



Wendy Bertrand

## If I Knew Then What I Know Now...

Epilogue from *Enamored with Place: As Woman + As Architect*  
eyeonplace press, San Francisco (2012)

When I was first starting out in architecture, the reality of being female in a male-dominated profession didn't appear to be that big a problem. Despite discouraging literature on the subject, I somehow felt I had the ability to overcome any obstacle. Perhaps my optimism was a carryover from the days of my youth, when I played tennis with the men at the La Jolla Community Center and joined the all-male Model A Car Club. Powered by this optimism throughout most of my career, I pushed confidently forward, never quite grasping how tenacious the roots of sexism were in my chosen field or how deeply entrenched they were in society as a whole. It would be years before I realized the degree to which these thickly networked roots hinder women architects from looking at "place" with the concerns of women in mind.

I suppose I believed architecture was inherently neutral; it just currently happened to be filled with men, and we women merely had to prove ourselves before our presence would be widely accepted—even appreciated. In the meantime, I learned, researched, and persisted.

I'd read that male interviewers tended to give male candidates an hourlong interview while giving women candidates only 20 minutes because men often ran out of things to say to women. Knowing this, my approach was to keep the conversation going, reasoning that equal time would give me a much better chance of being hired.

As I advanced in federal service, my reading focused on how to succeed as a woman in a man's world—in other words, how to copy the skills, qualities, and mannerisms that effective men demonstrated, such as spreading my arms to take up more space when sitting down at a meeting, and claiming more status, pushing myself to stand and speak up, dressing as smartly as my budget would allow, and trying not to let foul play discourage me. I even tried smoking a pipe to appear confident, strong, and able to do what I saw male co-workers do. (Some of the bold gestures were helpful, but the pipe smoking didn't last.) I went to coffee with the men, invited myself out to lunch with the boys, and played tennis with my male colleagues. All of this was done to combat the fact that the men tended to share information with one another when they were in social groups, and I didn't want to be left out. At the same time, I defended my status as a woman whenever I felt slighted and encouraged the women around me to be all they could be. These strategies felt reasonable to me at the time, and I enthusiastically applied myself to my work tasks, trusting that my efforts eventually would pay off.

*But I didn't know then what I know now.*

While I was busy holding off the discrimination I perceived above the waterline, the full masculinity of architecture lay out of sight, hidden like the underwater depths of an iceberg. It did strike me as unreasonably strange that my female colleagues and I were referred to as *women architects*; I didn't understand why the word *woman* was added, since our femaleness was obvious. Due to recent research,<sup>1</sup> my understanding now includes why being female *and* an architect is still considered an oxymoron.

For centuries, women were often the crafters of dwellings, structures, teepees, yurts, and grass huts. Thus, it seems perfectly reasonable that as the practice of making buildings developed into a profession, women would have taken an active interest in architecture. But, from the profession's inception, male architects have unfortunately defined the institution in terms of a male point of view, male history,

---

1. This essay is intended to share my reflections on my career, almost like a case study, rather than being a scholarly paper. I use footnotes when I feel they might be useful to readers who would like to know more of the details behind general statements. I also use footnotes for sources of ideas I recently learned from others. In each case, I give the author and title of the source. Please check the selected bibliography for more information.

male social privilege, and male social norms. In other words, the profession of architecture doesn't just lack women; the profession *was born masculine*.

As a result, the profession of architecture has developed conservatively, its male founders instilling their chauvinistic values into architecture's educational programs, tests, apprenticeships, and work-culture taboos. While I find it perfectly natural that men would have instilled some of their own values into the profession they populated, their outright resistance to the presence of women defies worldly wisdom. Nevertheless, over the years, men have given all sorts of strange and funny reasons as to why women should not practice architecture:

- Architecture is damaging to the female reproductive function, the prime responsibility of women.
- Men need to concentrate in school and remain undistracted by women.
- Women don't have the ability to practice architecture.
- Men don't want to take orders from a woman.
- Women aren't willing to commit to architecture as a total lifestyle.
- Women don't want to commit to the travel required by international projects.
- Women can make it through school (half the students in my class were women), but then the competition, especially in math and engineering, knocks them out of the profession.

This list may appear out of date, even ridiculous, but its spirit lives on in the thriving undercurrent of opposition to the success of women in the profession—even after more than 100 years of women practicing as professional architects. True enough, the percentage of women architects in the United States has steadily and slowly increased in fuzzy<sup>2</sup> numbers, but those numbers are not accurate and they don't tell enough of the story. Although the impact of being female in a male-dominated profession has changed somewhat over

---

2. I say fuzzy because the numbers are not kept systematically on a national scale. Also, the numbers for students are better, at 40 to 50 percent, and quoted more often than for working architects. Since many who study architecture don't get registered, that group is estimated at about 7 percent but hard to know. Fuzzy then because some people use 20 percent; others use 13 percent or a combination. I estimate that there are about 140,000 people practicing architecture in the United States today.

time,<sup>3</sup> the day-to-day reality is distressing and unnecessarily negative, both for society and for the individuals who are impacted. Admitting this sad fact only intensifies my determination to understand women's long struggle to be free of the sex-linked roles that have been male defined and controlled. I have especially wanted to understand why this basic limitation continues to be so significant, to the point where traditional architects have all but lost sight of including gender concerns and important social issues in design decisions that affect the making of place.

Like many professionals, I lost touch with what new scholars were writing and teaching about the status of women in architecture. Catching up has been very rewarding because the new literature digs deeply into how we architects are educated, how we practice, how the current design priorities usually ignore gender, how the lack of equity in design impacts society, and how there is a strong tendency to take for granted long-accepted practices without question when we should instead be exploring appropriate goals for our time in history.

