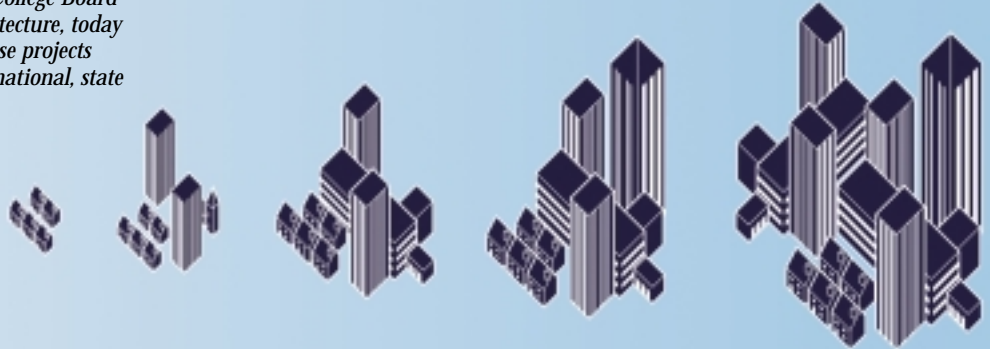


Three Decades of Designing the Future

AUTHOR: J. ROBERT HILLIER, *NJIT Overseer and member of the Albert Dorman Honors College Board of Visitors, is the founder of Hillier Architecture, today a 320-person international practice whose projects have been recognized by more than 250 national, state and local design awards.*



On its 30th anniversary, we must acknowledge that New Jersey School of Architecture (NJSOA) at NJIT has done something for New Jersey that should have happened decades ago. We have a solid school of architecture, which not only represents the state, but which today ranks as one of the largest architecture schools in the country. This is worthy of celebration.

Dean Harlyn Thompson founded the school of architecture at NJIT with the humble remodeling of an old gymnasium on campus. Hillier Architecture designed that first school as a series of free-form, free-standing spaces within the walls of the gymnasium in 1973 and later, in 1998, Hillier was invited back to renovate the 77,000-square-foot Weston Hall and expand it by 33,000 square feet. The School of Architecture has grown to become a powerful resource for students of architecture in New Jersey: one rich in technology, developing a dynamic network within its university community as well as extending its reach to local New Jersey constituencies.

NJSOA professor and former dean, Barry Jackson, has noted, “The school has come a long way since the first days of the IBM PC with full-height floppy drives; several faculty members have devoted themselves to introducing new design methods to accompany the thousand-fold increase of computers.” In fact, NJSOA’s depth of technological understanding was an early determinant of its strength among the architectural school community.

The school currently appeals to a number of foreign students who are attracted to the strategic urban setting offered by NJIT. Urs P. Gauchat, present NJSOA dean, has commented, “Our students work closely with such key players as city mayors, developers, and other officials on real-life projects. With the establishment of the Urban Lab, we have significantly expanded our role within the community by engaging in projects designed to meet the needs of those around us.” Architects today must respond to new dynamic

shifts in the political, economic and social landscapes, which have altered the role of the architect and how architecture is shaped. NJIT advocates a site-contextual role by establishing real, integrative approaches to design.

Gauchat has observed, “The study of architecture serves as a general education for a multiplicity of careers beyond that of a narrowly defined role as a professional architect.” In fact, architects today must incorporate knowledge over several fields into planning, design, construction and sustainability, while understanding the cultural education of place, space, context and environment. With interdisciplinary teaching practices, civil and environmental engineering, transportation, management and environmental policy studies, the program addresses the need to educate planning and design professionals who are capable of balancing a number of disciplines.

The study of architecture then becomes an experimental task where the universal can inform the exact, where the contextual becomes the key for the elemental. NJIT has accurately responded to this model with a more inclusive education, and the establishment of dual degree programs. For example, students in the master’s in architecture program have the opportunity to pursue a dual-degree that combines a master’s in infrastructure planning, management or civil engineering.

NJIT has clearly set new standards for schools of architecture. These standards are being implemented by expanding architectural study outside of the institution and into the surrounding city of Newark. NJSOA offers total immersion in a broad yet focused formal education for students of architecture, with programs consistently reflective of the NJIT tradition of building upon cutting-edge technology. ■

New Jersey School of Architecture on the Web:
<http://architecture.njit.edu>