

A Return to the Core of Life and Self: Realize Your Potential with Good Designs

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Devising a plan for architecture design? A natural calling

“I had never imagined myself being an architect. Never ever intended so before. When I came to awareness, this has just become the case. If anything, maybe it’s because my father is an aircraft designer.” Under her father’s influence, Kyoko Arai applied for the department of architecture, and graduated from the faculty of engineering.

“I was also motivated by my uncle. He is also an architect. He then introduced to me works by Bruno Taut, a renowned German architect that had deep connections with Japan. I think who I am today can also be attributed to their influence.” By modeling after these roles, more than just an architect, Kyoko has oriented herself towards a higher level as an artist in her whole life.

Autonomy sought and gained: Interlocution among architects, users, and designs

After graduation, Kyoko had practiced her profession in the Tokyo Branch of a world famous architecture firm for seven years, until she launched her own studio. Kyoko started her career from the interior design of houses, shops, and restaurants, and thereafter extended her business to the building of whole offices. “I have been aiming to design a good place to live, a cozy office, as well as a clean clinic for the people around me.”

After certain periods upon the completion

of the buildings out of her design, Kyoko would go on a visit to follow up on how they have been utilized. “Seeing how my designs are used, for example, patients receiving treatments in the clinics, I’ve always rediscovered the pure joy of being part of these projects. Some owners even turn them into better use beyond my expectation, which even provides me with remarkable insights for my future design. Nothing else is more encouraging than seeing this, and all the efforts pay off.”

Reflecting upon the past projects she has run, Kyoko sums up as follows, “Despite various methods for putting forward construction plans to the present, generally speaking, there is a sequential operation procedure to the completion of an architecture, from its design, project management to the onsite supervision.” In this design-bid-build process, traditional though it may seem, none of the streamlined workflows above can be carried out by mere individuals. For architects like Kyoko, seamless collaboration should be emphasized to achieve cohesion within the team. “Even when a construction project has already come to an end, I may still receive requests from my clients for renovations

and extensions.” To facilitate successful collaboration in the phases of pre- and post-construction, Kyoko considers it a must for an architect to have high-quality communication, leading strategies, as well as future visions.

Historical trace of this gendered industry

“I don’t want to distinguish between men and women, as I also have my own expertise.” In the eyes of Kyoko, not just limited to architects, any job title prefixed with “female” is redundant and unnecessary. “This is a man’s world,” Kyoko adds. “Even though years have passed and I’ve learned how to cooperate with them for now, I still remember the exact moments when I had trouble working with men back to the beginning of my career, especially with the constructors. Nearly two decades ago, there had been a strained atmosphere between men and women in the architecture industry. At that time designers like us had shouldered more responsibilities for our clients than we do today.” It’s not hard to imagine how these had been much burdened when some hidden

sexist assumptions were made upon female designers by their male colleagues.

“Nowadays, we’ve got more opportunities to see beautiful and clever female managers, coming to the construction site and supervising the project progress.” Kyoko elaborates more on such shifts of gender relations from the requests of her customers. With women’s entry into the workforce, Kyoko observes, there also generates an increasing demand of at-home meeting rooms from her female clients. “In the past twenty years, the world for women has changed a lot.”

Who is afraid of housing designs: women’s unique perspectives

Architecture design itself has inevitably covered a wide range of topics, but when it comes to the housing design, Kyoko asserts with confidence, women should excel better than men, for the image it conjures up used to be connected with mothers and young

children. “In the last century, at least for Japanese, women had spent most of their time home as housewives.”

Appealing to their instincts as women, Kyoko assumes that female designers can better understand different aspects of human behaviors inside their dwellings, including sleeping, eating, or cooking. With realistic assessments, they visualize these daily scenes and design accordingly to their clients’ needs. “I have faith in myself that I am capable of putting my customers’ ideas into practice, no matter how wild it could be. Soon after the project completion, same as women, I can feel their satisfaction expressed in their faces. They like my design.”

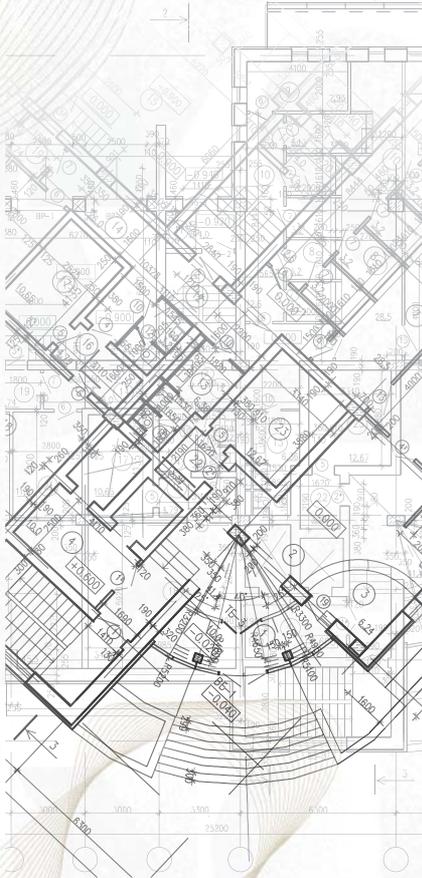
Gender talks, but never let it speak louder than actions

As an architect specializing in interior design, Kyoko modestly claims, what she can do is to help people live the best of their spaces with minor adjustments to certain environmental factors, such as the quality of the air, heating, ventilation, lighting and acoustics. From where Kyoko stands, setting any goals of social responsibility may be too far-reaching, but she still expects herself to pass her torch to the new blood in any event. “Living in an era that is constantly changing, education itself is important for nourishing our future

generation, and it takes a great amount of time and money. If a word of advice should be given to the government, I would say not to cut down the budget on education. Offer more subsidies to the vocational schools or training institutions.”

Considering the development of the rising architects, the promotion of women in specific appears to be more severe than that of men, as Kyoko indicates. “Some women are forced to leave their offices when they get married.” According to relevant research, regardless of genders, in order to stand a chance of getting promoted, people working in the architecture or engineering industry need to stay longer. The moment female professionals choose to place themselves in the job market, they are meanwhile caught in such dilemmas: To leave, or not to leave? That is a question.





“I suppose there are many other female pioneers being active in diverse professions before me, and I hope they could also get more involved to create pathways for the next generation.” With more fresh blood pumped in, we’ll never lose motivation in fostering a diverse workforce. “In so nurturing, not just women per se, I believe both genders can mutually inspire each other and benefit this society as an end, with a view to creating an inclusive environment in Asia and all over the world.”

“Girls, be ambitious!”

Kyoko ends the interview with this powerful sentence, encouraging the young women to remain positive and take challenges in acquiring different professions. To advent with this evolving world, Kyoko advocates for those who are planning to enter the architecture field. “At first, you might be dazzled by many kinds of techniques in this sector, like general design, structural design, services design, modeling, 3-dimension expressions, and so on. But once you familiarize yourself with them and keep advancing yourself, you will reap what you sow through your career.”