The more reading I did, the more I worried about a growing trend within the Organization of Women Architects and Design Professionals (OWA) to avoid feminist issues. Since many books are now available about women and architecture, I decided to see if a few OWA members would like to join me in reading and discussing books that linked women and architecture. I made an official proposal for the first OWA Book Circle at the annual business meeting in 2010 and was delighted that the circle filled up quickly. We began with longtime OWA member Inge Horton's freshly published book, *Early Women Architects in the San Francisco Bay Area: The Lives and Works of Fifty Professionals 1890–1951*, not only for the content but because I wanted to highlight and celebrate

---

3. Marguerite Wykoff, "The Outlook for Women in Architecture and Engineering." Wykoff reports that 477 women, or 2.3 percent, out of 20,000 total architects practiced in 1939. Also of interest is that all 34 schools of architecture reported they had at least one woman student, and the total added up to 21 percent of undergraduates and 15 graduate students being female, or 914 women, twice that employed in 1940 (page 146). The author suggests that the independence of architecture makes it advantageous to women, who could work from home and still have a family. The article ends with the claim that architecture is demanding and satisfying. (This claim comes right after the article says that there was a civil service exam in 1940 that two women passed for assistant architect positions in federal service. Sixteen positions were filled but none by women.)

her contribution to women's history. Horton's rigorous research uncovered many contemporaries of California's best-known pioneer woman architect, Julia Morgan. We agreed that becoming aware that Morgan wasn't alone was relevant to our understanding of women's history in architecture. More than 50 women were practicing architecture during her lifetime; although they were less famous, they pursued parallel paths that were equally interesting and commonly rockier, and they occasionally moved beyond private practice into public housing, planning, or teaching.

The OWA Book Circle went on to read Professor Leslie Weisman's *Discrimination by Design*, which was an exposé written from a serious feminist perspective, documenting the ways in which social issues in building design are presently being addressed, as well as those that still need attention. We then read *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, by historian Alice T. Friedman, a delightful look at the unique architectural programs resulting from design requests made by several extraordinary female clients whose modern houses were designed by famous architects. Public awareness of how these women influenced architecture has been eclipsed until now, even though their homes have been well covered and well visited.

Gender is one element of a person's identity—yet this fact is often overshadowed by the multitude of pressures for women in architecture. Architectural theorist, professor, and author Catherine Ingraham (1998) has suggested that sexual identity is part of the original primal sexual/spatial equation that humans formed for property, originally owned by men and shared with women in exchange for sex. This has resulted in an automatic linking of male identity and architecture to property and to the men who own, develop, and protect it. Although I had not thought of this specific connection, I am aware that American women were not allowed to own land or buildings until relatively recently and that, globally, women still rarely do. As a result, I would say, our identity is not tied to property in the same way that male identity is.

From its Renaissance beginnings, Western architecture has primarily concentrated on the public, civic, and political role of buildings and traditionally been commissioned by powerful patriarchs and institutions. This *public* aspect of architecture—historically not a place for women—is another reason why men in the early years of French architectural education<sup>4</sup> determined that architecture was unsuitable for

---

4. Meredith L. Clausen, "The École des Beaux-Arts: Toward a Gendered History."

women. Sadly, this unwarranted paradigm was adopted in many regions of the world and continues to exert its stifling influence.

For those who think that women have been incorporated into the workplace without a hiccup, problem, or struggle, let me mention playwright Theresa Rebeck's *What We're Up Against* (the world premier play produced by Magic Theatre San Francisco, 2011), a play bringing home some of the "self-worth drama" faced today by women working in architectural offices. At first, I thought her title was from the female perspective, but it works both ways. The key line of the title is actually spoken by the senior "old boy" who is trying to hold the traditional system of power in place. This older fellow loudly complains about "what we're up against," venting his frustration about the way young women in the office want to get right to work, take responsibility, and see results, without paying their dues to the established order of seniority or playing the power games so well understood by men. Rebeck shows a newly hired woman "up against" the common tactic of being assigned insignificant work, which frustrates her. This happened to me in 1991, and it was home-hitting to see it onstage in 2011.

What is going on here? Shulamith Firestone (1970) wrote about how the reproduction of the species cost women dearly because the division of labor was institutionalized by men to free them up to do the business of the world. She welcomed the technology available for women to take control of their bodies to free themselves from the tyranny of the traditional division of labor based on a sexual class system. This year, 2011, is the 163rd anniversary of the first Women's Rights Conference, which was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. While today we can see observable progress toward what is often called social justice, Firestone reminds us—and we seem to need to be reminded often—that any privileged group with power over another group will not give up that power without a struggle.

Although holding on to power is the most obvious reason why women still don't have the kind of equality we want, I think Leonard Schlain (2003), a medical doctor and humanist thinker, offers another interesting take on the current lopsided condition of the sexes. He questions the widespread and almost unconscious misogyny lingering in our species. His theory is that women have evolved differently from men in their sexuality. Men are still very much driven by their sexual instincts and urges, while women have evolved to reflect on the consequences of sexual behavior because we have died from childbirth, have

had fewer resources, and have become burdened with too many offspring and limited earning power. According to Schlain, this gap builds resentment in many men, who take out their frustrations on women through abuse, discrimination, and domination, in spite of widespread modern lip service to the value of gender equity.

This theory doesn't sit right with my editor, Lisa Zuré, because men seem to look down on and disrespect (and persecute) women who are sexually accessible or who enjoy sexual freedom. She thinks there is a deeper misogyny based on self-loathing and a general disdain for and fear of women, stemming from the "world view" of "Western Civilization." Lisa mentioned to me that in ancient Greece, the rule was that you should never have sex with an equal—only with a subordinate, which a wife was at the time!

