

WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE?

Understanding Architecture

e-Book

Understanding
Architecture

WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE?

Understanding Architecture

e-Book |

By An Architect

Sample: Interactive, 2022

All illustrations produced by author



What is *An Architect*?

An Architect is an online platform which promotes and contributes to the field of Architecture by providing insightful content. It aims to expand the online architectural knowledge base through easily understandable and accessible content, ultimately increasing awareness of the field's significance in today's society.

Who is *An Architect*?

An Architect is any individual who wishes to contribute to the field of Architecture through insightful digital architectural reading material.

All content is therefore based on opinions by individuals who wish to share their thoughts and collective knowledge on Architecture.

Taking the above into account, as material expressed by *An Architect* are often unique insights individuals have gathered, *all* content remains the intellectual property of the authors. Explicit permission is to be granted by authors before redistribution of content can be made.

Understanding Architecture

To the architectural
student,

A curious individual,

Anyone and

Everyone

Asking the question:

What is Architecture?

How To Use This e-Book

What is Architecture?: Understanding Architecture as the e-book is an exercise in utilizing the faculties of the mind to imagine scenarios which lead to the formation of a base definition of architecture.

What is Architecture?: Understanding Architecture as the interactive journal intends to record the thought processes and ideas engaged with whilst reading which lead to a more individualised understanding of architecture.

So if one can view the journal as an interactive physical experience toward defining architecture, then the e-book is an engaging digital experience toward doing the same.

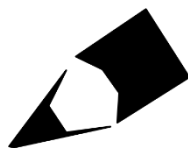
The aim of the e-book as interactive digital journal is to act as a dynamic surface which covers the foundational aspects of understanding architecture through 3 sections or *mental spaces*: the *read space*, the *reflect space* and the *record space*. Each space will contain icons to tap or select and each will direct you to the appropriate space to perform the related action.



The *read space* is where the reader's objective is to peruse content. Each chapter provides an insight into aspects of architecture. It presents an approach toward comprehending architectural ideas. Where additional ideas should be read and investigated, the **magnifying glass icon** will appear. Select it to redirect to the reading space. The space could include blog posts, articles, papers or other forms of readable content.



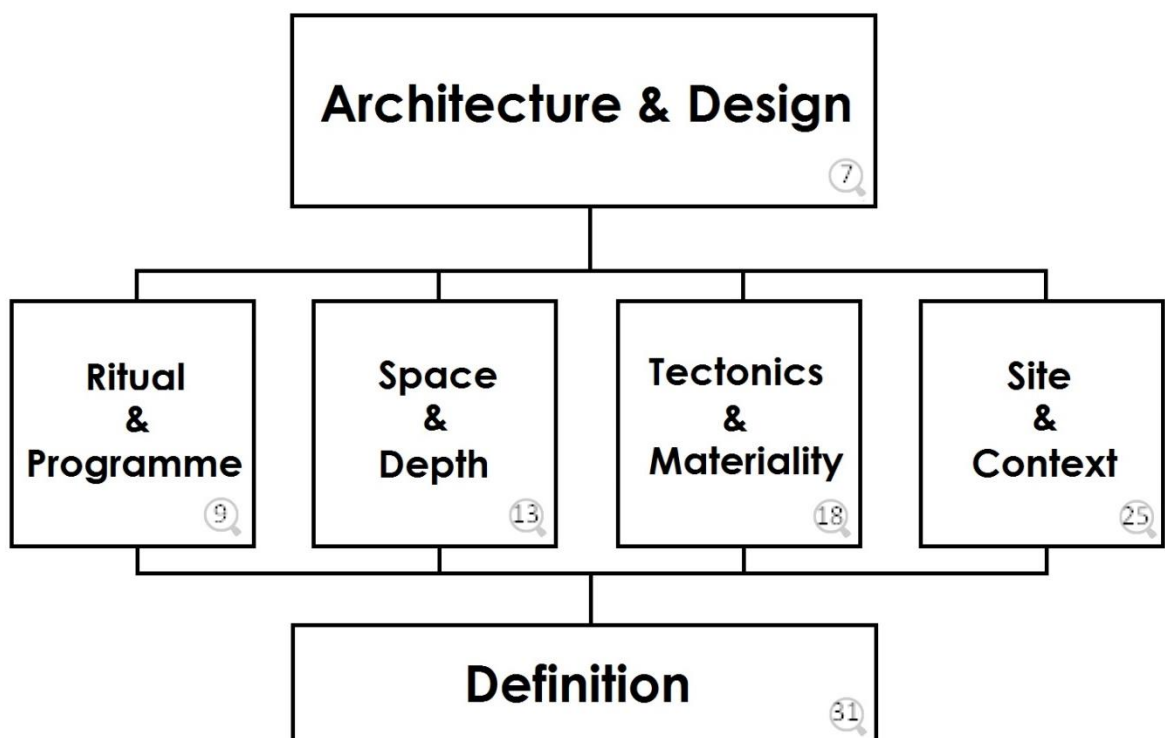
The *reflect space* provided after each chapter allows for the reader to pause and ponder over stimulatory concepts presented. The reader is encouraged to inquire deeper into the content through guiding questions. Where additional content that requires a higher level of intellectual engagement, select the **pause symbol** to redirect to the visually interactive space provided. The space could contain images, videos, virtual tours or other forms of interactive content.



