from theory and it’s actually the most mechanical, most predictable painting you could produce, much more so than when the artist had control [of] a brush.

The reason it’s so important, the whole notion of theory and practice, is that practice finally tests theory and it moves theory, and of course today we all understand that neither of them are the holy grail. If anything, theory is more provisional than practice. It’s not permanent. The evolution of evolution. Certainly since my generation, the change has become the subject matter. We’re not sure how to evaluate it yet.

I just turned 64. I’m using experience and I’m hunching based on certain experiences. I’m also practicing, and this isn’t an academy where we can be working on early, first-principle stuff. I have to have some notion that this trajectory is going to get me someplace within some reasonable amount of time. So, I’m going to load up this process with certain characteristics I think are going to achieve the various objectives we’re looking for. All science has done that, because all really major scientists started with huge hunches, and it was in fact their hunching, sniffing, that led them somewhere. Infinity doesn’t help you at all. You’re cutting down options somewhere. Who finds the option that finally resonates or makes some connection between a social problem, a cultural problem, and aesthetics?

Architecture is the aesthetic act as it meets the social, cultural act. And it’s that connection that finally has to happen with architecture. Unlike the plastic arts, which can be a bit more autonomous, although you can make an argument that all art has the same human connection to some broader cultural, social, political purpose that finally makes it resonate.

**David Erdman:** In your work and your peers' work, I see a clear intention to render different systems but never let any one of them be isolated autonomously. Often each is assigned a different materiality and geometry - typically one for an urban scale system, another for a system working more at the scale of the body. Those different "orders" are never allowed to totally gel or become legible. I think about your Sixth Street House and some of the ways that you were drawing in earlier projects. Where the edges are blurry due to a layering of different scales of geometry and tone. This technique of "layering" the drawing seems to be a meditation on boundaries and space where the focus is to make those boundaries or autonomous systems less legible and induce a "fullness" in the space? I suspect this intention is shared by our generations, but in different ways.

**Mayne:** But with Sixth Street, I'm moving at a vastly different speed, in terms of the development of the work. I'm working with the ten pieces within the distorted cube, and the cube is distorted again in terms of boundary, and then the boundary starts disappearing with the exterior, which is part solid, part wood. For me, I was moving from more literal, geometric connections to associations, and the associations were more psychological. Or they were more complicated in terms of the connection of the pieces, but they weren't necessarily geometrical. I was attacking the singularity of the thing, trying to deal with the fact that it is not any longer singular. It's a dissociation of vastly different things, which is making up one thing, and it led immediately to an idea that the elevations were radically different, and they dealt with the constituency or the contingency of a particular place. It was connected to an urban idea, a potential for radical difference of the things.

**Erdman:** There seems to be an assumption that working with effects is an effort to reduce multiplicity and limit design to singularities—at least implicit in discussions you and I have had and how you just described 6<sup>th</sup> Street. I wouldn't be able to say with certainty what the specific effect of a project is going to be, but I can make sure that I'm working with a number of different orders and specific qualities. The similarity between us (I would stipulate) is that there's an intentional murkiness between these orders. The difference is perhaps that they're never totally detached from one another (or layered). Maybe they're more pushed together in our generation than they were in yours because of ways of modeling and drawing?

**Mayne:** It seems, with your work, that the method *itself* is a connective tissue. So whether it's Maya or whatever tool you're using, it changes the equation of you as an inventor, you in control of that tool, and the simplicity of an Eagle pencil and then a piece of paper, and some fairly simple tools that manipulate that. And that itself has had a huge effect on your generation. There's the smoothing or the connectivity that comes out of the computational mathematics. Isn't that true, by its nature, unless you purposely start a second operation? But does that operation even have to have another tool?

