

OZ

Volume 35, 2013

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Oz is a nonprofit journal edited, designed, and produced annually by students in the Kansas State University College of Architecture, Planning, and Design. Inquiries should be addressed to:

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ISSN 0888-7802
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Printed by Consolidated Printing,
Salina, Kansas

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Prologue



As little as a few years ago, I vividly remember dispirited groups of ‘do-good designers’ lamenting, “If only a dean championed public interest design,” “If only foundations understood our goals,” “If only there were more opportunities for graduates.” I remember, because I was one of them. All of these needs persist, but the progress of the public interest design movement has been astounding.

We see schools making public interest design a hallmark of their curriculum, with Portland State University having just launched the first Center for Public Interest Design. We see impeccable work being produced by design/build programs, as Auburn University rings in the 20th anniversary year of the Rural Studio. We are also seeing a minor surge in post-graduate opportunities, with a record number of Enterprise Rose Fellowship slots and other programs. Foundations, meanwhile, have begun retooling their guidelines to explicitly embrace design, with Surdna Foundation chief among them.

We see building industry companies bringing new resources to the field, including the new Autodesk Impact Design Foundation, which I’m honored to direct. We also see firms, big and small, demonstrating their commitment to design for the public good, with countless more represented in The 1% program of Public Architecture. These companies get that public interest design is both good for business and part of their legacies.

The design press and mainstream media have taken note—from recent breakthrough pieces in The New York Times to dedicated issues of Architectural Record. At the heart of this coverage are stories about the transformative power of design and its ability to dignify.

I could go on and on. Lest you think the work is done, let me assure you that it’s still only beginning. And what got us here won’t be enough to carry us forward. We need to think much bigger, dig much deeper, and build cross-sector partnerships much more

aggressively to even start to address the extraordinary needs of our time.

While much of the momentum has come from the architecture segment of the discipline, I have even greater hope in what the field can learn from our counterparts pioneering the design of products, services, and systems for the public good. We saw this articulated beautifully this past fall as President Bill Clinton made “Designing for Impact” the theme of the annual Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Annual Meeting, focused on “designing for individuals, designing our environments, and designing our systems.” World leaders are literally talking about design as a means to make our world more just, more equitable, more sustainable.

What excites me most is to think about where today’s graduates will take us. It can be grounded in the same humility that drove my peers and those before us, but it can be much more professionalized, more rigorous, more far-reaching. It must also be truly inclusive of the many forms of design, while even more human-centered in its approach and focused on measurable impacts. If we accomplish these things, years from now, we’ll collectively be able to look back and remember when.

—John Cary, founding executive director of the Autodesk Impact Design Foundation and founding editor of *PublicInterestDesign.org*.