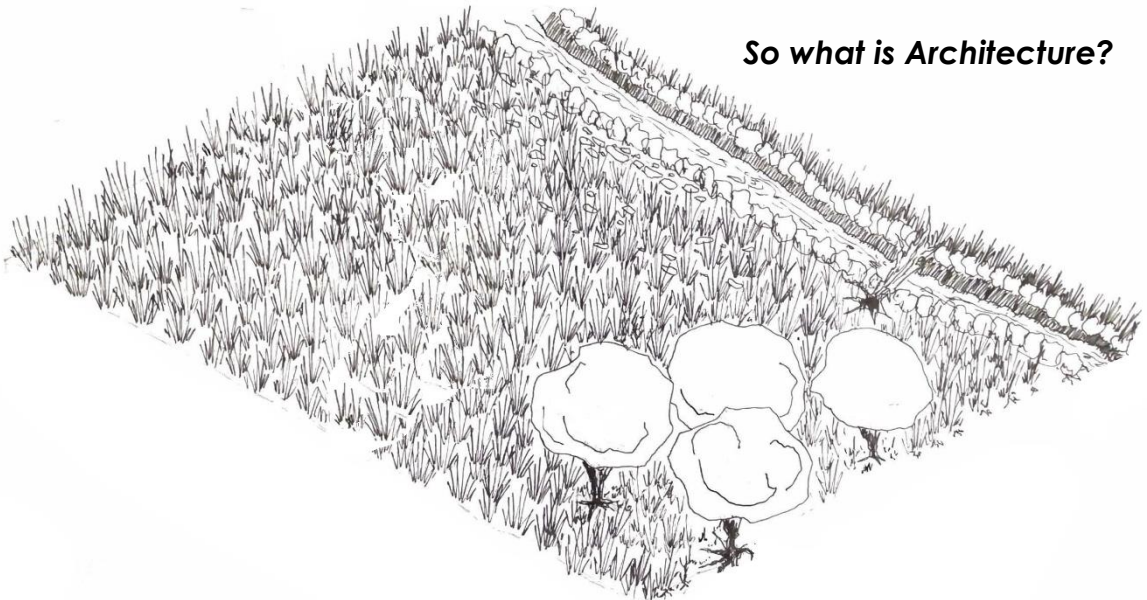
The *record space* allows the reader to capture moments of realisation after inquiry through the use of one's own words and drawings – thereby creating a meaningful definition of what the reader believes architecture to be. Where content read requires note taking and hand drawings to fully comprehend and appreciate the material, select the **pencil tip icon** to redirect to the online sketchpad provided. The space should ultimately be saved, downloaded or shared to oneself as a running record of the digital illustration and notes made.

Contents

A diagrammatic summary of contents of the book



So what is Architecture?



Architecture & Design

Architecture belongs to the discipline of *Design*. As a discipline, Design is essentially the *art and science of creation*: it is how an object looks, works and solves a problem in order to meet an objective. There are several fields of design, a few of which are product design, clothing design, automotive design and building design.

The field of building design has been aptly named *Architecture*. The word comes from Latin roots, which can be best understood as *the work of a master craftsman*. By this definition one can assume that a master craftsman – or an *architect* – possesses the necessary knowledge and skill to craft a variety of objects, all of which require a collective understanding of human needs, behaviour and environments within which we live. An architect creates a physical object which satisfies man's physical, emotional, spiritual and mental needs.

