

# **AN ARCHITECTURAL DICTIONARY**

by

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Coffee with an Architect



# A

**Adaptive Re-use:** (noun) – Removing soiled linens and empty colt 45 bottles prior to leasing a building to creative professionals.

**Agora:** (noun) – The fear of Architecture in public places.

**Amphitheatre:** (noun) – Large crowds in seating organized by their dislike of classical music.

**Arcade:** (noun) – Corridors lined with repetitive video games.

**Architect:** (noun) – An effete bon vivant with a drawing problem.

**Architecture:** (noun) – Load bearing walls plus optimism.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The act of artfully placing complex forms in remote locations to be photographed for magazine covers.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The memory of that which could have been, that is invoked by the residual form remaining after extensive value engineering.

**Architecture:** (noun) – Public disinterest derived from a combination of self-importance and greed.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The compromise arrived at by the client and the designers after the president of the firm and the client played golf yesterday.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The hard metallic outer shell surrounding confused school children pointing at the large early period Calder mobile hanging from the ceiling.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The space between 4 or more glass walls, wherein wealthy people shower.

**Architecture:** (noun) – Profession wherein ones salary is amusing to the majority of other professionals.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The homes that hipsters admire.

**Architecture:** (noun) – Structure approved by banks.

**Architecture:** (noun) – The touch, the feel of titanium. The fabric of our lives.

**Architecture:** (noun) – creativity plus financing minus creativity

**Architecture:** (noun) – The solid form of angst.

**Architrave:** (noun) – The lowest part of the entablature which rests on the laurels of the designer.

**Armature:** (noun) – The thin metallic shell protecting an Architect from public opinion.

**Articulation:** (noun) – The act of organizing Norwegian Designers by austerity.

**Atrium:** (noun) – The cold interior volume next to a food court.

**Attic:** (noun) – One who cannot stop designing unusable spaces under the roof.

**Authentic:** (noun) – Having to do with anything the Architect believes is more important than the work everyone else is producing.

**Awning:** (noun) – Cloth covering that directs rain water away from the entrance doors and into the masonry walls.

# B

**Balance:** (noun) – The thin line between incorrect and profitable.

**Balustrades:** (noun) – Describing a stairway using only hand gestures.

**Barrel Vault:** (noun) – The curve generated by throwing a barrel over Louis Kahn.

**Basement:** (noun) – Architectural floor plan with the lowest level of detail.

**Basilica:** (noun) – The white packets at the bottom of a cathedral that remove moisture from the space. Do not eat.

**Bays:** (verb) – The act of breaking up a façade by howling at the moon.

**Beams:** (verb) – Architectural facial expression upon design approval and/or payment.

**Belfry:** (noun) – The space enclosing bats.

**Bracket:** (noun) – The list of Architectural firms competing to play against UNC or Duke in March.

**Brise soleil:** (noun) – Concrete exterior sunshades used to deplete construction budgets in France.

**Bulkhead:** (noun) – The discount contractors provide when the tops of all door frames are ordered at once.

**Buttress:** (noun) – The act of leaning your back-side against a cathedral.

# C

**Canopy:** (noun) – The opposite of Cantopy.

**Cantilever:** (noun) – Handicap accessible door hardware that will not turn.

**Capital:** (noun) – “C”

**Casement window:** (noun) – The operable window used by potential thieves to determine the easiest means of access to the valuables.

**Circulation:** (noun) – The excitement Architects feel when they feel excitement about Architecture.

**Classical Orders:** (noun) – Demands passed down from Robert A.M. Stern.

**Coffer:** (noun) – Exchanging coffee for services.

**Colonnade:** (noun) – A refreshing beverage made from Portland cement and limes.

**Columns:** (noun) – Vertical structural elements that may be installed horizontally prior to lawsuits.

**Compatibility:** (noun) – The ability to blend into one's surroundings while being better than everything around you.

**Consultant:** (noun) – One to whom blame is placed.

**Commission:** (noun) – Architectural prospect prior to 2009.

**Configuration:** (noun) – Placing scale figures and trees in a rendering to obscure the unfinished parts of the design.

**Cornice:** (noun) – A styrofoam replica of a classical ideal.

**Corbel:** (noun) – The act of stacking French Modern Architects on top of each other while offsetting each successive Architect.

**Coping:** (noun) – Dealing with Architecture.

**Cupola:** (noun) – Literally “putting a bird on it”

**Curtain wall:** (noun) – The transparent screen between the lobby and the homeless.

**Curvilinear:** (noun) – not applicable.



# D

**Datum:** (noun) – a line drawn from one irrelevant point to another. This line is never curved.

**Decoration:** (noun) – also, not applicable.

**Demolition:** (noun) – Removing earlier Architecture to make room for new Architecture that refers to the earlier Architecture.