**Erdman:** Well. I think this has evolved. I would say initially yes—and people like Jeff Kipnis or Peter Eisenman had a huge influence on those obsessions. However, the more recent obsessions with affect, mood and atmosphere I think require one to work with different materialities—however, these are not necessarily literal materials but can be more abstract formations. For example, the only reason I'm interested in "interaction technologies" or "luminosity" at all is there are other dimensional ecologies that work on the material stuff that I'm organizing in the space. Immaterial and material ecologies play off of one another, and they are not able to be coordinated within the same software nor in the same dimensions—some operating in four or more. Yet, they have discrete geometries and congeal in discrete formations—they engender a degree of materiality. Because they occur over time and include other dimensionalities, they are difficult to organize exclusively using Maya—they often require prototyping at full scale. You have to look at them in space and use other ways of representing them to study them.

When Greg [Lynn] and Sylvia [Lavin] and Neil [Denari] brought a lot of us out here for teaching positions, many of us (and this was certainly true inside of my practice with *servo*) had intensely focused on these almost rote demonstration type of projects—often installations. On one hand they offered a way in which we could get our hands on technologies that a small practice might not otherwise be able to get their hands on. On the other they provided a theoretical territory in which we could (as colleagues) begin to shape a discourse about technology in Los Angeles which in retrospect I believe has distinguished itself as having a separate set of interests from other technologically based discourses.

Ultimately, you find yourself becoming obsessed with, well, what does that do to a wall? What does that do to a boundary? Or how does that act on the larger mass of the space? Even if I can only work with ten percent of the space, can I get that much matter to somehow influence the rest of the container?

The fact that all of us talk maybe a little bit more than people do on the east coast, also that there's a lot of work out here and everybody's still teaching makes a difference, in terms of community participation and learning from each other's work. It pulls it together. Would you associate this type of progression with your early development among colleagues in LA?

**Mayne:** You started in a very different way. You were talking about small projects and demonstration work. When we did that it was *very* small projects, but somehow they were immediately affected by material and tectonics and their role. But it was quite conventional, almost nineteenth-century. I was looking at Diderot. There was definitely a commonality at a mechanical, material, tectonic level among the people here—Robert Mangurian, Coy [Howard] to a little less extent, Craig [Hodgetts] for sure, and Eric [Owen Moss]. It was all extremely conventional, but it was challenging the simplicity and the crudeness of the construction that takes place, and how to protect your artistic capital in this part of the world. And it also probably came—which I was maybe less aware of, though it's obvious—from the tradition of Schindler and Gregory Ain and a group of people we all rejected but who were still there somewhere rattling around in our brain. Even if I claimed that I'd never looked at them, I had. I had all those people as teachers.

It seems like your generation have started in a much more conceptual territory, and it seems to have the opposite problem, because I accepted, and still do to some extent, a generic palette of materials. I'm not really using the invention of the latest materials in my work the way, say, Rem [Koolhaas] does. I stay to a simple, generic palette, and I find my architecture spatially, organizationally, and other places. You guys: the materials haven't been invented yet to accommodate your formal language and your aspirations, the desires you have that come with the nature of that language. Which will appear, for sure, but it's in your future. Something as simple as a double curve that can operate on an architectural scale, that has the chemical, physical properties, the coefficient of expansion and the relationship of transmission of heat, and its structural capabilities, on and on.

**Erdman:** I see myself conducting research very differently from someone who's devoted to animation and rendering. I have spent a lot of time making stuff, playing with plastics, figuring out how it works, how it doesn't work, really testing. But both research areas are imagining materialities that haven't existed before.

It's not that they couldn't exist in material, but the way you drew Sixth Street is an abstract materiality that hadn't been seen before, and the logic of drawing motivates you to explore architecture. And as you get more of a handle on that technique and that technology, the less interested you are in new materials, techniques, or technologies. You're actually interested in exploring that imaginary state of experience and trying to figure out a way to make it with whatever material you need to make it.

**Mayne:** You look at Frank [Gehry]'s early work, Eric's early work—the people we just named. All of them quickly found materials and weren't challenging that palette. The aspirations of the work were doable within the existing typology of materials.

