## Thinking Into Other Boxes

BY DAVID ZACH



If there is a map of the professions, then the boundaries for the Architect have been precisely drawn. We know what's on the inside and we know that everyone else is on the outside. Boundaries keep the risks low and the knowledge specific. But are the boundaries too specific? They help keep the wild things out, but do the inside things become too tame? Tame things take no risks and make no plans. Tame professions are always in danger of being boring.

Architects have less excuse for being boring than any other profession out there. And that's the problem: too much of the profession isn't out there. It has retreated inside of those carefully plotted boundaries. It's safely inside of a predictable organizational box, and left out of most everybody else's conversations.

So it's time to look away from your screens, dust off your pencils, and draw some new conclusions by thinking into other boxes. Add intellectual depth to your thinking the way you do to your drawings: use multiple-point perspective. See the world through the well-trained eyes of an architect, but also try seeing from other angles, as each has a valid and valuable perspective. Invite the points of view of non-architects. When you think into other boxes, you can see the greater context of your problems and the greater reach of your solutions. No one is better qualified than an architect to connect across boundaries because you already do – by connecting art and science, form and function, strength and beauty.

By thinking into other boxes, architecture becomes an emerging profession. Architect and educator Billie Faircloth, AIA, believes, "All materials are emerging materials." There's so much more about everyday materials that we don't yet see, but we can if we take new perspectives. AIA President Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA, talks of the value of reemerging professionals who stepped back from architecture and then returned, bringing with them the wealth of additional perspectives. Architect and educator Maia Small created the fascinating Tumblr list "Architects of Other Things," showing people who trained as architects and then famously did other things. They prove that thinking into other boxes works and creates value.

In 2012 I surveyed AIAS students, asking: "If you don't become an architect, what else might you do?" Their answers generated this word cloud. It reveals that emerging professionals see design as the center of connected professions. They will bring design to the work at hand, no matter what work their hands do. Licensed or not, gripping a tool or holding a stylus, they will be designers.

Connecting with these young professionals will help this profession to emerge in new ways and to reemerge in time-tested ways. Their talent must not be boxed into just one line of work. They will rethink boundaries and re-enchant the world with design connected outside of today's boxes. They will not be boring – and that may be the most exciting thing about the future of architects.

David Zach is a futurist who frequently speaks to the design professions. He was the 2011–13 Public Director on the AIA board. In 2012 he received an AIAS Presidential Citation for his work with emerging professionals. His website is www.davidzach.com