This is all so messy and tangled. Yet both men and women freely admit that architecture is a male-dominated profession, as if everyone automatically understands what that entails—much in the same way we assume that everyone knows what *global warming* means. Some feminist theorists point out that the profession of architecture is so masculine that women architects feel an ongoing anxiety yet are unaware of the reasons for their discomfort. This anxiety shows up in different ways. One way is to try not to stand out as female.

"When I decided upon architecture, I resolved that, because there were so few women in the profession, my efforts should bear no sign of the touch of a woman's hand: I was not hoping for that kind of distinction."

—Marcia Mead (1931)<sup>5</sup>

"Subtle qualities such as graciousness, livability and charm, harmony, restfulness, peace, and homelikeness ... are often forgotten in the so-called perfect garden ... because they are feminine qualities, and unimportant ..."

—Mary Lou Drosten (1938)<sup>6</sup>

---

5. Marcia Mead, "Women's Versatility in Arts Enriches Field of Architecture" in the *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1931. Note that her name as author was followed by: "Member of American Institute of Architects and National Housing Association." Despite this cautious approach, Mead constructively spoke out for women to be active members of the profession.

6. Mary Lou Drosten, "The Keystone National Fraternity of Women Architects (March 1938)," in Inge Schaefer Horton's *Early Women Architects of the San Francisco Bay Area: The Lives and Works of Fifty Professionals 1890–1951*, p. 44.

“The gender issues surrounding architecture are extraordinarily complex and frequently highly emotionally charged. Even the title of this book generated controversy: The original title, *The Female Architect*, was rejected because it highlighted the fact that the architects whose work is featured here are women, when most want to be considered just as architects.”

—Maggie Toy (2001)<sup>7</sup>

“In an atmosphere that was the opposite of Hollywood, we were there *teaching at the University of California* [italics added] for our brains and God forbid we should use any womanly wiles to succeed in our careers. I sacrificed my femininity and never let people see the full person that I am.”

—Clare Cooper Marcus (2010)<sup>8</sup>

Paradoxically, although many women architects feel compelled to downplay their femaleness, I dare to speak for many when I say that women as a rule don't rely on their work to validate their femaleness in the same way that men use work to validate their maleness. Just the opposite—most workingwomen don't want their gender getting more attention than their work. This dilemma of being female and a working professional is complicated but worth contemplating. During an excellent interview with Marcia Feuerstein (2002), Susana Torre, an admirable architect, educator, and writer, discussed attempts to sidetrack her interest in women in architecture: “Many male colleagues and former professors had warned me that the exhibition (“Women in American Architecture,” 1977) would ‘brand’ me: I would no longer be seen as a real designer.” Feuerstein clarified with, “You were warned that if you were identified as a ‘woman architect,’ the ‘woman’ would obscure your work as a serious ‘architect.” “Yes” answered Torre, continuing, “In the late 70s, such an exhibition *and book* [italics added] was disturbing to many people. Those who wished me well thought that all my aspirations as an architectural designer and practitioner would be diminished because of my association with this project.”

In the introduction to *Women in American Architecture* (1977), Torre writes about prevailing issues related to being a woman architect. For example, one common comment from men was that there were no

7. Maggie Toy, ed., *The Architect: Women in Contemporary Architecture*.

8. Clare Cooper Marcus, *Iona Dreaming: The Healing Power of Place*, p. 217. Professor Marcus taught for 30 years at the College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.



great<sup>9</sup> women architects, insinuating that women were not recognized and so not up to the task. I am glad to know that no one can use that excuse anymore. Along with many other awards to women architects since 1977, two women have received the top architectural prize. Even many architects don't know that in 2004 Zaha Hadid (an Iraqi-born British architect) became the first woman laureate to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize—\$100,000 and a bronze medallion from the Hyatt Foundation—known as the highest honor in architecture. National Public Radio's Edward Lifson didn't make a big deal of Hadid's gender when he reported the news; he just noted she was the first woman and the 25<sup>th</sup> architect to win the annual prize since its creation. However, when Hadid won, Clay Risin of the *New Republic* loudly criticized her win, calling it more politically correct than deserving, on the grounds that she hadn't built enough. I read some of this volley and backlash on the Internet.

With these kinds of reactions to highly accomplished females, not to mention all the everyday jabs, setbacks, and missed opportunities experienced by everyday architects, it is not surprising that discussions of gender are often perceived negatively by women—who feel put on the spot, overly scrutinized, or totally dismissed—while men neutrally and naturally continue to see themselves as the norm, the default. I understand that most women would prefer to drop the “woman” in “woman architect” and not dwell on gender; otherwise, they would start calling architects who are male “men architects.” But whenever I hear a woman say, “I have never been discriminated against,” I think she either is unaware of what discrimination is or feels too embarrassed to admit it. Maybe she has done nothing in architecture to make her stand out as a woman, or perhaps she has stayed within the pseudo-neutral boundaries of the discipline. This is not to say that women don't want

---

9. “Great” is defined by mainstream traditional values, usually based on originality, and art-as-object and image-making criteria, rather than on a community's social well-being. It is not widely known, but the California Women in Environmental Design (CWED), a short-lived organization (1990–1994) seeded from the Organization of Women Architects, the Association of Women Architects in Los Angeles, and the Women in Architecture of San Diego, used a custom nomography to come up with an innovative evaluation graph to judge architectural values much differently than is typically done. Karen Van Dorn published the evaluation nomography in February 1991 after it was presented at the CWED 1991 conference, which I attended. It is listed at the International Archive of Women Architects as record MS-1990-059.

