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ESSAY: DESPINA STRATIGAKOS

# What I Learned from Architect Barbie



Architect Barbie on display at the AIA convention in New Orleans, May 2011. [Photo courtesy of Mattel, Inc.]

In February Architect Barbie made her industry debut at the Toy Industry Association's Toy

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Fair in New York City; in May she made her professional entrance at the American Institute of Architects convention in New Orleans. But Architect Barbie's real beginnings were political. In 2006, while I was a research fellow at the University of Michigan, the passage of Proposal 2, a ballot initiative, ended affirmative action in that state. Debates before and after the law's passage tore into friendships and collegial relationships, and the atmosphere on campus was tense as the school's colleges, including architecture, struggled to determine what the new law would mean for diversity among students and faculty, and ultimately why that diversity mattered.

This question was especially pressing in architecture, which has struggled more than most professions to foster diversity. Today, more than a century after the Buffalo, New York-based architect Louise Bethune became the first woman admitted into the American Institute of Architects, the organization's membership remains 83 percent male. And yet architecture schools have seen steady increases in female enrollment over the past two decades, reaching 40 percent nationwide. Having earned an architectural degree, why do so many then leave the profession? There are few studies to help us understand the phenomenon of vanishing women architects. The common assumption — that women "naturally" opt out to have children — doesn't hold up to scrutiny: professionals in equally demanding fields, such as medicine and law, start families while continuing to work. And although other professions might offer the incentive of better pay, money alone does not explain a woman's ability or desire to persevere. One of the most poignant findings of a 2003 study by the Royal Institute of British Architects on the loss of women in architectural practice is that women make this choice reluctantly: they love architecture and don't want to go.

As a feminist scholar, I am interested in analyzing the ideological fences that architecture has built around the profession — the barriers that determine outsiders and insiders. One starting point is the idealized image of the architect that has been nurtured within the profession and reinforced in popular culture. Here we find a pervasive insistence on the incompatibility of the architectural and the feminine — seen not only in early 20th-century writings on modern architecture by Otto Bartning, Karl Scheffler and others, but also in recent Hollywood films, such as *One Fine Day* (1996), in which Michelle Pfeiffer, playing an architect compelled to bring her young child to work, trips over her own handbag and crushes the design model she's carrying, including its phallic high-rise. This scene points also to another deeply embedded conflict in the image of the architect: the irreconcilability of production and reproduction. They require different and opposing abilities, we're told, and being a good architect necessarily means being a bad parent, as Adam Sandler's character discovered in *Click* (2006).



Architect Barbie on display at the AIA convention in New Orleans, May 2011. [Photo courtesy of Mattel, Inc.]

Hoping to encourage discussion about these beliefs and attitudes, but wary of preaching to the converted, I looked for an unusual angle to address issues of diversity in my fellowship exhibition at Michigan, held in 2007. I had long admired feminist artists, such as the Guerrilla Girls, who use humor to political ends. Given the tensions and resentments stirring on campus in the wake of Prop 2, it seemed more important than ever to harness the disarming power of humor. It was at that point that I remembered Architect Barbie. In 2002, Mattel had staged a public vote to allow people to determine the next career in its new professional series, "Barbie I Can Be..." The choices — architect, librarian and police woman — unleashed an epic online battle, which architects won. But then came Mattel's crushing announcement that the company would not produce the doll — in its view an architect's work was beyond the comprehension of little girls.

Eager to see Architect Barbie materialize, I asked Michigan architecture students and faculty to develop their own prototypes. I was particularly interested in how a younger generation, just learning to become architects and absorbing the professional culture, would imagine her. The results, exhibited in the architecture school, were an eye-opener. I had expected Barbie to show up in a black power suit and Corbusier eyeglasses. In other words, architecture would come first, Barbie second. Instead, some students reversed the order. Their dolls explored architecture on Barbie's own terms, from an über-feminine angle that celebrated fashion, hairstyles and makeup. In these dolls, I was confronted by the "femmenism" or "girl power" of a younger generation, which seeks empowerment by playing up femininity in contexts that prohibit it. Inside architecture's hallowed halls, Barbie's "girlie" attributes were not a mark of oppression, but of resistance. These dolls looked you right in the eye and asked, "Why can't architects wear pink?"



