

who can imagine every element of the design during the design phase nor imagine the best way to realize them alone or ahead of time.

This open-endedness does not cause jobs to escalate in cost. This open-endedness does not make schedules expand. It is based on the idea that maybe the best idea is yet to come, with “best” meaning: more cost-effectively detailed; more structurally sound; using materials that are going to cost less and perhaps be available sooner than the ones first selected; elements assembled the way the selected fabricator does it best, not the way specified in the design drawings.

MY PERSPECTIVE ON DESIGN

I never studied design, but fine art. When one makes art one’s mind stays aware throughout the process, and so I think that the same ought to be true in design. I like to keep my mind aware and active during all the phases of a project. Each step should be alive and fluid to me. Also, I like to treat each project as a great opportunity to learn and grow. If one has only one life to be a designer, each project should be seen as full of possibilities.

My path as a designer could be characterized as one that has moved from possibility to possibility. It is an accident that I took up designing at all. But after I designed a loft for my wife and myself I wanted to work with space again and the only way I could see having the opportunity to do that was to get some clients. I taught myself to draft. Friends who were designers slipped me the contracts their offices used, so I understood how a design firm worked, how it billed, and what its responsibilities were in relationship to the client and in the realization of the design. I never used the contracts, as the processes seemed wrong for how I wanted to work. From what I learned about the processes in standard contracts, and how I wished to develop designs for clients, I made up my own letter of agreement. Then, I got some clients.

We are a small and nimble interior design firm. We are four people. The very largest we ever were was eight people. This was too big for me. I became unhappy with my role in the company. Somebody had to be the boss, so I got to conceptualize the projects and pass the projects on to my staff. I did keep

the product design for myself. What I enjoyed the most was doing the details, but I needed to give it up to have enough time to run the company, schmooze for new work to feed the machine. All the people working for me had great things on their desks that I wished I was doing.

One day I mailed in an application for the Rome Prize, a fellowship awarded every year to a designer to live and think at the American Academy in Rome. Upon my return from the post office, I began firing the staff until there was no one left. Now I have a very small office in New York, the city where I do not live anymore, but visit regularly. In Rome, where I now live and never left after winning the Rome Prize, I have a 400-year-old studio in the walled-in garden of a villa in Trastevere. This is where I now design and make art.

CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION AND THE ONGOING PROCESS OF DESIGN

I like to step back and rethink the nature of things: turn the structure of doors and walls inside out, use materials for purposes they have not been used before, run the traffic of an office around the window wall. This is a process full of effort for us, but when we work hard we are rewarded, and we do not ask more effort of our clients. It makes sense to me that if we are to realize any of our designs, we need to make the best use of all the wisdom and knowledge and experience of the design team, the client, the contractor, and the fabricators. And we can't possibly achieve this best use of all of our resources if we limit our learning and work solely to the initial design phase, a phase I find insular and narcissistic by nature. Design needs to be responsive to the clients and their needs; the designer doesn't have to live with his/her solutions, the clients do. The best way to design the most appropriate space is to engage the clients throughout the design phase. We never make a design presentation, a standard procedure in this industry, but have regular meetings during the design phase to continue to receive input from the clients. The effort of a formal design presentation is better spent responding to the clients' comments as ideas are developed. What is most important for our projects is to use the wisdom of the entire cast of characters of a project—the client, the contractor, and as many of the key fabricators as