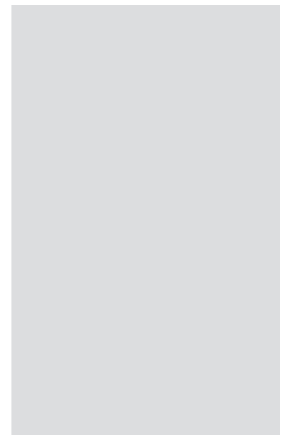


DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE



**LENHARDT
RODGERS**

Architecture + Interiors

People Focused Design

WHAT IS PURPOSEFUL DESIGN

“Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design.”

Charles Eames

Every architectural design project has meaning—a reason why the building is planned, or its purpose. While every design has a purpose, “purposeful design” blends form and function to offer meaning to a building’s users. Using design elements like light, texture, movement, shape, and balance, purposeful design decisions are deliberate, not just for show. A purposefully-designed building isn’t trendy, and is equally as functional as it is beautiful, yet provides value beyond aesthetics.

Walk through any town and you can easily identify churches, homes, offices, and other building types. Every building should be viewed based on its shape and material usage in response to its users’ needs. The ability of a design to meet users’ needs gives the design purpose. Where a building’s intention is apparent in its completed appearance, the building as a whole provides meaning and purpose. Materials used on and within the building can also give it meaning and establish design principles that become standard for future designs.

The goal of purposeful design, then, is to create architecture that is wholly responsive to its users, site, context, and environment.



BLENDING PURPOSE WITH DESIGN

People are generally attracted to certain spaces over others because of particular qualities that make it more comfortable, functional, or aesthetically pleasing. From strategically-placed windows that provide natural light, to spatial adjacencies that allow convenient or comfortable movement from room to room, purposeful design provides a feeling of comfort and familiarity.

Spaces that speak for themselves—that demonstrate the designer’s clear vision for the space and naturally inform guests of their purpose—exhibit purposeful design. Purposeful design cannot be achieved through aesthetic embellishments. If any element of a design does not contribute to the quality of the proposed environment or its users, it will not be purposeful.

In the context of form follows function, purposeful design generally follows three key principles:

- Inherent usability: A design that is as user-friendly as it is distinctive and attractive.
- Familiarity: A design that speaks for itself.
- Timeless: A design lacking trendiness that will aesthetically withstand the test of time.

Many architects struggle with the term “purposeful design,” as every design has purpose and includes detailed programming to meet a client’s needs. Building programs must accommodate function, movement, service, and operations—everything for which the design is created. In this way, “responsive design” may serve as the foundation of purposeful design, as architects must ensure that a design is responsive to a client’s needs before it can deliver purpose. However, the design becomes a purpose design when it not only responds to the client’s program, but to the people who will use the spaces.



The need for an architectural design may be attached to a client or user mission: maybe for a senior living community, office development, or religious space. A church pastor will have different needs than the parishioners, requiring the designer to understand the needs of multiple users. A building developer plans for a building that will provide longevity, while a user may see the space for its safety, convenience, or comfort. Each space within the building will also have its own purpose and needs. In this way, designers must have a thorough knowledge of who a building’s proposed or intended users are and meet the needs of every user.



TRANSLATING MISSION INTO ARCHITECTURE

When architects start to design a project, they must first understand the client’s mission—or the project’s “why,” then translate that mission into architecture. Will the design be applied to a faith-based senior living community, place of worship, or an affordable housing community? Information gathering sessions held with project stakeholders, including the client and end users, will reveal the “why” and the “who” that will be served with the design. The client may be an owner, staff, or board of directors, while end users may comprise residents, staff, patients, or parishioners. These sessions are crucial to not only understand the client’s mission but also identify the users’ needs.

But designers should not mistake a design’s mission for its goals. For example, an organization’s mission may be to promote peace and justice, while the design goals may be energy efficiency, affordability, and to provide a safe community. Architects must create designs that prioritize goals to achieve the organization’s mission, while making the ultimate design purposeful for its users.