**Details:** (noun) – Details.

**Diametrically:** (adj) – The opposite of the word your client will think you meant.

**Dome:** (noun) – The sound made by cross-legged meditating monks under a circular roof form.

**Doric Order:** (noun) – Gyro, hold the lettuce and tomatoes.

**Dormers:** (noun) – Those who dwell in student housing.

**Double hung:** (noun) – Windows which were reordered because the shop drawings mislabeled the “rough opening” as the “masonry opening”.

**Draft:** (verb) – Creating an initial version of the design to establish a project budget. This version will later be refined beyond recognition as the established budget remains unchanged.

**Drip edge:** (noun) – Flashing that directs water into the soffit.

# E

**Eave:** (noun) – The sound construction workers make when lifting heavy objects, often followed by the word “ho”.

**Elevation:** (noun) – 2-dimensional drawings used to generate approval, while obscuring the design and confusing the appearance commission.

**Entablature:** (noun) – Child-proof lids on top of Greek medication bottles, often decorated with acanthus leaves.

**Entrance:** (verb) – The act of momentarily mesmerizing visitors upon entry into an excessively designed lobby space.

# F

**Façade:** (noun) – The cooperative impression an Architect leaves on the storefront sales rep.

**Fascia:** (noun) – Architectural trim work placed at the edge of the eaves to conceal the rotted ends of the roof framing.

**Fenestration:** (noun) – The act of artfully arranging holes in any architectural theory.

**Finial:** (noun) – The last time I put a decorative form on the top of this stair rail, I swear.

**Finish:** (noun) – The last thing done in Finland.

**Flashing:** (noun) – Redirecting water from the building by quickly opening your trench coat.

**Floor plan:** (noun) – The level you intend to get to.

**Flemish Bond:** (noun) – “From Helsinki with Love”

**Flying Buttress:** (noun) – The act of leaning against a cathedral while only touching it with one hand.

**Focal Point:** (noun) – An element on axis with an important vista (usually next to the fire department connection).

**Form:** (noun) – To follow function.

**French Doors:** (noun) – Portals that open to a grand vista prior to surrender.

**Frieze:** (noun) – Statement uttered by Greek police when apprehending criminals.

# G

**Gable:** (noun) – Same-sex roof form.

**Gambrel:** (noun) – Roof forms with particularly long odds against them.

**Gazebo:** (noun) – Architectural follies placed in the landscape which have no proven medicinal effect but may show positive results in clinical trials.

**Galvanized:** (noun) – Public opposition to anything metallic an Architect proposes adjacent to an existing elementary school.

**Golden Proportion:** (noun) – All-you-can-eat buffet-style Architectural scale-franchise.

**Gothic:** (noun) – Architecture produced while listening to “Arcade Fire”

**Grid:** (noun) – An Architect’s ego, (per Freud).

**Grille:** (noun) – Wherein one gets all up in the Architecture.

**Gutter:** (noun) – The personal residence of the Architecture Profession since 2009.



**Hierarchy:** (noun) – An arched opening positioned just above another arched opening.

**Hip:** (noun) – Ionic roof forms.

**Historic:** (noun) – Pre 1945, (except for Adolf Loos or Rennie Mackintosh)

**Hood:** (noun) – Architecture in an area with a high crime rate.

**HVAC:** (noun) – The awkward furred-down area in the ceiling of the most public space.





**Ionic:** (noun) – Greek Hipsters.

**Infill:** (verb) – Removing dilapidated buildings and replacing them with condominiums to be sold to affluent homosexuals.

**Interlocking:** (noun) – Dutch town in which MVRDV is located.

**Interstitial:** (noun) – The space between the Architectural commission you have and the one you hoped to have.


**In Situ:** (noun) – From the Greek, meaning “I know a phrase from the Greek.”

# J

**Jamb:** (noun) – The side of the door frame with butter on it.

**Joist:** (noun) – The inexplicable happiness of framers.

**Juxtaposition:** (noun) – When the exact location of the building doesn't really matter.

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**Keystone:** (noun) – Key-shaped stone at the top of the arch used to open a secluded vault in Egypt containing the secret to all Architectural success. The vault may be empty, and booby trapped.