Architect Barbie prototypes, created by Taubman College architecture students Enesh Easlick (doll on the left) and Mashawnta Armstrong (doll on the right) for a 2007 University of Michigan exhibition. [Photo by Paige Hammerschmidt and Caryn Schadeegg, courtesy of Despina Stratigakos]

My assumptions would be challenged again, a few years later, when Architect Barbie finally entered the realm of trademarked toys. In February 2010, Mattel invited the public to vote on Barbie's 125th career, only the second such election to be held since 2002. Having once shunned "complex" careers in the "Barbie I Can Be..." line, Mattel was now focusing on professions in which women were underrepresented. (Even a corporation can evolve.) This time, Architect Barbie's rivals included Surgeon Barbie and Computer Engineer Barbie; the latter emerged victorious. At which point — still reluctant to concede defeat — I joined forces with architect Kelly Hayes McAlonie, a colleague at SUNY Buffalo, in a last-ditch effort to save Architect Barbie, and approached Mattel directly to advocate for the doll. To our delighted surprise, Kelly and I were asked to advise on her design.

Over the next six months, as Mattel explored the world of architecture, Kelly and I were inducted into the mysteries of toy manufacturing. One of our first lessons was that creating Barbie in the image of a professional was not about miniaturizing the adult world, but rather

about translating it into a child's terms. Yes, we know architects like to wear black (we like it ourselves). But to a five-year-old girl, a doll dressed in black says "villain" or "mortician," not "architect." In working with Mattel's designers on Architect Barbie's outfit, we focused on simple volumes, clean lines and basic colors. Since Barbie's molded feet made flats impossible, we gave her black ankle boots with a chunky heel. With architecture undergoing rapid changes, not least in its technologies, accessorizing Barbie involved difficult choices. We sent a list of 25 possible accessories to Mattel's designers, who selected three with iconic power and instant recognizability: a pink drawing tube, white hard hat and black glasses.





Top: Barbie's Dream House, 1979 model, on display at the AIA convention. The AIA is holding a competition to design a sustainable Dream House for Architect Barbie. Bottom: Girls participating in one of the Architect Barbie workshops at the AIA convention. [Images courtesy of Mattel, Inc.]

Negotiating the transition from office to construction site also posed a sartorial challenge. What outfit would work for both? After considering slacks, we ultimately agreed with Mattel that Architect Barbie would wear a dress. A century ago, men campaigned to ban women from construction sites because their dresses (standing in for female bodies) were seen as nuisances. Since women then were also forbidden to wear pants, this dress code effectively excluded them from the building trades. Our decision to combine a hard hat with a dress — symbols of building and femininity — channels the spirit of girl power, flaunting that which has been prohibited.

Ultimately, though, Architect Barbie's power is not in her clothes, but in what she represents. And this, Architect Barbie's last and most enduring lesson, became fully clear to me only at the official launch of the doll, at the AIA convention in New Orleans. Working with Mattel and the AIA, Kelly and I developed workshops for 400 girls, recruited from local schools and girls' clubs. The workshops, led by women architects, had three components: an introduction to what architects do, a discussion of the work of past and present women architects, and an exercise to redesign Barbie's Dream House. The exercise focused on teaching the girls basic skills for drawing floor plans and encouraging them to explore their ideal domestic

environment. Throughout, I was amazed at how intensely the girls wanted to learn how to shape and control their own spaces. One of my favorite floor plans, created by a seven-year-old, included a room for monsters; by acknowledging their presence and giving them their own space, the rest of the house would remain monster-free — a design solution to an eternal childhood problem that would have put Freud out of business. At the end, each girl left with a gift bag that included drawing tools and her own Architect Barbie.

At no point during the workshops did I hear any girl question her spatial skills or the appropriateness of architecture for women. And that, precisely, is where Barbie's power lies. The fact is that Barbie appeals to little girls like no other toy. They are proprietary about her — they know the doll is just for them. And whatever Barbie does, she brings it into the sphere of women. She has the power to make things seem natural to little girls. Admittedly, Architect Barbie can't do all the work. Deeply held attitudes about women must shift before architecture becomes a profession that truly embraces diversity. Open discussions about how to encourage and keep women in practice need to happen in architecture schools, around the water cooler, in boardrooms. If Architect Barbie gets us talking, then more power to her. But ultimately she is for kids, not adults, and it is the politics of the sandbox that I hope to influence. I look forward to the day when little girls claim hard hats and construction sites as just another part of their everyday world.