to be appreciated and acknowledged for what they do at work. Take the renowned architect Denise Scott Brown, who felt rightly slighted at not being recognized for work done in partnership with her husband, Robert Venturi. Apparently, even after her husband wrote to the media, insisting that they highlight her full contribution, writers continued to underscore the firm's work as his. And so did the Pritzker Architecture Prize committee in 1991, when they awarded their prize only to Robert Venturi, although Denise Scott Brown had been his architectural partner since 1968.<sup>10</sup>

Try as they may to downplay the fact that they are female, women architects continue to encounter professional hindrances in a variety of direct and indirect ways. For instance, a woman architect is often asked to play a subordinate role, designing only the kitchen or calling-out colors, rather than designing entire projects. I personally didn't use the strategy of deflecting my femaleness, femininity, or feminist concerns during my career. Although I will never know how much my authentic overt behavior helped or slowed my success, I do believe I lived my values as I saw them. I didn't see my female identity in conflict with my way of acknowledging the importance of equity for women; yet the friction of discrimination definitely impaired my professional growth and satisfaction. As much as I wanted to progress up the career ladder and enjoy recognition for my achievements, I also wanted to improve things for women in general, retain my feminine self, and be a good single parent. My mother was aware of these issues and lived her life as independently as possible, but she was also quiet about sexism, so I had little guidance for accomplishing these goals. Creative trial and error worked some of the time. Thirty years ago, when I felt that I was making satisfactory headway, I purposely shared my struggles and triumphs openly with my daughter, in the hope that my road map could serve as a reference for her own journey.

Not long ago, Rachel, a younger architect and OWA member, said to me, "Wendy, you were a trailblazer!" I was genuinely taken aback. It had never occurred to me to use that phrase. I never thought of myself as a trailblazer, since I was among other colleagues in the Organization of Women Architects and Design Professionals who also were keen on making it in a man's world by supporting one another, filtering out what we felt was sexism, and working together

---

10. Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*, p. 207.

on whatever we could improve. In looking back, I now realize we were on the right trail. We were enthusiastically trimming away at the obstacles and clipping blatant barriers, without paying much attention to our path's direction or how much wider the path needed to be enlarged.

Today we know more about that trail because of dedicated researchers (usually female) scouting latent sources, drilling for details, and investigating the early history of women architects. They have provided us with books from the United States (1977,<sup>11</sup> 2008,<sup>12</sup> 2010<sup>13</sup>), Finland (1983),<sup>14</sup> Germany and beyond (1987),<sup>15</sup> New Zealand and Australia (2002),<sup>16</sup> Canada (2000<sup>17</sup> and 2008<sup>18</sup>), the United Kingdom (2003),<sup>19</sup> and France (2010).<sup>20</sup> Note that these newly published histories provide a solid and permanent foundation for current students who want to understand the past, strengthening them as they prepare to continue the struggle. The bulk of this noteworthy and supportive history was unfortunately not available during my education, but I enjoy reading about it, even at this relatively senior point in my career. The international range of these historical facts helps us to realize that despite so much blazing, remarkable women still have to cope with many of the same social obstacles, as well as newly understood systemic hurdles, on the trail today.

Perhaps we need a shortcut, as the existing trail resists clearing.

History helps, but gender difference is much more than women standing on a broad historical foundation, mimicking masculine savvy or overriding anxiety rooted in ancient cultural structure. There is more.

---

11. Susana Torre, ed., *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*.

12. Sarah Allaback, *The First American Women Architects*.

13. Inge Schaefer Horton, *Early Women Architects of the San Francisco Bay Area: The Lives and Work of Fifty Professionals 1890–1951*.

14. Museum of Finnish Architecture, *Profiles: Pioneering Women Architects from Finland*.

15. Union Internationale de Femmes Architects, German Chapter, *The History of Women Architects Catalogue: A First Survey Starting in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1987).

16. Julie Willis and Bronwyn Hanna, *Women Architects in Australia: 1900–1950*.

17. Annmarie Adams and Peta Tancred, *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession*.

18. Joan Grierson, *For the Record: The First Women in Canadian Architecture*.

19. Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke, eds., *Women's Places: Architecture and Design, 1860–1960*.

20. Meredith L. Clausen, "The École des Beaux-Arts," pp. 153–161.

What I want to make clear is that the feminine gender difference does not mean women are *inferior*; however, it might mean we *all* need to work fewer hours and redefine childrearing norms and sex roles in the family. It might also mean increasing social dimensions and underlining values within the profession and the built environment.

In particular, the issue of “long” and “inflexible or family unfriendly working hours” may be a specific roadblock for women, especially in an age when nuclear families (the man works and the woman is a homemaker) make up only 15 percent of current American families; the others are nontraditional households (two working parents or single working parents, for example). The US Census Bureau in November 2009 noted that in 2007 there were approximately 13.7 million single parents in the United States, and those parents were responsible for raising 21.8 million children (approximately 26 percent of children under 21 in the United States today). Also of note is that almost 80 percent of single parents work part time or full time and that in 2011, the number of workingwomen outnumbered workingmen.