One of the things that seems so interesting in your generation, starting with Greg [Lynn], is the fact that your ideas precede reality, in terms of material production. You can see it especially in, say, in Greg's early work, the Presbyterian church. The materials were not allowing him to even come close to the aspirations of his drawings. And he had to make huge compromises to accommodate the vicissitudes of reality economically and within functional terms, but clearly within material terms.

**Erdman:** Neil's interesting this way. His stuff comes very much from looking at a lot of graphic design and digital influences that add color and certain techniques of form-making. The material palette is neither here nor there. Whatever he can find to work with that, it's really about developing a language that came out of something which hadn't been materialized yet, but didn't require a new material to find itself, either.

**Mayne:** Neil comes with a certain groundedness in his life experience, which affects his work. Which is quite different from a lot of you who, let's say, put larger demands on the conceptual part of your work, that aren't in any way burdened with those types of realities or even the potential of those realities—who are comfortable pursuing the work without getting entangled with those limitations. Again, that's going to limit the type of work: installation versus small-scale versus large-scale project. But it probably should. Something important about being 30 years old, 30 to 40 years old, your job description is establishing your intellectual, conceptual, artistic priorities. You're developing your project within those terms. And that's your job.

**Erdman:** Did you feel that way yourself?

**Mayne:** Absolutely. In your 20s, you're a kid still and you're just you're trying to establish what the project is. In your 30s, it's still very possible that your practice is not primary, which makes sense pragmatically, because nothing important is going to happen—in this country, especially—until you're 50 anyway, or 45, if you get lucky. But the commissions will be farther apart—I'm talking about doing architecture, not making a business—and they're going to be smaller scale and what people trust you with in terms of investment. And your job is to do your research.

In your 40s, you're in transition. You're emotionally more frustrated. You're probably exhausting those ideas that are operating only on paper. And you should be ready—in terms of your energy level, your accomplishments, where you are in your artistic, intellectual project, in your research—to start testing. (We're just generalizing, because the important thing for an architect is to operate at your own pace.)

Teaching's probably becoming quite different in terms of the kind of questions you ask. It's probably not as much first-principle; it's now much more articulating broader problems, in sync with where you are in your work life, and probably becoming a bit more pragmatic because of that, and they're becoming more synthesized, typological projects that are paralleling, possibly, your practice, but they're much less investigations into broad theories that don't even relate to building.

And, in your 60s hopefully you're utilizing your thirty years of research, and your translation of that into smaller and then medium-sized projects, and you get to make a few things that are serious, of some scale and some cultural value.

And it seemed like it's impossible to get out of that when you're young, to win a major competition at 35—which can be, by the way, a horrible thing. It can end your career. It's happened. As many times as it's made careers, it's ended careers, because you're not ready. The Koreans talk about making opportunity, and when you get an opportunity, you have to be prepared to utilize that opportunity. You had to have gone through these stages in some fashion to be able to utilize it.

**Erdman:** What's fascinating about the evolution you outlined is that in L.A. there's a legacy of people going through it fully, whereas on the east coast it seems like there are very few who fully make it through that cycle.

**Mayne:** I was very lucky to be here in the '70s and the '80s, and there was a huge amount going on. There was a critical mass and it seemed to be diverse enough, and there was a kind of a brutal honesty among a lot of the characters. New York—I've been a transplant there my whole life, because of the architectural scene—living there now, I'm starting to realize it's a centralized city, power-wise, and commodity capital is so powerful that it's extremely difficult, especially for architects. Young architects just get consumed by it. It's the city of Warhol, and it just swallows you up.

But L.A., for whatever reason, is still an institutionalized anarchism. It's an oxymoron, but it allows for a certain creativity and freedom and autonomy. If there were any two things powerful in my development and in my generation, they were seeing architecture as an autonomous activity and that autonomy as connected to resistance. Not the resistance and autonomy of modernists in the manifesto. A much more calculated, much more personal, private, diminished objective. But still absolutely connected to resistance. For me it's still incredibly important, the political nature of architecture, and it's part of my practice and my person. I would have said it's a little different in your generation.