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Finally! Guys... Come on, doesn't she look sexy! A female architect is THE perfect symbol of creativity!

**Lafemme1987**  
06.13.11 at 04:13

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Great article. All the bright, young faces are the hope our future needs. Thank you for doing everything right!

**Andrea**  
06.13.11 at 05:10

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Impressive reasoning and beautiful research. Brava!

**Sally Levinson**  
06.13.11 at 08:19

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I would love to know more about your research.....as we know, women do drop out of practicing architecture, and you note that they don't want to, so...WHY do they? As a woman who has practiced for nearly 30 years, while married (to an architect!) and raising 3 kids, I know it wasn't easy, but I don't feel that I was particularly strong...I just couldn't think of anything else I wanted, or was qualified, to do. And I did love the craft of buildings.

**Betsy**  
06.13.11 at 10:09

What is it that makes women move to other fields?

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wow, architect barbie and i wear the same eyeglass frame!



anonymous

curator

06.14.11 at 01:00

Architecture Barbie may send more women into the field, but until some changes are made they may opt out as I frustratingly have. None of the issues I mentioned were things I considered when choosing architecture. No one ever mentioned to me that these things even mattered when choosing a profession.

Betsy, I am one of those women who would like to practice architecture, but for a number of reasons is not. Mind you I graduated near the top of my class at The top architecture school and have completed my IDP. The honest truth of why I'm not practicing (in no particular order):

Location & Traffic. To get to most firms, it would take 45+ minutes each way. Add that to the typical 9 hour work day (including lunch) plus a half hour of overtime a few days each week and I would be working longer than my husband. Resentment sets in.

Options. There are only a dozen firms or so within commuting distance. When these firms aren't hiring or don't mesh with personal values, there aren't many other options without relocating, which wouldn't be fair to my husband and his job (though we relocated for his job...). There have got to be at least 20 medical centers within 15 minutes. There are dozens of schools. Architects are limited in options compared with women dominated fields.

Earning Potential: We had to favor my husband's job in case I want to stay home with children-- his field has higher earning potential

Overtime. With salaried positions the overtime becomes resented. If we were paid overtime when we stayed late or worked through lunch, we might not feel so bad. Rather than feeling trapped at work, we would feel like we were earning more.

Pay. We get paid so much less than other professions, and even many jobs. I have family members who never even went to college who are making more than I would, while I have a master degree and a load of school loan debt. I worked harder than everyone I know and will be making about equal to or less than each of them.

Male Clients, Consultants, and Builders. While within architecture schools 40% are women, in the field the clients, engineers, builders, and other consultants tend to be men. It is hard to feel respected by a 50 year old man when you enter the profession as a 27 year old women.

Flexible Schedules: In the medical field, teaching field or other service positions that women tend to choose, schedules are more flexible. If something comes up, they are able to find someone else to pick up a shift or sub for a class. In fact, medical centers and schools will even find the replacement for them. Architects can't pass their project on to someone else for a day or two.

No Part-Time: Although I do not have children yet, I feel guilty to take a position knowing that I would like to work part-time. This doesn't

seem to exist in our profession. The few I know who tried this ended up back full time or left entirely because they felt that it was too complicated, they still had to do the same amount of work but were being paid less, they missed too much of what was going on in the office, and they were less respected by other members of the firm.

Limited Time Off: Some firms require a year with no vacation when starting off. Holidays are limited to about 6. I compare this to my husband who get 3 weeks vacation, 7 personal days, and 14 paid holidays. I would constantly feel like I had to go to work while he got to stay home and make twice what I would. This is frustrating especially around the holidays when I would do all the cooking, shopping, and planning.

Licensing Fees: AIA fees and exam fees are high. Without a firm to pay for them, that is potentially thousands of dollars more (and then hundreds to maintain) that we'd have to pay.

So, although I love the architectural field and designing, my frustrations with our field compared to other fields, along with the limited options for employment, have led to my limited involvement.

**Out of Architecture**  
06.14.11 at 01:10

I wish the AIA had included this information in their press release about Architect Barbie. In talking to women in my office, they were upset about the combination of the boots, dress and hard hat. I heard them say things like, "How's she going to climb a ladder in that dress?" or "I would never wear those boots to a job site!" But explaining the history, intent and limitations, puts things into perspective.