**Light:** (noun) – The illumination at the end of the tunnel which has been turned off due to lack of financing.

**Linear:** (noun) – The shortest distance between your ideals and your client's pocketbook.

**Lintel:** (noun) – A bean-soup used to span window openings.

**Loggia:** (noun) – A gallery or corridor on the façade of a building, open to interpretation on one side.

# M

**Mansard roof:** (noun) – Steeply sloped roofs that screen HVAC equipment on fast food restaurants in France.

**Materials:** (noun) – Natural or manufactured elements used to populate specifications.

**Members:** (noun) – Only.

**Mid-Century Modern:** (noun) – The days before modernism was considered to be too expensive.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – The art of doing less with more money.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – The process of slowly removing everything the client asked for.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Taking an inordinate amount of time to do incredibly little.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Obscure concepts, Transparent materials.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – More space, less furniture’

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Easier to clean, you know because of the no furniture.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Open plan, Open stairs, screw handrails.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Open plan, open mind, open a second bank account.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Wood, Concrete, Glass, Angst.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Blank canvas, blank stares.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Look how little it took to upset the neighbors.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – No ornament allowed. None.

**Minimalism:** (noun) – Less.

**Minimalism:** (noun)

**Mixed-use:** (noun) – Building type where-in the residents complain about the smells and noise from the restaurant and the restaurant patrons look up at the ceiling whenever the residents flush their toilet.

**Modernism:** (noun) - a global movement in society and culture that from the early decades of the twentieth century sought a new alignment with the experience and values of modern industrial life using mostly rectangles and condescension.

**Modification:** (noun) – Placing a butterfly chair next to a Charles Eames foot stool in a 1950s home.

**Modulor:** (noun) -The manufactured home that Le Corbusier lived in.

**Molding:** (noun) – Decorative trim work used to conceal the imperfections in one's architectural ideals.

**Mullion:** (noun) – Time spent thinking about the window placement.

**Muntin:** (noun) – Window panes divided by sheep.

# N

**Nave:** (noun) – The negative end of a sanctuary.

**Neo-Classical:** (noun) – New, yet oddly the same as the old, but, with more Styrofoam.

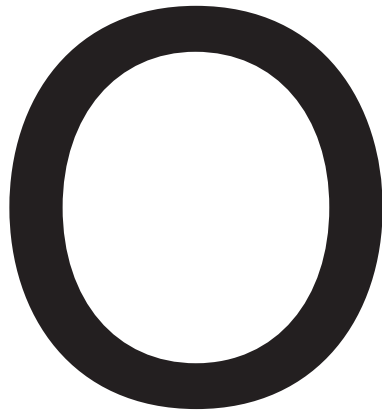
**New Urbanism:** (noun) – Much like Classical Architecture, with more paperwork and guilt.

**Newel post:** (noun) – The stair element that reminds Jimmy Stewart that he does, in fact, have a wonderful life.

**Niche:** (noun) – Specialized area of concentration used to limit choices and relevance.

**Node:** (noun) – The state an Architectural concept exists in after it has been rejected by the client.





**Oculus:** (noun) – The hole in your ideal roof form.

**Occupancy:** (noun) – Group of strangers residing within an architecturally significant contribution to the community. (Strangers to be removed prior to photography).

**Ornament:** (noun) – Vestiges of nostalgia festooning a pure form.

# P

**Parti:** (noun) – Gathering of 3 or more design professionals under the influence of alcohol, wherein the “big idea” for the project is formed.

**Pavilion:** (noun) – Architecturally significant structures devoid of context, program, and budget.

**Pedestal:** (noun) – Position preferred by most Architects.

**Pedestrian oriented:** (noun) – Buildings that allow people to approach on foot, while parking somewhere in the rear.

**Pediment:** (noun) – The slow, but steady build-up of an Architects resolve over time.

**Permit:** (noun) – The act of building officials allowing a structure to exist.

**Piano nobile:** (noun) – The principle floor marked by larger openings in the piano.

**Piers:** (noun) – Those equal to the Architect who help hold our values safely above the incoming waves of an economic tsunami.

**Pilaster:** (noun) – Semi-attached columns concealing HVAC duct work.

**Placemaking:** (noun) – The circular drive or “round-about” near the entrance to a retail / lifestyle center.

**Plane:** (verb) – To remove all detail or ornament from a design.

**Platonic:** (noun) – Buildings that only want to be friends.

**Porte-cochère:** (noun) – The covering at the entry of a structure, used to keep the rain off of the elderly as they remove their belongings from the trunk of their car, in France.

**Portico:** (noun) – The opening between you and the fortified wine within.

**Post-Modern:** (noun) – When everything began to get away from us, somehow...things just weren't the same. Hey, is that a Michael Graves gravy boat? cool..., I love Target.