**Erdman:** To be blunt, it's a big difference. There's a kind of apolitical posture . . .

**Mayne:** And with that goes away the resistance. There's nothing to resist. I think that's going to change. Every generation and every person develops at their own rate, and part of that development isn't psychological or personal. It has to do with the general environment, and maybe in some simple way it has to do with what's going on right now with the current political scene, with Obama, that he seems to be bringing in large numbers of young people who go up to your age, the 20 and 30s who, if they haven't been disgusted by government, find it totally irrelevant. And he seems to be galvanizing a whole new group of people who find him compelling.

But then I have to say, the thing that's changed me the most when I hit, say, 50, I was with Richard Weinstein and we were just walking and talking and looking at this and that, and he turned around and he said, "Thom, you've finally done it. You've connected the social act and the aesthetic act." For him, that's the definition of architecture. And it was for me, too. And it was the most—I felt it was like the first building I had ever done, the first time I'd actually affected society. I did something that could shape behavior, that in some small way . . . Forget the modernist—I'm not talking about it in those terms, that architecture's going to change the world. We've been there. But, in fact, in some way it can change somebody's life. So four students can write me and say, "I went to architecture school because I looked at your building," and it just makes me complete. It makes my existence worthwhile. Because otherwise, what the hell am I doing? Cake decorating or something. And there's nothing wrong with being a cake decorator. That's just not what I want to do in my life.

I'm curious, with your group that goes all the way up to somewhere in the middle 40s. Because, for me, one of the things that's still difficult is moving from rebel to authority; it's a killer, worst thing that ever happened to me. Horrible.

**Erdman:** Establishment instead of change?

**Mayne:** Oh, horrible, horrible. I still want to be the rebel. And I still want to poke at people and criticize. And finally, at 55 and then 60 and now 64, I'm stuck. As you do more work, you have your own things to talk about, and you become the subject of critique. And that, I guess, has to happen, and it's important that it's actually a proof of your ability to progress. That's a natural evolution.

Tomorrow somebody comes up and gives you a certain type of project, and by coincidence it's a library or a school, versus a commercial office building. And you don't say no. Your life changes automatically, just instantly your behavior is changed, the nature of the type of subject matters in front of you. For architects, different from most professions, there's a huge amount of serendipity involved in your development, which you have no control over. It's been very frustrating to me at times, because I'm a person who would like to have control over my own destiny. Many people can do that in their professions. They can make decisions that move them x, y, and z.

In architecture, you're waiting for the bloody phone to ring. You do your work, and it gets disseminated and published, and that certainly has, in our profession, a huge amount to do with potential opportunities.

But still, we live in a culture that can also hurt you. The reality has very little to do with the academic. In fact, as you get older, you actually have to shroud it, because people aren't looking for intelligence. Look at our political leaders.

Anyway, there's a huge amount of serendipity. Something takes place that will completely change the types of responses necessary by you as an architect to resolve the problem. At that point you're going to have to say, "No, I'm not ready. These aren't my interests, so to move from this project to that project is actually going to harm me, because the distance is too great, and I need some sort of a ramping up to maintain who I am"—"who I am" meaning the culmination of your own research and whether there's a critical mass that can deal with x, y, or z problem.

Because as I look at the young generation, at certain people, I'm curious. All of a sudden, it's a three million-square-foot complex in Abu Dhabi and I go, "Hmm."

**Erdman:** Do they have the capacity?

**Mayne:** You can control your own pace. Not only do you have the design tools capable of solving that kind of problem? But are your processes in synchronization with the type of task you're being asked to do? And beyond that, do you have an organizational structure? Do you have the logistical part? Do you know how to talk to a client? Can you put together a large team of consultants [for] complicated projects?