**Mike B**  
06.14.11 at 01:33

DESPINA,

It would be interesting to revamp your study so that rather than asking why women leave architecture, ask why do men stay? Rather than assuming it is the norm to stay in the profession, assume that the women are onto something and the men have hang-ups on leaving. Perhaps it is because they are the primary earners of their family and can't "opt" out the way their wives potentially could. Maybe it is a sign of weakness to admit you weren't totally happy and to change careers that men can't own up to while women can (either through ability to admit defeat, or by using children, scheduling, etc. as a "reason"). I would be especially interested to see how couples' salaries compare. For instance, if a woman architect makes less than her husband, she might be more likely to opt out than if she was making more than him. Do men who stay in the profession typically make more than their wives? If so it would make sense to stay. Or if the men are making less than their wives in other professions, then why do they stay? When do men leave and why?

**Out of Arch**  
06.14.11 at 01:54

I think that the right decisions were made with Architect Barbie's accessories. Most women in offices where I've worked wore skirts or dresses a few times each week, especially in the summer. 95% of the

**Jennifer**  
06.14.11 at 02:41

work done was in an office setting, usually sitting at a computer, presenting material to clients, or discussing issues in a conference room. When presenting to clients, we definitely wore heels and a skirt or suit. Usually older, more experienced, architects handled the site visits. For the portion of a project when we (younger architects-- like Barbie appears to be) were needed on site, we often came to work dressed nicely, and kept boots in the car in case we needed them. The white hard hat is right on, as colored ones indicate a person's specific trade. I have a drawing tube with a shoulder strap (though mine is blue). Blueprints are out of date (now we have white paper with black lines from a large scale printer, or colored renderings (3D computer images), but the world commonly refers to architectural drawings as blueprints, so it would make sense to a child. The small version of the dream house is excellent for a child's understanding of something small representing something to be built big. Maybe she should have had a laptop in addition to the other items, but that isn't unique to the profession. The color choices were good too. I would have made the skirt a little more tapered so it looked professional, not party-like, but limiting the black shows the liveliness of the profession-- she doesn't look like a nerd because of her glasses, or a mean or boring lady by wearing too much black, and she doesn't look like a construction working man with thick boots that girls might recognize as being like their dads'. All in all, it is a good recognizable and relateable image of a young architect.

Out of Architecture - It seems to me that most of your issues are not unique to architecture; they are more about wanting equity with your husband, and if that doesn't happen, it turns into resentment. Most jobs don't have 16 holidays, unless you work for the government. I'm just going to take a moment to share my personal experiences on all of your points (for the record I have about ten years experience on you it sounds like):

Location & Traffic. I bike to work, it takes me 15 minutes. It takes me 10 to drive. I choose to live in a city, so I am near things...

Options. Slightly agree – but honestly – even in a low-construction city where I live, there seem to be plenty of options – there is a big international firm, mid-range good design firms, and smaller firms to choose from. I ended up where I was by being able to match my lifestyle, priorities and job expectations with this office.

Earning Potential: While I don't have a super-high earning potential, I can make a decent living. I have gotten raises my entire career and intend to continue to do so.

Overtime. Before I became licensed, all of my jobs paid me overtime. I choose to be at a firm whose culture is to work 40 hours/week most of the time.

Pay. Pay is all over the map. I feel like I have always been paid fairly, if not making tons of money. Unless you are in the medical profession, a CEO, or a lawyer, you probably aren't going to make tons of money. And, if you are in one of those positions, you are probably working a lot more overtime than me!

**C. Hadder**

06.14.11 at 05:11

Male Clients, Consultants, and Builders. The older generation can occasionally make you feel not respected, but for the most part this has rarely been an issue for me my entire career. People's respect often has to be earned, especially if they see a 27 year old male or female. Sometimes it is difficult to see that older men are reacting to age and perceived experience and not gender.

Flexible Schedules: As long as I get my work done, my schedule is semi-flexible. I set my hours (within reason) and when I have to work crazy overtime, I have flexibility on the other end as well.

No Part-Time: Agree. This is difficult to juggle. I would not feel guilty taking a job though knowing I was going to have children. Cross that bridge when you get there and try to work at a family-friendly office. We have more than one woman at our office on extended maternity leave, or returned part time.

Limited Time Off: Again – unless you work for the government – two weeks is standard to start out with... then it is raised with experience.