There is evidence that architecture enjoys a special place in this area of discrimination. Consider that *two out of five architects* work more than 40 hours a week, while *only one out of four of all other working males and females* work more than 40 hours a week.<sup>21</sup> Other professions also work long hours; however, this statistic is alarming, as it compares the tiny profession of architecture with *all* other types of workers. The excessively long hours that architects work, whether out of habit or peer pressure, strike me as unhealthy. Is this a distribution problem? Two senior women architects working for Kaiser Permanente told me separately that they each worked 50 hours a week. When I asked why, they both said they “need to.” I don’t think they were getting double pay for overtime. Maybe this is a cultural trait of that particular corporation, but I don’t see why—the work is constant and there should be limits. I see this as a problem with management assuming that employees should absorb any overload rather than management taking responsibility for workload scheduling. Students, interns, and young architects say online in their blogs that 70-hour workweeks are too long. Where will work compulsiveness stop? There needs to be a differentiation between being committed to and being submerged in architecture. As Chinese medicine reminds us, balance requires constant attention and adjustment.

---

21. Blythe Camenson, *Career in Architecture*.

At the time of this writing, I estimate that 28,000 American women practice architecture. This number includes both registered architects and those who have graduated from architectural school and are not registered. Yet, the structure of work has not changed much since when I started working in 1973, even in progressive San Francisco, where there is a high percentage of both male and female architects. Childcare is still difficult; discrimination against young women who might have children exists; employment interviewers still ask young women if they are married (even though the question is illegal); women architects earn less than men; and senior women consistently experience a lack of rewarding projects, high positions, and recognition for their contributions.

It is rewarding for me to see, and I loudly applaud, the increasing yet still thin body of publications from professors, feminist critics, and architectural theorists looking to better understand the modern role of gender in architecture. A number of anthologies come to mind: in 1989, *Architecture: A Place for Women*;<sup>22</sup> in the 1990s: *The Sex of Architecture*<sup>23</sup> (1996), *Architecture and Feminism*<sup>24</sup> (1996), *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*<sup>25</sup> (1996), *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*<sup>26</sup> (1998), and *Design and Feminism: Re-vision Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things*<sup>27</sup> (1999). Some of the accounts in these books are deemed classics, such as the one by architect Denise Scott Brown, who admitted in 1989 that, for her, “the discrimination continues at the rate of about one incident a day.” She also wrote, in her contribution to *Architecture: A Place for Women* that she had written an article in 1975 but decided against publishing it because she feared that exposing “the strong sentiments on feminism in the world of architecture would bring a hostile reception, which could hurt my career and the prospects of my firm.”<sup>28</sup> I look forward to reading a new

---

22. Ellen Perry Berkeley ed., and McQuaid, Matilda assoc. ed., *Architecture: A Place for Women*.

23. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Weisman, *The Sex of Architecture*.

24. Debra Coleman, Ann Danze, and Carol Henderson, eds., *Architecture and Feminism*.

25. Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, eds., *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*.

26. Francesca Hughes, ed., *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*.

27. Joan Rothschild, ed., *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things*.

28. Denise Scott Brown, “Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture,” in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, pp. 237–46.

collection, boldly titled, *Architecture: A Woman's Profession*. According to editor Tanja Kullack, "This is a reference book, a 'tool' for the everyday application of young architects; inspiring, optimistic, and sometimes subversive."<sup>29</sup>

Of course, architecture isn't the only profession missing the intrinsic and full contribution of women; patriarchy in the family and sexism in the workplace grip the cultural substrata of most societies. I checked online under science, engineering, business, accounting, medicine, and law; every category expressed substantive claims by women of mistreatment, discrimination, and frustration. One woman in broadcasting reminds us that the men consistently get more money than the women, even when two newscasters anchor the same program. I had no idea; they looked equally important on the screen.

But now that the statistics in architecture have finally been collected, there is clear evidence of the seriousness of existing professional impediments for committed women and other groups.<sup>30</sup> Scholars have sorted through statistics reflecting the tangles of discrimination, amazing the establishment with concrete facts about the inequity that previously was noted by a few journalists but otherwise whispered about among women in break rooms and within private feminist gatherings. Women and nonwhite males have suggested changes, but actual change is rare. Traditional organizations like the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in the United States, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in the United Kingdom, and more recently the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada have been challenged about their structural and behavioral discrepancies, but they don't appear to consider addressing these issues as a priority. The most famous study to expose the seriousness of the problem (2003) documented the alarming number of women architects leaving the profession in the United Kingdom.<sup>31</sup> The reasons given for these professional departures tended to be a combination of a number of factors and/or a "final straw" moment. Some of the key complaints:

---

29. Tanja Kullack, ed., *Architecture: A Woman's Profession*.

30. Kathryn Anthony, *Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession*.

31. Ann De Graft-Johnson, Sandra Manley, and Clara Greed, *Why do women leave architecture? Research into the retention of women in architectural practice*.

- Low pay
- Unequal pay
- Long working hours
- Inflexible and/or family-unfriendly working hours
- Sidelining
- Limited areas of work
- Glass ceiling
- Stressful working conditions
- Protective paternalism preventing development of experience
- More job satisfaction elsewhere

There was little evidence that women left because they were incompetent designers or because they no longer wanted to be architects.<sup>32</sup> This gap between the number of women educated in architecture and the number happily employed in architecture continues to be significant. What a heartbreaker for women!

Women's issues are considered part of the larger category of social issues whose cultural force has been dramatically declining for the last 30 years. Social architecture, as compared with art-as-object architecture and science architecture, also suffers from this general political turn away from addressing social ills and from incorporating democracy into the making of place. Now the focus is on capitalistic concerns, such as speculative office buildings for renting space, the corporate image making of skyscrapers, and the warehouse mentality of box stores—all showing little concern for the character, well-being, and livability of place for observers and users. Add to the downturn in social concern the stigma that *anything* having to do with women is considered by men (and women) as *women's work* and therefore less valuable, and you have a trend influencing many women to focus their efforts on new technology, green buildings, teaching, or high-end residential—areas of architecture where gender is less likely to surface as a stumbling block for them.