Purposeful design is not limited to functional or operational architectural elements alone. Interior design must be part of any design process from the start—including master planning. Engaging interior design professionals early can inform space configuration, circulation, furniture planning and placement, square footage, and building footprint. Interior designers can also ensure a simplistic and modest design in tune with nature that gives the space its purpose and meaning.



WELL DEFINED PROGRAM CREATES PURPOSE

A building's program is critical to purposeful design, emphasizing the importance of the design team, client, and user collaboration.

A design investigation should begin with the most significant project goals. Purposeful design should integrate the flexibility of a building program while accommodating the environment and bringing context to the community at large. Buildings and spaces should be relatable to the average user, consistent with ideas, and fundamentally performative.

Most design projects emerge from a master plan based upon a project's goals. As the building design progresses, it is important to revisit the original goals to ensure that the project remains on track. Is the client's interest in sustainability still being met despite new project developments? How can the budget be modified to continue the goal of serving the low-income population? These targets should be recalled regularly to ensure that the design achieves the originally identified objectives. New goals can be added with the full understanding of their impact on the overall project and existing goals.

The goals of a building design can be guided by its program. What spaces or rooms are needed to fulfill client goals? Where designated spaces are not yet identified, consider

what activities are envisioned in a building or space: is there need for large or small gathering spaces—or both? Wellness, meditation, or food service? Are there activities that can share the same space? It is vital that each space carries meaning and contributes to the building's broader flow without excess and redundancy. To deliver a purposeful design, there should



be no space within a building that does not add meaning to the overall design.

To create a program, architects may design successive plans relevant to the building context, environment, or zoning, which can guide circulation diagrams used to create a building's overall shape. The designer must then prioritize these defining elements to arrive at a purposeful building design.

SPECIALIZED USES

Purposeful design is particularly applicable to spaces serving those with special needs, including the physically impaired and behaviorally challenged. Senior living communities are often considered primary consumers of deliberate design to accommodate users through building accessibility, material finish and durability, spatial relation, and use of select materials to accommodate sensitivity to light, sound, and other senses. However, these design considerations are equally applicable to programs serving people with autism. Such populations as these often have heightened sensitivity resulting in an intolerance to “normal” design conditions.



International and Federal agencies and, in most cases States and Municipalities have specific codes and regulations to address those with physical, audial, and visual needs within a design environment. Purposeful design will go beyond these to design for the finer aspects of the occupant’s special needs. For example, AARP has begun advocating for the creation of universal streets

and sidewalks to not only expand opportunities for the mobile-impaired and aging population, but to encourage movement among the healthy, children, and those pushing strollers or shopping carts. They are considering all people who use streets.



INCORPORATING PURPOSEFUL DESIGN

Purposeful design inherently carries elements of sustainability, cost efficiency, and are sensitive to maintenance issues.

Creating spaces that carry purpose and eliminate impractical design elements will deliver cost efficiency to owners. Today's purposefully designed spaces often carry eco-friendly design elements, taking advantage of natural resources such as sun, shade, and wind.

For example, a design may reduce interior lighting by including large windows to allow natural light to fill a space, or include strategically placed windows that provide warmth in winter months and shade and air flow in summer months, reducing the load on the HVAC systems. Though these strategic design elements may not be apparent to the casual observer, they can have a significant impact on the overall feeling of a space and become vital to its purpose. Most often, sustainable design solutions are not only environmentally friendly, but also long-lasting due to the inherent comfort they provide the occupant.

Given the decisions required as part of purposeful design, architects must understand a client's time frame and when future renovations may be needed. Many owners base design decisions on up-front costs and immediate affordability, not giving due consideration to operational cost savings that may be achieved throughout a building's lifecycle.



MEANINGFUL BUILDINGS

Purposeful design is a commitment to create spaces with meaning and that leave a lasting impression upon their users and inhabitants. To create purposeful designs, the design team—including clients, end users, and other stakeholders—must identify a clear vision, mission, and goal to achieve the design. Purposeful design results in meaningful buildings that individually demonstrate environmental and cultural relevancy and offer a shared sense of purpose.





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