Licensing Fees: My firm has paid 100% of every fee associated with licensing, IDP, and maintenance of my license, and AIA membership.

I am not trying to argue all of your points, just wanted to offer up the idea that there are good firms to work at and you just have to be wise enough to know what you are looking for in a firm. I enjoy my job for the most part, and feel like I am successful at it. I can sympathize a little, but you do have control of some of those items, and the rest seem like excuses to me.

So I guess that still leaves the question open as to why more women leave the profession... what are the numbers exactly?

Here are some thoughts I have on it. The culture is to work hard, and since the profession has been male-dominated, women that want to cut back hours for family may feel that they don't have the same support as other women-dominated professions. The only way to combat this is to let the fact that more women are entering the profession and demanding part-time options filter through the culture so it is accepted. Maybe there is just a lag happening.

The only other thing I can think of is the difference between your academic preparation for a profession in architecture, and the real-world experience of being an architect. The two were very unrelated for me, but to my benefit I enjoyed both for different reasons. I think there are plenty of bad firms out there who will take advantage of their employees and maybe women are more susceptible to it. I have left firms where I thought this was the case and it made me wiser to good firms. Some people don't realize they have a choice.

I think the argument of why men stay in the profession is just sort of silly. Is our society so bent on every job allowing you to earn \$100,000+ right off the bat or it is seen as crazy to stay at it? While

Architecture is not the highest paid profession, it is one of the most highly respected.

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I left and am much happier.

Architecture is a difficult, demanding profession with little return. Building is very complex in our day... so very different from 50 years ago: the systems are more complex, approvals are more complex, everything.

It is badly paid because our society doesn't value it... and because a lot of firm owners are disorganized (so much wasted time) and bad at writing contracts.

Long hours are spent making changes that water down a project (because of too many people who have a say on a project). So you ask yourself... why am I working so hard to VE a good design into something that looks horrible? What am I getting out of it if even the final product isn't something I can be proud of.

Also, in this day, there are too many consultants on projects so that not only the CA, but all the phases entail a lot of project management. Since the creative part dwindles down to 'nil, if I am going to be doing project management, I'd rather be in another field where I can be paid much more and work more regular hours, WITHOUT the possibility of being sued.

There are so many reasons why I left architecture... and they are mostly practical. Possibly men are more stubborn or inflexible to change, or have ego issues, or cannot afford it if they are supporting a family.

I think it is a great education, but unfortunately, unless the AIA or some organization somehow fights for more respect, pay and power, the profession is going to keep losing a lot of creative people.

From my graduate architecture class at one of the most top ranked in the country, in 10 years already half have changed out - both men and women - into related fields or completely different fields. Mostly it is related to pay and independence and a desire to be doing something more intellectually challenging than CAD drawings which, aside from project management, comprise a large part of the (grunt) work.

I am writing as a licensed architect with 10 years experience (in five firms) on both high-end modern residential and large urban mixed-use complexes, both here and abroad.

**Joana**

06.14.11 at 09:34

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C. Hadder, thank you for your comments. It is always interesting to see how comments are perceived by another person. I agree that I would want equity with my husband, but it may not be in the way you think. I am not competing with him. It is more that I envy the way his company (not government, but a larger private corporation) treats its

**Out of Architect...**

06.15.11 at 12:12

employees. I wish I could be treated like that in architecture. I'm talking paid relocation, pension plans, profit sharing, multiple bonuses, paid community service days, great healthcare plans, shorter summer work days, college reimbursement etc. etc...

The main cause of envy has to do with the group of people to which we compare ourselves. So my frustrations with architecture are tainted by the people I relate to. My husband would be the primary person I relate to, so I used him as an example. Other close friends and family would be the others I compare to, and their fields are predominantly medical, educational, and technical. The same issues are present with other members of the group.

While this may sound like "excuses", the mental frustration that I feel with the type of work and how it compares to other careers is the basis for why I would choose to leave the field. When comparing to other fields, it just doesn't compete. If there were to be a big change in pay, people might stick it out. There is a company I know of that actually recruits college graduates to do jobs such as making and packing boxes. They are very successful because they pay incredibly well and offer amazing benefits. While the people working there are not thrilled with their day to day tasks, they want to stay. I personally wouldn't work there because I want to like what I do, but their logic for retainment makes sense. It seems that architectural firms do not care much about retainment as there is a flood of architects on the market looking for jobs. When I took my first job in architecture, I actually made less per hour on average than I had as a waitress.