**Preservation:** (noun) – Allocating additional funding, by means of government grants and tax increment financing to leverage nostalgia and guilt to save non-functional buildings that bitter people value.

**Proportion:** (noun) – The professional amount.

Q

**Quoin:** (noun) – Quash

# R

**Radial:** (noun) – Emanating from the center, like a tire.

**Relief:** (noun) – A façade broken up by the few moments of the day spent not thinking of the Architecture.

**Repetition:** (noun) – Repetition.

**Residential:** (noun) – American dreams bundled into mortgage-backed securities and leveraged to blame the middle-class for buying more than they can afford.

**Restoration:** (noun) – The discount clothing store that moves into the space formally occupied by the designer clothing store

**Return:** (noun) – The negative balance after construction, often reimbursed by the Architect by way of a change order.

**Reveals:** (noun) –  $\frac{3}{4}$ " glimpses into an Architect's soul.

**Ridge:** (noun) – The crest of the nose under the black-rimmed circular glasses.

**Roof:** (noun) – The barrier between the elements and the lawsuit.

**Rowhouse:** (noun) – Narrow urban residences facing a flooded street to be approached by boat.

**Rustication:** (noun) – The use of wide-plank flooring and wool by hipsters and/or Nick Nolte.

# S

**Sash:** (noun) – The portion of the window draped across the left shoulder of the building.

**Scale:** (noun) – The hard segmental reptilian skin covering most architectural egos.

**Section:** (noun) – 2-dimensional detail indecipherable by clients and ignored by contractors.

**Sense of Place:** (noun) – That funny feeling of being watched by a 16-year-old holding a skateboard and an energy drink.

**Served and Servant Spaces:** (noun)  
– A rectangular house in which Louis Kahn resides on the 2nd floor and his maid isn't allowed to leave the 1st floor; also, the working title to a Robert Altman film.

**Shaft:** (noun) – The vertical opening within a structure capable of transporting a 5000lb, 400 ft/sec bad mutha — shut your mouth.

**Sill:** (noun) – y

**Siteplan:** (noun) – The first drawing the client sees that shows how little parking is available.

**Soffit:** (noun) – The exposed underbelly of the roof.

**Spatial:** (adj) – The smartest intern.

**Stile and rail:** (noun) – 1960s country duo popular for their top-20 hit “The 4-panel door to my heart”

**Stoa:** (noun) – Placing all Roman items below deck.

**Streetscape:** (noun) – Popular city sponsored improvement projects involving very small trees and 19th century reproduction lighting.

**Stoop:** (noun) – The part of the building near the front door that bends to pick up occupants.

**Stretcher:** (noun) – Tool used to lengthen boards that were inadvertently cut too short for the stairway.

**Stucco:** (noun) – The sticky plaster-like residue used between the masonry facades due to value engineering.

**Symmetry:** (noun) – The place where the bodies of dead Architects are interred.





**T-square:** (noun) – Unsuccessful Architect and 1990s rapper.

**Temple:** (noun) – The edges of an Architects brow which are rubbed as they contemplate their fate in this world.

**Transit Oriented Development:**  
(noun) – Suburbs within a 10-mile radius of a future planned rail corridor (trains to be powered by rainbows and biofuel).

**Transom:** (noun) – Crossing the door above the head.

**Triglyph:** (noun) – Meaningless 3-letter acronyms used for architectural firm names (i.e. S.O.M. or H.O.K. or B.I.G. or F.L.W. or M.V.R.D.V)

**Tuck-pointing:** (noun) – The tradition of extending a finger towards the mason who pushes the ends of the bricks into his pants.

**Turrets:** (noun) – Uncontrollable  
Architectural swearing over the  
decorative tops of towers.

U

**Urban design:** (noun) – Getting less for more, while waiting longer for approvals.

# V

**Vault:** (noun) – The place where the profit on the job is rumored to be held.  
(Ref: Keystone for access)

**Vernacular:** (noun) – dirty.

**Volute:** (noun) – The act of placing one's right hand to one's forehead when passing the top of an ionic column.

**Vomitorium:** (noun) – The narrow hallway leading out of the Velvet Underground's flat in Soho.

# W

**Wainscot:** (noun) – The pants of the dining room walls.

**Wall:** (noun) – Autocad command shortcut which applies a W to all.

**Window:** (noun) – The part of the glazing that does not go from floor to ceiling; probably in the bathroom, or the closet.

# Z

**Zinc:** (noun) – Mythical metal cladding only specified as an add alternate.

**Zoning:** (noun) – The act of removing the barriers to creative and thoughtful urban design, by only allowing development patterns covered in the seminars the local planners attended during a conference 5 years ago.