Henry Frost, teacher at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture from 1917 to 1942, indicated that women's concerns for the social values in architecture have been evident for a long time. In 1941, he wrote in a letter to a friend about his female students:

32. Miragestudio7 March 2010 online summary of above study shows that this study is still being summarized and referenced.

She thinks clearly, reasons well, and is interested in housing rather than houses; in community centers for the masses rather than in neighborhood clubs for the elect; in regional planning more than in estate planning; in social aspects of the profession more than private commissions.... Her interest in her profession embraces its social and human implications.<sup>33</sup>

It appears that women students of 1941 held some of the same concerns I dwell on in 2011.

Unyieldingly, I hang on to the hope that groups like the Organization of Women Architects will play a relevant role in working out solutions to concerns for women in the designed world. In spite of my experience that women are often shunned as complainers if we bring up concerns and problems with the status quo of gender and architecture, I believe that many women (and some men) architects today sympathize with these issues, but too often social values and concerns have been repressed.

I am convinced that from the inception of architecture to current times, everyday women architects (like myself) have been forced to practice their chosen profession with only one hand, while their other hand holds the barrage of discriminating behaviors at bay. This is my premise as I review the dust of my career path, wondering, how do we free up that hand—kept so busy shielding us from sexist swats—for more productive concerns, like expressing cultural issues in the built world?

Since women scholars are now writing more and more about the inherent mutual influence of cultural values (including gender) and the built world, I feel the time is right to launch a call addressing these cultural issues in our practice without the fear of being belittled, ignored, or made invisible by discrimination. As I observe and analyze how the architectural profession has limited others and me, I am emboldened to reflect on and expose unnecessary flaws. With adequate hindsight, I feel quite sure that had I been free of the major constraints of sexism (and *had I known then what I know now*), I would have focused my work, from an evolving feminist perspective, on building design and

---

33. Doris Cole, *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture*, p. 97. Note that all of chapter 4 is devoted to the Cambridge School, where Frost was a great mentor and advocate of women learning architecture and going on to practice. Cole bemoans the loss of such a champion of women architects, still missing 30 years after the school was forced to merge into Harvard's architecture program in 1942. Now, another 40 years later, I would add that we still lack our champions in 2011.



dialogue, concentrating on instilling progressive cultural values, including women's issues, in our workplaces and livable spaces. I believe that many others might also want to incorporate more deliberately the new scholarly findings about how social equity can be better understood and expressed in our design of both everyday and landmark spaces and places.

Therefore, combining my career experience with my values of social justice and dignity, I envision a new approach to making place. I can imagine a practice that respects the essence and quality of architecture, yet at the same time is slightly removed from the discipline, tradition, and discrimination of the profession—a practice, guild, or association, constructed outside the institutionalism of the profession as we know it. I call it *placitecture*.

I envision a more democratic workplace with structural elements, managerial policies, and a working atmosphere without the injustice and anxiety because of physical differences. I think of a more gender-sensitive and socially aware workplace, in tune with one's whole life—not structured as if everyone had lots of money, a wife, or servants, and not structured around the power of privilege or based on the privilege of concentrated power.

In *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*, Francesca Hughes extols the virtues of women architects' dual position in the profession, both on the inside, as architects, and on the outside, as women. She has no problem asserting that women could make a special and particular contribution to architecture while at the same time being capable of fully practicing architecture as men do. "It is precisely this diversity, this ability to be central and marginal *simultaneously* that will allow women to expand the territory of architecture."<sup>34</sup>

I remember hearing in management classes that innovation comes from the fringes; from my own experience, I know this to be true, and I still feel hopeful about the possibilities that those on the "outside" will fire up enough energy to spin open opportunities for the changes I can imagine.

In placitecture, I suggest not that we replace masculinity with femininity; my intent is to explore, integrate, and value both critically and contextually. I think that facing sex-role issues in society will help individuals to better craft their whole lives. Of course, rearranging the twisting threads of pressures and practices concerning culture, gender,

---

34. Francesca Hughes, ed., *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*, p. xv.

and architecture is an incredible design problem of its own. But this is a task certainly worthy of our problem-solving skills and creative talents. The work of placitects would be a cocktail of evaluation, planning, social science, ethics, design, and research—all mixed carefully to make culturally radiant places. Our definition of culture can include many variables, such as how we respect nature and beauty,<sup>35</sup> as well as how we deal with the density and inequity of earning power or status connected to the making of place.

The binding, container, or framework holding together the dimensions of placitecture is still open for discussion, definition, and development. My idea is to find some way to bring together the scattered existing efforts to preserve character of place, nature of place, history of place, vitality of place, democracy of place, and even size sensibility of place, while at the same time inserting new ways of expressing fairness and inclusion into humankind's drive to cover the natural world with our made places.

Could women architects, clients, and users enamored with place be ripe to create a new influential force? Why keep butting heads against a wall that doesn't give? I now believe we must investigate beyond the initial attraction of the word *architect* to clearly define what architectural activities we want to spend our time on. Making computer details for big-box stores or finding an image for speculative office space doesn't seem that interesting to me, but many architects are doing just that for not much money.

Upon meeting architectural PhD student Alexander Ja Yeun Lee at the "Death + Life of Social Factors" conference this year,<sup>36</sup> I was struck by the realization that she was redefining what her role as architect might be through her exploration of emergency housing, especially timely in her homeland of New Zealand as it recovers from earthquakes. She spoke to the social dimension of memories that crumbled

35. In *Architecture and Beauty: Conversations with Architects about a Troubled Relationship*, Yael Reisner includes the following in her class abstract at the AA School of Architecture in London: "Personal expression is a reflection of one's culture and, architecturally, a visual discrimination that comments on a broader, collective cultural spectrum. It is through culture that architectural poetics are evolving. The aesthetic capacity of architecture is charged by visual qualities that might evoke emotions in people. This is when beauty comes into the conversation." (On Line, July 2011).