I look back now and I have a little different attitude. At 45, I was so pissed off I could barely talk to anybody, because I was ready to do that work. And now I look back and say, "Actually, really, I wasn't quite ready to do what I thought I was ready to do." I was thinking about it in design terms, and maybe that was correct. But I wasn't thinking about the complexity it takes to accomplish a project on a certain scale, which takes an organization that you've built up so that it's not you anymore, it's your culture. And your culture might be five people or twelve people or a hundred people. But in fact, you nurtured it. It's not only you as a designer, a thinker, a researcher. It's you as a thought leader. That you in fact can organize and lead a group of people within broad intellectual, conceptual terms. And that you have the authority to do that, and you have the strength and the talent to bring people together and multiply your ability to deal with complex problems.

You're in an interesting cycle that way, because you're beginning projects that take a couple people or five people or something. And that keeps growing, and you get older, and it's fascinating. I'm working on this project in Paris right now, and I'm working with a group of people that are taking big pieces of it, and I'm watching what they can grab, and then I went over and did a kind of a charette. We had to make a huge amount of changes.

And I came back and—I don't mean to be bragging—I came back and I was really proud of myself, because I got a lot done in five days, and I was able to solve a huge amount of stuff, I can get my arms around a vast project that has thousands of variables, and I was joking with my wife, "Damn, I actually learned some shit all this time."

It comes over a long period of time. At forty you're starting to be able to deal with more and more complex problems. You can even make them complex, like I did: you take small projects and make them overly complex. I was pummeled for that: "Mayne over-articulates, and he should have bigger projects." And I always agreed with them. You're correct.

And now I talk to people who say, "Oh, you finally got projects you can use . . ."

**Erdman:** That are the right scale.

**Mayne:** . . . and I say, "You're completely correct. I just wish I'd had them earlier. What can I tell you?" But I always thought it was odd criticism, that it is over-articulated, which I don't agree with, by the way. Is an amoeba more interesting than a prickly porcupine or a physically more articulated thing, versus a simple thing? It's a ridiculous argument. They have different qualities, and what do those qualities mean? Why is a more articulated thing more or less interesting than a simple thing? Why are they even set against each other?

**Erdman:** That's beaux arts appropriateness of scale rearing its head. "You can only do so many moves at a certain scale or it becomes too much," whereas clearly you and Wolf and Eric . . . you guys very much have influenced our generation. It's got to have a lot. It should be full.

**Mayne:** That's funny, because it works back and forth. Because I look at your generation, and think about smoothing. The word smoothing didn't come out of my generation. I appropriated it. And I looked at it and went, "Huh. Maybe it's time . . ." 1989, '90. Mike and I were splitting up, and we were having differences in terms of approach, clearly, and I was ready to dump the articulation of pieces that are all documented by material language. It became clear to me that, as we got larger work, the strategy was dead-ended. It was handmade, nineteenth-century. The stuff that was loaded with craft was both retrograde intellectually and it was not strategically possible on a larger-scale project. So I had to make a change.

I'm a person for whom there's no single influence. I was educated in the '60s, and it was during the political shift taking place. Modernism was on its third generation, and postmodernism was just about to begin. I didn't really get a normal education, in terms of any historical stuff or any of the modernists, other than the people that were around, which I didn't understand or didn't connect to.

And then when I came out of school, I started planning, and then I started teaching and went back into architecture with my first partner, Jim Stafford, who came out of USC earlier and had the more classical education. He opened me up—believe it or not, I had no education on Mies van der Rohe, [Kahn], and

Corbusier. I went out and bought the *Ouvres Completes* one at a time, and I just pored through. I started working on the façade drawings and started training myself in architecture within those terms.

But the connections were absolutely random. Archigram was teaching at UCLA, and I got interested in them while I was still in school . . . And then Sterling—that became a love affair just by instinct, and I went to London to look at his three, Leicester, Cambridge, Oxford. Anyway, I have these huge numbers of influences, and I don't come out of a school.

