

John Brown

brownj@ucalgary.ca

403 614 8363 call or email for office appointment

Introduction

North American architects have a shameful history of irrelevance in the world of single family housing. Almost all of the profession's involvement has been, and remains, at the extreme high end of the market, creating boutique houses for wealthy patron clients. The two most widely known, and historically significant, attempts by the profession to meaningfully engage in mass market housing for the middle class failed. For a variety of reasons, neither the California Case Study House Program in the 1940's nor Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian House Project in the 1950's captured the imagination of the public or, more significantly, the interest of the residential construction industry. Since then very little of substance has been ventured by the profession and almost nothing has been gained.

As a result, it's estimated that up to 95% of the single family houses built, and being built, in North America have not been designed by an architect. Many have no professional design involvement whatsoever. The result is what the Sierra Club calls the 'Dark Side of the American Dream.' On the surface these houses, and the suburbs in which they sit, appear easy, cheap, and cheerful. Too often, however, this marketing veneer masks a world of thoughtless design, careless construction, and ecological waste that, as we learned from the housing collapse of 2008, has little real enduring value.

The profession's abandonment of the middle class single family house is a gross abrogation of our public responsibility on a cultural, social, and environmental level. Houses are too important to an individual's well-being, too significant a cost for most families, comprise too large a land use in our cities, and have far too big an environmental footprint to be ignored by architects. For too long we have taken the easy way out, treating cookie-cutter suburban housing with disdain without offering any sort of real alternative that makes sense in the lives of the everyday middle class homeowner.

The goal of this seminar course is to explore potential strategies for the profession to meaningfully engage this middle ground - that vast, formless, un-designed place where almost everyone lives.

Objectives

1. To gain an understanding of the current conditions in the housing industry from a financial, material culture, and media perspective.
2. To gain an understanding of the domestic as a conceptual framework, that has influenced design professionals for the past one hundred and fifty years.
3. To gain an awareness of the principles and practices of architectural entrepreneurship and how they can be applied in a residential practice.

Teaching Approach

The class will meet, in general, on Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-2:00. The course will be a combination of lectures, discussions, and project tours. To accommodate the additional time required for off-site project tours, some of the Thursday classes will have an extended length. This additional time will be offset over the term with the cancellation of other class times in order to not exceed the prescribed contact time for the course. A detailed schedule will be provided in class.

Content: Topic Areas

Seminar Presentations:

- Heidegger and the Domestic
- City Legislation and Housing
- Market Drivers in the Housing Market
- The House as Financial Instrument
- Homelessness and Affordable Housing
- The Residential Real Estate Industry

Off-Site Tours:

- Single Family Greenfield Housing
- Custom home Brownfield Housing
- Mid-density Residential Infills
- High-rise Residential Towers
- The High-End Architectural House

Means of Evaluation

Workings in small groups, students will prepare a 60 min presentation and lead a 30 minute discussion on a topic determined by the instructor. Working individually, students will also prepare a major paper on a topic of their choosing and approved by the instructor. Topic details and due dates to be provided in class.

Group Seminar Presentation: 40%
Individual Major Paper: 60%
Total: 100%

Grading Scale

Final grades will be reported as letter grades, with the final grade calculated according to the 4-point range. Assignments will be evaluated by percentage grades, with their letter grade equivalents as shown.

Grade	Grade Point Value	4-Point Range	Percent	Description
A+	4.00	4.00	95-100	Outstanding - evaluated by instructor
A	4.00	3.85-4.00	90-94.99	Excellent - superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter
A-	3.70	3.50-3.84	85-89.99	Very good performance
B+	3.30	3.15-3.49	80-84.99	Good performance
B	3.00	2.85-3.14	75-79.99	Satisfactory performance
B-	2.70	2.50-2.84	70-74.99	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
C+	2.30	2.15-2.49	65-69.99	All final grades below B- are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements.
C	2.00	1.85-2.14	60-64.99	
C-	1.70	1.50-1.84	55-59.99	
D+	1.30	1.15-1.49	50-54.99	
D	1.00	0.50-1.14	45-49.99	
F	0.00	0-0.49	0-44.99	

Notes:

- A student who receives a "C+" or lower in any one course will be required to withdraw regardless of their grade point average (GPA) unless the program recommends otherwise. If the program permits the student to retake a failed course, the second grade will replace the initial grade in the calculation of the GPA, and both grades will appear on the transcript.

Readings

Readings for the course will be provided in class.

Notes:

1. Written work, term assignments and other course related work may only be submitted by e-mail if prior permission to do so has been obtained from the course instructor. Submissions must come from an official University of Calgary (ucalgary) email account.
2. Academic Accommodations. The Academic Accommodations Policy can be found at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy>. It is the students' responsibility to request academic accommodations. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodations and have not registered with Student Accessibility Services, please contact them at 403.220.6019. Students who have not registered with Student Accessibility Services are not eligible for formal academic accommodations. More information about academic accommodations can be found at www.ucalgary.ca/access. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.
3. Plagiarism - Plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Most commonly plagiarism exists when: (a) the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test), (b) parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author, (c) the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or, (d) a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved. While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted. Plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offence. It is recognized that clause (d) does not prevent a graduate student incorporating work previously done by him or her in a thesis. Any suspicion of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean, and dealt with as per the regulations in the University of Calgary Graduate Calendar.
4. Information regarding the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>) and how this impacts the receipt and delivery of course material
5. Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>)
6. Safewalk information (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/safewalk>)
7. Contact Info for: Student Union (<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/page/affordability-accessibility/contact>); Graduate Student representative (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/gsa/>) and Student Ombudsman's Office (<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/page/quality-education/academic-services/student-rights>).