36. "The Death + Life of Social Factors," conference at the College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley, May 2011.

with the physical structures in the city of Christchurch, and also, she took a critical look at the transition housing provided to the earthquake victims. There is much to be done around the world that placitects can put their mind to, whether they are working with the United Nations, nonprofit organizations, or governments at all levels interested in including the richness of their culture in their built places.<sup>37</sup>

We live in a time when social values could be a part of professional conversations with the same abundant flair that fashion designers use to tag clothing. I can imagine devising a means of measurement to ensure transparency in building design and land use—a transparency similar to what we see for coffee growers, with the use of fair trade stickers, building products with sustainability ratings, and financial investments with social criteria.

In ten years, placitecture may be a vibrant and rewarding new stream of study and practice. This year may be the right year for those swimming so hard against the existing current—and using so much energy to stay in the mainstream—to consider a move to less-traveled waters, to the innovative shores of social awareness and responsibility. We need thinkers, writers, and placitects to blaze the path of placitecture so that the making of place will include contemporary and complex values of *more* social justice, planet peacefulness, respect for nature, diversity in history, ethical distribution of resources, and land conservation stewardship—at all levels—from the corner of a city block to the patterns of buildings claiming our natural geography.

Since I know much more now than I could have known then, if I were starting out today, placitecture would certainly be my focus because I remain enamored with place ... and place-making needs plenty of attention.

---

37. Anthony Ward, “The Suppression of the Social in Design: Architecture as War” in Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, eds., *Reconstructing Architecture*, pp. 59–65.



## Selected Bibliography

- Adam**, Peter. *Eileen Gray: Architect/Designer*. New York: Abrams, 1987.
- Adams**, Annmarie, and Peta Tancred. *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Agrest**, Diana, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman, eds. *The Sex of Architecture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996.
- Ahrentzez**, Sherry. "The F Word in Architecture: Feminist Analysis in/of/for Architecture." In *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*. Edited by Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Allaback**, Sarah. *The First American Women Architects*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- American Institute of Architects**. "That Exceptional One: Women in American Architecture 1888–1988." Exhibition, 1988.
- Anthony**, Kathryn H. *Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Barber**, Elizabeth Wayland. *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Berkeley**, Ellen Perry. "Women in Architecture." *Architectural Forum* (September 1972): 46–53.

- Berkeley**, Ellen Perry, ed., and Matilda McQuaid, assoc. ed. *Architecture: A Place for Women*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.
- Betsky**, Aaron. *Building Sex: Men, Women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1995.
- Boutelle**, Sara Holmes. *Julia Morgan, Architect*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1988.
- Bullock**, Susan. *Women and Work*. London: Zed Books, 1994.
- Camenson**, Blythe. *Career in Architecture*. London: McGraw Hill, 2008.
- Carter**, Morris. *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court*. Boston: Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1971.
- Clausen**, Meredith L. "The École des Beaux-Arts: Toward a Gendered History." Society of Architectural Historians, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69:2 (June 2010): 153–161.
- Cole**, Doris. *Candid Reflections: Letters from Women Architects*, 1970 & 2000. New York: Midmarch Art Press, 2007.
- . *Eleanor Raymond, Architect*. Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1981.
- . *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture*. Boston: i press, 1973.
- Coleman**, Debra, Ann Danze, and Carol Henderson, eds. *Architecture and Feminism*. New York, N.Y.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.
- De Graft-Johnson**, Ann, Sandra Manley, and Clara Greed. *Why do women leave architecture? Research into the retention of women in architectural practice*. Bristol, England: Royal Institute of British Architects, University of West of England, 2003.
- Doumato**, Lamia. *Architecture and Women: A Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1988.
- Drinkwater**, Sheryl, and Kristina Raupach, eds. *Women's Work: Architecture + Design*. San Francisco: Organization of Women Architects and Design Professionals, 1991.
- Dutton**, Thomas A., and Lian Hurst Mann, eds. *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Feuerstein**, Marcia Fae, assisted by Dawn Bushnaq. "An Interview with Susana Torre." In *The Reflective Practitioner*. Edited by Paul Knox. Blacksburg, VA: University of Virginia, Spring 2002.
- Firestone**, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: Bantam, 1970.
- Friedman**, Alice T. *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.

- Grattan**, Virginia L. *Mary Colter: Builder Upon the Red Earth*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1980.
- Grierson**, Joan. *For the Record: The First Women in Canadian Architecture*. 2008. Kindle edition.
- Griffin**, Marion Mahony. *The Magic of America: Electronic Edition*. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007. <http://artic.edu/magicofamerica>.
- Gruskin**, Nancy. *Designing Woman: Writing about Eleanor Raymond*. PhD dissertation, Boston University Department of Art History, 1998. <http://escholarship.org>, 146–162.
- Hanna**, Bronwyn. “Australia’s Early Women Architects: Milestones and Achievements.” *Fabrications* 12:1 (June 2002): 27–57.
- Hayden**, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.
- Heilbrun**, Carolyn G. *Writing a Woman’s Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.
- Hesse-Biber**, Sharlene, and Gregg Lee Carter. *Working Women in America: Split Dreams*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Horton**, Inge. “Young Ladies with T-Squares—Early Women in Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley.” In *Design on the Edge: A Century of Teaching Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, 1903–2003*. Berkeley: College of Environmental Design, University of California, February 2010.
- Horton**, Inge Schaefer. *Early Women Architects of the San Francisco Bay Area: The Lives and Work of Fifty Professionals, 1890–1951*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010.
- Hughes**, Francesca, ed. *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
- Ingraham**, Catherine. *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Kaplan**, Victoria. *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States*. Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2006.
- Kilbourn**, J. P. *One Woman’s Unique Architectural Journey: The Life and Times of Mary Alice Hutchins*. Portland, OR: J. P. Kilbourn, 1999.
- Krebs**, Nina Boyd. *Changing Woman: Changing Work*. Denver, CO: Macmurray & Beck Communication, 1993.
- Kullack**, Tanja, ed. *Architecture: A Woman’s Profession*. Berlin: JOVIS Publishing, 2011.
- Leach**, Neil, ed. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Lin**, Maya Ying. *Boundaries*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