I don't know about you. I just point at literally hundreds of characters that still mean something to me, that I can actually make connections to. And so if it's Kurokawa's capsule housing, I know exactly where that's located. I was talking to a kid at a jury a year ago and I mentioned Kurokawa and his capsule housing. The guy never heard of it. We talked about Erskine and Byker Housing, which is about a certain kind of randomness and building in contingency. The notion of the contingent as it finds its way . . . with Sterling, it was Corbusier, and he was moving Corbu in a different way. With Corbu, as opposed Kahn, 80 percent of the idea was conceptualized, and then there were these freestanding pieces, and he was somewhere between always, because he was much more complicated. He had no problem, unlike a Miesian character, of starting to move things around, and the columns in fact don't finally have to be in a grid.

**Erdman:** But this is why I would say that Corb is better than Gropius, in terms of his ideas about transparency, because they're more perceptual, they're driven through an opaque architecture, they allow for perceptual alignments but actual misalignments . . .

**Mayne:** But it's also a beginning critique of the rules, the theories.

**Erdman:** Yeah. Whereas Gropius, you've got to see it.

**Mayne:** They're not the Holy Grail. They represent a broad organizational, interpretive territory, within which one can now operate. Because Corbusier that way was fabulous, whereas Mies was absolutely Calvinist, which Meier became. A grid is a grid, and it's impossible to violate that rule, which is intellectually a completely ridiculous idea today, in broader terms, anyway. Anyway, there was a complete breakdown a singularity. I don't come from anywhere. Funny, after the '60s it never changed. There are no singular characters.

**Erdman:** Well, there was a lot of gravity in New York, but I also worked for Stanley Saitowitz. And that was a really different set of influences from what I had at Ohio State or at Columbia. But Stanley was the person who gave me my proper training and taught me how to draw. I worked there for two and a half years and basically drew one house for two and a half years. I worked a little bit on Richard Barnes's house, but Byron Meyer's house, the big curved one that goes between the hill and the valley, I drew that for two years with him.

**Mayne:** Wow. He's an interesting guy that hasn't even nearly reached his potential.

**Erdman:** Well, he's getting there. He's starting to get some bigger projects out there now.

**Mayne:** Good. Tough city to practice in. They all left, one by one. Mark [Mack] comes down and then Holl left early, and . . .

**Erdman:** Among my generation, there's a perception that '68 had a political clarity and singularity, driven through Tafuri, through the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, which definitely was a

shared value system among your generation, even though you might have all been coming from wherever. That moment pulled a whole lot together.

At least for those of us that are here—but I would say for a lot of the teachers on the coasts right now, Columbia did a lot. Columbia in the mid-'90s—about discourse, more intellectually formed trajectories that were very powerful through a very limited set of journals, which were the only things we could get our hands on.

*Progressive Architecture* was dying, *Record* was going through this weird gestation period, and we never had *Oppositions*. *Assemblage* and then the *Zone* books that Sanford Quinter and Jonathan Curry put together, were our ability to engage the world. And that was a lot of theoretical territory. I didn't understand all of the misalignments or alignments within that, but that's what influenced a lot of our obsessions as we got out of school.

**Mayne:** Clearly, there was quite a difference between the west and the east coasts, in that the west coast, for whatever reason—is it pragmatism, maybe?—was more practice-based than the east coast. On the east coast, Peter [Eisenman] was more dominant within the intellectual discourse, and the work was much more secondary, because that's not that interesting to Peter. Here it was practice-based.

Peter's not a person who's actually interested in the work. I've always thought he needed an architect. Because he doesn't have an interest in that. The manifestation of the work doesn't preoccupy him. And here, I think, all of the people were preoccupied with the work. The work was the research. My focus is on the work itself. It always has been. There was quite a difference between the two, which you can still see in some of you.

**Erdman:** Because we're totally obsessed with it. You know, in fact, we're criticized for being too concerned about the work. This is where our value system is a bit inverted from yours. What starts to set up our fears or our risk aversion to taking on a school that we get tomorrow and trying to figure out how to do that, is that the work may deviate too much, that we haven't sorted out what we're doing clearly enough yet to really be able to act on it.

