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VISION 2020



Design and the Laws of Attraction

Ewing on the softer side of performance and the need to step away from

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developed an early interest in architecture, but a friend of the family was discouraging. “I don’t know how to stand, but the implication was ‘You’re a girl, you can’t do that.’ And I believed him,” she says. “It was more than resentment. Putting aside architecture, Ewing eventually obtained a degree in landscape architecture. She has since added another dimension in the circuitous route that led to her successful and varied career.

During an extended study tour in the French capital, the rich architectural environment inspired her approach to design, and she made the decision to return to the United States and study at the School of Architecture and Design in New York City. “The program focus changed from interior design to landscape architecture somewhere on my flight between Paris and New York,” she recalls. “The architectural environment was perfect for me. I finally realized I could do this, and perhaps do it well.”

Ewing completed graduate work in architecture at Yale University, and once more traveled abroad, winning a Fulbright Fellowship to study Japanese architecture. She later worked in Genoa for Renzo Piano, and in the U.S. where she and her husband became partners at William McDonough and Partners, Va. In 2006, Ewing joined her husband to form [Hays + Ewing Design Studio](#), a firm practicing integrative contemporary design with a core belief in the importance of environmental sustainability. They have led both in their own firm and at [William McDonough + Partners](#) have garnered numerous international architectural awards.

Can you talk about her approach to design.

“We have a strong focus in marrying landscape, architecture, and the environment with an integrative approach. While we are naturally drawn to a modern aesthetic, we honor the lessons of traditional models. We remain process-oriented rather than approaching projects with a preconceived notion of what a building will look like. I believe that the true potential of sustainability is to create an aesthetic language where an aesthetic evolves from the pragmatic.

How do you define beauty?

“The design process is much more complex, unless you’re designing a purely utilitarian building. It’s a lot more like solving a Rubik’s cube, there are so many considerations to weigh and balance. It involves integrating all of them while teasing out an aesthetic that celebrates the functional and ethical elements. I have to make the case for beauty because beauty inspires hope. Beauty is essential to procreation. Flowers attract bees, light attracts moths, and there are so many examples of attraction—which is beauty—is at the root of sustainability.

How do you create beauty out of building science?

“Relying on the laundry list of LEED credits won’t produce good design. A practical approach is to produce a livable habitat. Consider the Pruitt-Igoe public housing complex in St. Louis, which was demolished because it had no soul. It was practical, but not beautiful. I’m very interested in how to merge science and art to create an aesthetic language, but efficiency alone won’t create beauty.

How do you use building science to blend building science with beauty?

“We start with research. We start by developing a response to the site, looking at the climate, solar, and wind characteristics, and social studies as well. We ask what the key performance indicators are. The project is a product of those studies. The Japanese concept of Shakkei, of borrowed scenery, informed one project I led while at William McDonough’s. Located in Banff, Alberta,

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abstract play of roofs that mimic the mountain landscape: The roofs frame the attention to them. Water quality was a major concern and became the practical the building design. Just as the water from the mountains goes to Bow River, our and courtyards; the project represents the aesthetic of water. So, getting back to inception, such as modern or neo-traditional architecture, that we seek to develop a e for each specific site. It's architecture with a sense of place, but not an attempt to rather an innovative response to the environment.

portfolio, your projects seem to respond to social needs, as well.

of the criteria of sustainability and as fundamental to the success of a project. This itself from the laundry list approach. Getting LEED points for good indoor air quality gh to create a healthy building. This is why I believe the additive approach to design is e building must have daylight and access to fresh air, yet that is not enough. nunity, at all scales, is fundamental to happiness, I believe.

e approach is key. The Japanese concept of Ma is something that fascinates us and it ting community. It translates roughly as "gap," "space," or "pause." It's the space the pregnant void. Perhaps this goes back to my psychology degree, but I am keenly e the spaces that allow for human interactions, the spaces that create a transition ublic and private, intimate and social. In architecture I often find it is the void between usness is excited and interaction the richest.

rtunities for community at many levels. In the home, community happens at the family additional dining, living, and kitchen separately in our projects. We always design this tchen at the hub of the house. And happily, community and energy efficiency go hand oining the family gathering spaces in an open plan, we can reduce the overall building ol the spaces the family inhabits.

ive a commencement address, what would you tell the new graduates at Yale?

ole. Design is intentional and good design must be judged on both aesthetic and building science, know your climate and site, and work with these elements to etic. Think of it as cooking: A master chef looking into your larder of sustainable n amazing dish, and not just a nourishing one. Eschew the additive approach for one d beautiful.

launched in 2012, ECOHOME's Vision 2020 program continues in 2013, focusing on ainability: Energy Efficiency + Building Science, Building Design + Performance, stainable Communities, Water Efficiency, Codes, Standards + Rating Systems, Indoor d Economics + Financing. Track our progress all year as our panel of visionary focus- nd leading researchers, practitioners, and advocates share their perspectives on nsuring progress toward sustainable priorities and goals in residential construction The program will culminate in an exclusive Vision 2020 Forum in Washington, D.C., in h a special edition of ECOHOME in Winter 2013. [Click here to see the 2012 Wrap-Up.](#)

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ORGANIZATION:

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