You have been lucky to find a great firm that matches your lifestyle and aspirations and is so close to home for you. I am curious as to whether or not you are married or have children. And if you are a man or woman. If you are renting or have purchased a home.

Before I married I felt able to give my all to work, knowing that somehow it would all pay off. But now that I see that my work will not pay off financially, I question if it is paying off emotionally well enough not to change careers. When in school and working in architecture full time I had blinders on: I hung out with architects, worked with architects, made friends with architects... so I didn't see what else was out there.

I'm sorry you see my question of why men stay in architecture as being silly... I really meant it as a serious question. I think it would be an interesting study. The common view is that there is something wrong with architecture as it relates to women, or that there is something wrong with women as they relate to the architectural workplace. The answer may not be seen easily in the incredibly multi-faceted reasons for why women leave (respect, pay, family, flexibility, a certain coworker...). Perhaps it would be natural for more people to leave the profession, but typically women do so because they are missing some larger desire or pressure to stay that men typically have.

I do love your last line-- while architecture is not highly paid, it is a very respected position. I completely agree. Telling someone you are an architect feels good. It is a sense of identity. It shows accomplishment, artistic ability, and intellect. It feels exclusive.

Perhaps women are more able to part with their sense of professional identity than are men... I do believe there is something here to look at.

Joana,

I agree with your perspective. I left intending to return. My reasons now have more to do with why to go back rather than why to leave. It is interesting how I have been where you were, having similar reasons, but now that I am out a different pull has taken my focus for reasons not to return.

I am very interested to hear about related fields that former architects go into when they leave traditional practice. I have tried Google searches, but what comes up doesn't represent this population that has been-there-done-that and then chooses something else. Besides the completely unrelated work, what fields or types of jobs are former architects moving into?

**Out of it...**

06.15.11 at 12:21

Out of Architect sounds like a whiner - boohoo no older men listens to me. Architecture is never about clocking in and out btwn 9 to 5. If you decided to move to suburbville because of your bread earner slave... Oops I mean husband then it's not like you have no choice. You do. You just want a big house living unsustainably, and your kids growing up behind white picket fences. Urban planning history class? Oh you slept thru that.

**Architect as a profession not a job**

06.15.11 at 03:17

Wonderful essay. We posted your link with our story on Architect Barbie. <http://miletusgroup.com/blog/2011/05/barbie-modular-architect-makes-her-debut/>

**Arch-Plus**

06.15.11 at 05:18

But really, Architect as a profession not a job, you just wanted to provoke Out of Architect with that comment. That was not an educated counterargument, but a contrived dismissal of her situation through your own prejudices. The multi-faceted considerations that Out of Architect talks about have been very similar issues either for myself or for others I know.

**Don't Argue with Idiots**

06.15.11 at 11:43

I also have moved to Suburbville, because I don't like being aggressively approached while walking to my car after working late. Because I want my children to go to school with their mixed income neighbors, not to private schools with others of my social status and income level. I live in a modest newer home, that is very energy efficient compared to the old converted homes in the downtown area. I wanted safe parks to walk my dog. I wanted a sense of community with my neighbors. And I wanted time to spend with my family.

YOU are the problem with the profession. You believe that there is only one lifestyle appropriate for an architect's life. If a woman puts the needs of other family members first then she obviously does not

have a place in this self-absorbed and blindingly idealistic profession. You believe that all the amazing majority of the population that has moved to the suburbs is wrong and you are right. And you are going to bring back the old city one grassroots effort at a time, by efforts like condemning young women architects for their choice of property to purchase. That will surely make them feel welcome in the profession. Your attitude is a poor reflection on our field.

I was actually denied a job because of living in suburbia- they didn't want to hire someone with my personal design values, which they admittedly "determined" by my address on my resume. Never mind that it put us very close to my husband's work, within walking distance to a grocery store, and parks. Never mind that I have worked in New York City and lived another large city without a car. Never mind that I have lived in walk-ups, condos, and apartments and have rented and owned. Did they ask if I was planning on using more maternity leave, no, but my location said "family" all over it. After some justification of why I lived where I did, they seemed to calm a bit, but told me that they still weren't comfortable with my choice of residence. I never saw that one coming.