- Loden**, Marilyn. *Feminine Leadership, or How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys*. New York: Times Books, 1985.
- Lorenz**, Clare. *Women in Architecture: A Contemporary Perspective*. London: Trefoil Books Ltd., 1990.
- Lunneborg**, Patricia. *Women Changing Work*. New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1990.
- Marcus**, Clare Cooper, *Iona Dreaming: The Healing Power of Place*. Berkeley: University of California College of Environmental Design, 2010.
- Martin**, Brenda, and Penny Sparke, eds. *Women's Places: Architecture and Design, 1860–1960*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Martin**, Rochelle. *The Difficult Path: Women in the Architecture Profession*. PhD dissertation, University of Michigan. Information Service, University Microfilms International, 1–24, 121–45, 1986.
- Matsuzaki**, Eva. PP/FRAIC, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, Consultations & Roundtables on Women in Architecture in Canada, December 2003.
- Metz**, Don. *Confessions of a Country Architect*. Piermont, NH: Bunker Hill Publishing, 2007.
- Mitchell**, Melvin L. *The Crisis of the African-American Architect: Conflicting Cultures of Architecture and (Black) Power*. San Jose, CA: Writer's Club Press, 2001; 2nd ed., New York: Writers' Advantage, 2003.
- Museum of Finnish Architecture**. *Profiles: Pioneering Women Architects from Finland*. Helsinki, 1983.
- Nye**, Joseph S. Jr. *The Powers to Lead*. London: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Perriand**, Charlotte. *Un Art de Vivre: Charlotte Perriand* (for a Paris Musée des Arts Decoratifs exhibition of Perriand's work, February 5 to April 1, 1985).
- Pinet**, Celine, and Kimberly Devlin, eds. *THREADS: Insights by Women Architects*. Milwaukee, WI: Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research, University of Wisconsin, 1991.
- Pregliasco**, Janice. "The Life and Work of Marion Mahony Griffin." *Museum Studies*, the Art Institute of Chicago 21:2 (1995): 164–181. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/4102823>.
- Reisner**, Yael. *Architecture and Beauty: Conversations with Architects about a Troubled Relationship*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010.
- Rothschild**, Joan, ed. *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Schlain**, Leonard. *Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution*. New York: Viking Adult, 2003.
- Seabrook**, John. "The Abstractionist: Zaha Hadid's unfettered inventions." *The New Yorker* (December 21, 2009): 112–24.



- Searing**, Helen. *Equal Partners: Men and Women Principals in Contemporary Architectural Practice*. Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, Smith College, January 1998.
- Stevens**, Garry. "How the Invisible Stays That Way: Sociology on Architects Thresholds." (1998): 54–6. <http://www.archsoc.com>.
- Thornton**, Sally Bullard. *Daring to Dream: The Life of Hazel Wood Waterman (1865–1948)*. San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1987.
- Torre**, Susana, ed. *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (publication and exhibition organized by the Architectural League of New York through its Archive of Women in Architecture), 1977.
- Toy**, Maggie, ed. *The Architect: Women in Contemporary Architecture*. New York: Watson–Guptill, 2001.
- Van Slyck**, Abigail A. "Women in Architecture and the Problems of Biography." *Design Book Review* 25 (1992): 18–20.
- Ward**, Anthony. "The Suppression of the Social in Design: Architecture as War." In *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*. Edited by Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Weisman**, Leslie Kanes. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-made Environment*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992.
- Welch**, Diane Y. *Lilian J. Rice: Architect of Rancho Santa Fe, California*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2010.
- Weltge-Wortmann**, Sigrid. *Bauhaus Textiles: Women Artists and Weaving Workshop*. London: Thames & Hudson, April 1998.
- Williamson**, Roxanne Kuter. *American Architects and the Mechanics of Fame*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991.
- Willis**, Beverly. *Invisible Image: The Silent Language of Architecture*. Washington DC: National Building Museum, 1997.
- Willis**, Julie, and Bronwyn Hanna. *Women Architects in Australia: 1900–1950*. Canberra: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 2001.
- Wykoff**, Marguerite. "The Outlook for Women in Architecture and Engineering." *Zapoleon Bulletin of the Women's Bureau* (1948): 223–5.

## About the Author



Wendy Bertrand has been a mother since 1966 and a registered California architect since 1978. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a bachelor of architecture (1971), and with a master of architecture (1972) after study in France at the École des Beaux Arts in Aix-en-Provence (1964) and in Montpel-

lier (1965). She divides her time between her city house in San Francisco and her country cabin in Del Norte County, and frequently visits southern France, where her daughter, Chanette Manso, is one of the top internationally recognized light painters.

[www.wendybertrand.com](http://www.wendybertrand.com)