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FOR THE EMERGING ARCHITECT

Being at the start of your career means having alternatives, though for many architects starting out, the options seem limited. CAD for firm A, or model-building for firm B? This month, however, archrecord2 seeks out architects who are creating options for themselves. Whether taking an unconventional path to a conventional career or making up an entirely new job description, the six architects featured this month all Design, Work, Live, and Talk from an individual perspective.

DESIGN

Mike Latham: Mentorless Brooklyn

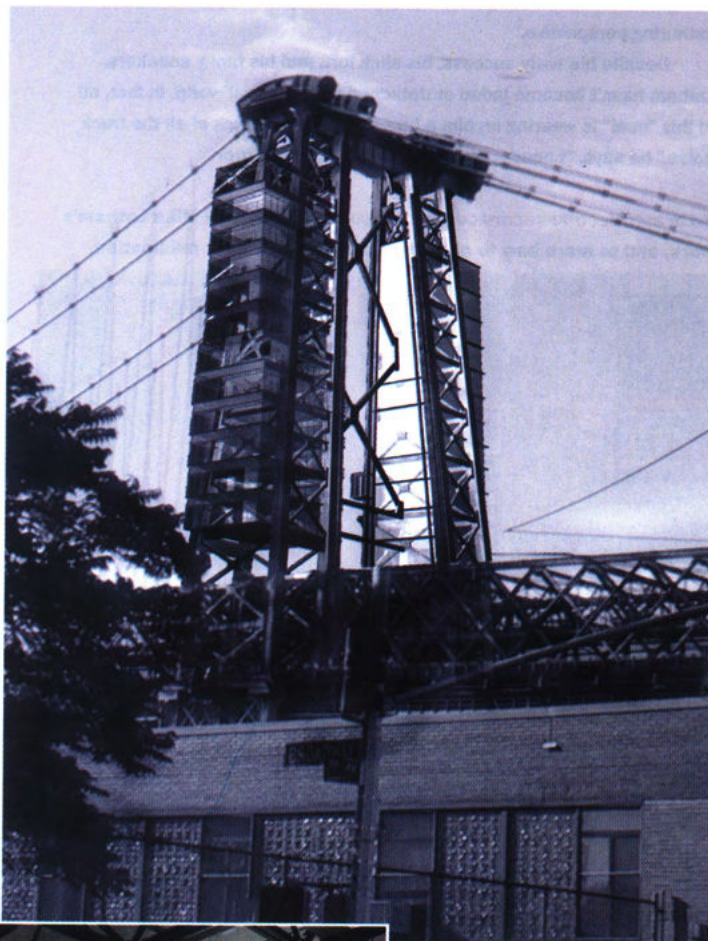


Mike Latham lives and works in a loft in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, in a building four or five fish-stinking, not-yet-quite-postindustrial blocks from the rapidly gentrifying main drag, Bedford Avenue. Latham, who calls his practice the(1999)project, designed his own loft, which is defined by huge rolling glass vitrines, one of which contains an entire guest room on wheels. Others store books, a TV, or snowboarding boots. With the exception of a vintage plastic-and-leather sofa, these vitrines are the space, which is otherwise the bare concrete essence of an artist's once-industrial loft. A product of his neighborhood, Latham lives and works at an intersection: between funky and yuppie; between industrial and artistic; between his trim gray slacks and his high-design sneakers.

Call it the naive idealism of youth—Latham, who only finished his M.Arch. at Columbia a couple of years ago, is only 26—but he can't see why he and his generation aren't poised to influence the world, or at least the world of architecture, in a palpable way. "I'm not a huge public activist," he says, "but some of my architect friends and I are seriously thinking about doing something to oppose this World Trade Center problem. We're the ones who are going to have to live with it. I don't understand why there isn't a call for an international design competition. It's what would happen in any other city in the world. This is one of the biggest urban design projects of the century, and I don't believe that we're so impotent that we can't do anything about it."

But what sets Latham apart from other young architects who hold on to their ideals is that he has set a path for himself to fulfill them. Instead of working for an established architect right out of school, Latham set up on his own, disregarding established procedure for what, to him, seemed like the more logical path.

"What I've picked up, I've picked up by doing," he says. "It's probably going to make it quite difficult for me to be licensed—though I may get licensed as quickly as the next person—because, although every time I work on a project I collaborate with an architect, mine is not a process that is officially approved of."



Williamsburg Bridge Lofts, Brooklyn, 2000

the(1999)project. Inspired by his own loft's view of the bridge, Latham projected a series of lofts (above and left) stacked on the support towers of the bridge.

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Latham has made his atypical career work by looking outside of pure design, to models of business that actually generate business. And he has made work for himself by having a physical product to market. He has found that having built work, even if it's furniture or one of the functional, technological sculptures he makes, has been an invaluable tool for marketing himself.

"That really is the mystery of starting out," he says. "Where do you get clients from? I think you get clients by doing. A lot of people have really good ideas on paper or in the computer, but you really need to get your work made and put it out there."

And then there's the story about him that ran in *The New York Times Magazine's Home Design* supplement. Having your work on the cover of a glossy insert in a major newspaper certainly can't hurt from a client-gathering perspective.

Despite his early success, his slick loft, and his funky sneakers, Latham hasn't become jaded or detached from the real world. In fact, all of this "cool" is wearing on him a bit personally: "I'm sick of all the truck noise," he says. "I need a real apartment." *Kevin Lerner*

Go to architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2 for more on Mike Latham's work, and to learn how to submit your own projects for publication.



Belen Apartment, Brooklyn, 2001
the(1999)project. Latham designed this apartment, based on modular components, for a friend.



1999 Loft, Brooklyn, 2001
the(1999)project. Latham's home and office, an industrial loft on the Brooklyn waterfront, was built for \$15 per square foot.

WORK

Five designers forge hybrid careers

Redefining "architect"

So lately you've begun to wonder about your career in architecture. The economy has taken a turn for the worse, clients are hard to find, and those plumbing details that you spent a good part of last night finishing aren't exactly what you bargained for after three years of grad school. Time for a change?

In this month's Work section, *archrecord2* searches for life beyond the CAD station. We've found five architects who show that a degree in architecture has far more to offer than a working knowledge of construction drawings. They've ventured outside the boundaries of traditional practice, engaged other disciplines, and have resurfaced in the fields of writing, animation, film, and fashion. One architect has even found himself working in outer space.

Some have done so out of necessity. A slow economy often offers no other alternatives, and a job outside the profession is better than no job at all. Others were simply eager to explore new territory and delve into experiences that might, in the end, spark new ideas and perspectives. In a

world where ideas and meanings constantly evolve, and information travels with the click of a button, it is almost impossible to not want to peek your head around the corner and see what else is out there.

We can learn a lot from these stories. Whether their paths were intentional or not, all five designers seem to demonstrate that venturing outside the profession can provide invaluable insight into—and understanding of—what is within it. And who knows what new ideas their experiences might inspire? Through their discoveries we may also find solutions, new perspectives, new challenges, and—if we look hard enough—perhaps even a new direction for the future.

Profiles of these five architects—journal editor Mimi Zeiger; game designer Ed Keller; clothing entrepreneur Joe Day; floral designer Mako Otaki; and NASA architect Garrett Finney—can all be found on *archrecord2's* Web site. Maybe you'll find some ideas for your own career.

Christina V. Rogers

To read the rest of this article, visit architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2.

On the Web, *archrecord2* presents an ongoing dialogue among young architects. The interactive forum addresses topics as diverse as the ARE and what inspired readers to become architects in the first place. Click on TALK at architecturalrecord.com/archrecord2.