Architects like them and you don't see the give and take that goes with having more people to think about than yourself. I do not buy into the idea of using one's family's lives to make a statement about what is wrong with other peoples' life choices. There are many reasons why people choose to live where they do. A profession that jabs at and judges young women for not choosing a prescriptive "architect" lifestyle will continue not only to lose them, but to force them out.

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Barbie might have to give up living in her dream house if she becomes an architect... It would be a dream job to design one for someone else though, right? Architects apparently need to live in old urban homes...

**Emily**  
06.15.11 at 12:20

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I would also like to add that last year polls (2010) came out stating that women across all profession make approx. 20% less than men. Which with a profession that already doesn't make enough compared to the effort put in, adds to the overall conflict.

**Jessica**  
06.15.11 at 01:45

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Great project and great article. Thanks to Despina Stratigakos for posing provocative questions and following through with Mattel.

**kelly quinn**  
06.15.11 at 07:02

This is a great piece for us to think and teach with.

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Very well written and an admirable project. She is a definite step forward for little girls.

**Tag Christof**  
06.16.11 at 03:45

We caught Barbie for a tour of Milan when we heard she was becoming an architect. What might she call her practice? And we hope she can avoid the pitfalls of starchitecture...



<http://www.2dmblogazine.it/2011/04/architect-barbie-does-milano/>

Sounds like the described culture often suffocates creativity and enthusiasm. But if women comprise 40% of the architecture grads, then I think the feminine influence in architecture could be the next great design movement! Believe it AIA, and get with it!

**Annie Benzon**  
06.17.11 at 05:30

Remember the movie "Top Gun"? The heroes were the "guy studs", played by Val Kilmer and Tom Cruise, and the great looking lady Phd Astrophysist, played by Kelly McGillies. When the "Top Gun" school was moved for El Toro, CA, to Reno, NV a few years ago, reporters asked who was the best pilot they ever trained. The unanimous choice was a WOMAN. She was Valedictorian from Camarillo High School in Southern California and graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs before being sent to the Top Gun School. She flew support Missions over the Iraq "No Fly Zone". Women have instincts that men don't have. It's often a joke that "women have eyes in back of their heads". It's that they sense the environment their in better than men. Men were trained, since time began, to "bring home the food" and "protect the family". Women were trained to raise offspring and be helpful, and look out for the family and themselves. That's given way in recent decades in the U.S. but it still lingers in some part of the world. Three countries in the Middle East immediately execute any woman caught in adultery. The men aren't even questioned if they do it. Good grief, let's get out of the Dark Ages. Countries that engage in that kind of behavior have to stopped. Period.

**Gregory Parks**  
06.17.11 at 05:53

An interesting statistic I read was on a major university study about medicine, which has been in the news, almost every day in recent months. The study ranked undergraduate subjects, by how many of the applicants from each was accepted into medical schools (by percent of applicants). Turns out the answer is: Architecture. Most people would be very surprised about that, but it makes sense because it takes a lot of self-discipline, and requires "structured thinking", which is what medicine requires, in spades. When a surgeon goes into an operating room, he or she isn't "winging it". There is an incredible number of well-known procedures that they can draw from to understand how to treat the patient. That's what architecture teaches, far more than other subjects.

**Gregory Parks**  
06.17.11 at 06:02

This article greatly reassured me about Barbie choosing architecture, and about Barbie representing women architects, but it did not reassure me in total.

**Greenduck**  
07.05.11 at 11:41

Yes, we need to show that anyone can choose to be anything they will work for, and no, we don't want to add to stereotypes (a pink plan tube - come on, who would buy one of these even if you could!).

I guess my issues are inextricably linked to the Barbie packaging -

when architecture should be about creation and re-use of places and spaces, healthy and responsible use of materials, effective use of energy and support of community in site use, etc, Barbie unintentionally makes it all about the outfit and the accessories.

Brava if this opens an opportunity in the minds of kids who want to be part of building our future world in tandem with our natural environment. Boo-hiss if it sells this choice as easy, stylish, transient or unimportant in any way. It's not about the glasses, folks, it about what you see with them, and what you do to achieve that vision!

It is interesting to see that Architecture is also a 'deadend professional' in the States. Everything that has been said here applies to Australia as well. The same problems and sad outcomes are repeated here also. At my age I greatly regret my decision earlier in life enter the profession and regret even more my decision not to leave when I realised that this path was leading no where.

mmcc

07.12.11 at 07:36

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