Whereas I think on the west coast, the work has never been treated that preciously. As opposed to Eisenman, who's judged on the Wexner Center, his first big project, and everything that he's been thinking about for 25 years has to be reflected in one building, on the west coast—and I think for those of us who came out here to teach, this is partly why we came out here—it's about cycles. You're going to have some bad stuff in there, but you've just got to work your way through it.

**Mayne:** That's really important. The young generation's very ambitious, and I talk to a lot of people about doing work that—don't worry about publication. Forget it. You don't want to be published. What you want to be able to do is experiment on work privately. What you need is autonomy and anonymity. If you can't experiment and make mistakes, you're never going to go anywhere.

And to make mistakes—by its nature, you don't want to make them public, or you want the mistakes to be good mistakes. You don't want to get published necessarily. You make the decision when you're done with the project. And what you need to do is more work, and start accelerating the possibilities of testing your ideas within real time, real space. And so you build the piece, you look at the piece. You're able to walk over with people, you're able to assess it, and it's going to change you. The next time you do something, there's a list of stuff. It's only very major shifts that are going to be broad, strategic, methodological, intellectual, or tampering in an evolutionary way, whatever it is, and others will be much more pragmatic. You're broadening your project again, and you're expanding the kind of issues that you

want to deal with. And you do another one, and immediately you see the result of that critique, that self-critique. And so on. Every once in a while something happens that's unexpected, when you've actually gone beyond something you're not even aware of. Positive or negative will be irrelevant, because either way it's going to be extremely useful to you. "I just discovered something here." It's that incremental, evolutionary process developing you as an architect. And it's not always important people see it. That's your choice.

**Erdman:** That's very interesting, because that's certainly true, that idea of autonomy . . .

**Mayne:** Also anonymity.

**Erdman:** And anonymity. Even more important.

**Mayne:** You don't want to be a star. You don't want to have to have all this on this line. I don't think anybody does their best work under that kind of pressure. You can't attempt to make your best product. Stuff happens. "This is the one I want to be my best project" doesn't mean it's going to be my best. Maybe yes, maybe no. The chances are it's no. And finally, you want to just let it go. You do your work, and it's going to be what it's going to be, and you want all of them to be the best, and that's as simple as that. You put the energy into it, but you don't want to put yourself under that pressure. It's just get some work.

Besides the fact that the little projects are going to finally add up to a huge amount of knowledge that will make that more successful. You don't want it to be your first one. You don't want it to be the first time you've looked at the way a curtain wall attaches . . . A million things, what the hell you do with all the shit that goes into building? So what do I do with the hatches to get to equipment, the fire lighting, on and on . . . It's just a ton of stuff. And people say, "Not a professional job. This guy needs some help." You don't want that. Or you won't even know who the hell you need to bring in to do that stuff that you don't want to do or you don't know how to do. And now you're on the line. You're well known, you're being looked at, and you're being super scrutinized. You want some practice runs. Because you're going to learn it a piece at a time.

There's the trajectory of the real work, and then there're the things that are taking away from the work, that just appear, a huge amount of contingency at every level. Part of becoming an architect is learning to deal with damage control as things get realized. They go from an idea to a realization, and all of these things that show up that you're not at all concerned about, that have to be dealt with, that are going to erode the broad idea of the project, because you don't want someone meditating on a sprinkler head. You're taking somebody someplace, especially if you're interested in sensory environments; then nothing shows up that's not a part of that magic. Anything pragmatic completely disappears.

Meaning you were the one who invented the sprinkler head that's flush, that drops down, or the fire light that's flush that drops down because you don't want to see the fucking fire light and a battery. You've done it before, you've made the mistake where you got the bloody exit sign and you couldn't argue the exit sign away, or any of these things that had completely destroyed your product, because you can't have a fucking exit sign in front of the place. You can experiment. You can do that stuff.