Such an object should protect us from the outdoor elements of sun, wind, fire and water. It should be able to provide a place for our daily activities to occur, and comfortable enough for us to move freely within it. It should create a suitable microclimate where our bodies feel comfortable to reside in – the perfect temperature for us to perform our tasks without feeling bothered. And It should also provide a place of belonging; where we feel like we could just be ourselves, do things we please with whomever we please - a place of community, yet simultaneously a place of intimacy, privacy and safety for the individual. Essentially, it should be everything we need, and feel like everything we want.

From reading the above, it is possible to understand that in order to do this, an architect is required to integrate several human facets of life: art, technology, science, sociology, biology, history and mathematics at the very least. Architecture demands its creator, the architect, to be well versed in several fields of study and possess the ability to integrate multiple facets into a meaningful whole.



Therefore providing a comprehensive definition of Architecture is impossible as it encompasses a wide list of fields outside the scope of Design. With that said, the following content aims to create an outline of the basic aspects which Architecture is composed of. It seeks to provide a foundation upon which more knowledge can be laid. And it is these aspects which are currently prominent in contemporary architectural education.

Architecture is a multifaceted field which can be approached in an endless number of ways, however the following is an attempt to provide a linear sequence of instances which will allow the reader to follow a logic when attempting to understand the complexity of this field.

In any field which possesses in-depth knowledge, a list of terms are assembled, repurposed or created to best describe and convey meaningful pieces of information - words which are so specialised that only one who practices within the field can understand their true meaning. Architecture is no exception to this.

Architecture possesses its own language. In order to understand the complexity, one must first understand the dialect. In the following content, words which are *italicised* allow one to distinguish between architectural and common terms. Keep note of them as they will reappear throughout the content.

Ritual and Programme



FURTHER READING: PETER BLUNDELL JONES, *Architecture & Ritual: How Buildings Shape Society* • SIR BANISTER FLETCHER, *A History of Architecture* • SIMON UNWIN: *Analysing Architecture*

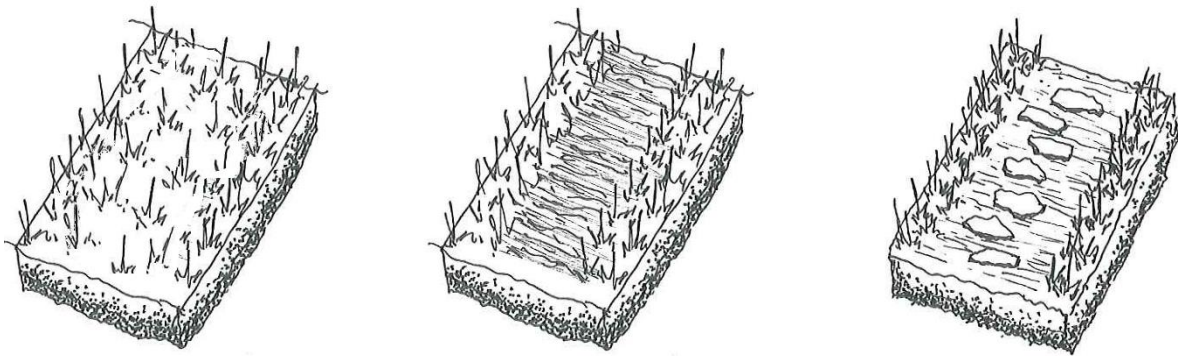
The Beginning of Architecture

Imagine yourself taking a walk through a dense shrub patch almost every day to arrive at home. You walk through this path because it saves you time in reaching your destination.

Through the daily walk, the greenery on route begins to wear and your path begins to show. However, after heavy rains, the greenery reappears and your path disappears. You begin to lose direction, especially in the thicker portions of the shrubbery.

So you decide to find a few flat stones from a rubble patch nearby which are large enough to step on. You lay them out along the path to find your way through the grass. After placing several stones one after the other a substantial way into the path, you eventually see a trail beginning to form.

You now realise that there is evidence of your activity. It is a physical manifestation of your daily ritual. It is an intervention between yourself and the natural landscape around you. It is this intervention which depicts *the beginning of Architecture*.





Ritual

Rituals are part of daily life. The word can be sometimes understood as an action of a religious nature. Although this is the generally accepted definition, it possesses a different meaning in the field of Architecture. When specific behaviours are repeated frequently enough, they become *rituals*. In Architecture, rituals are repeated behaviours which occur as a result of beliefs, actions or habits. This is illustrated in the stepping stone scenario.

Rituals are time based and occur in cycles. Eating, drinking and sitting around a table every afternoon can be considered a ritual. So can sleeping at night, and bathing in the morning. This understanding of daily activities or behaviours as ritual is essential to generating appropriate, functional and meaningful Architecture.

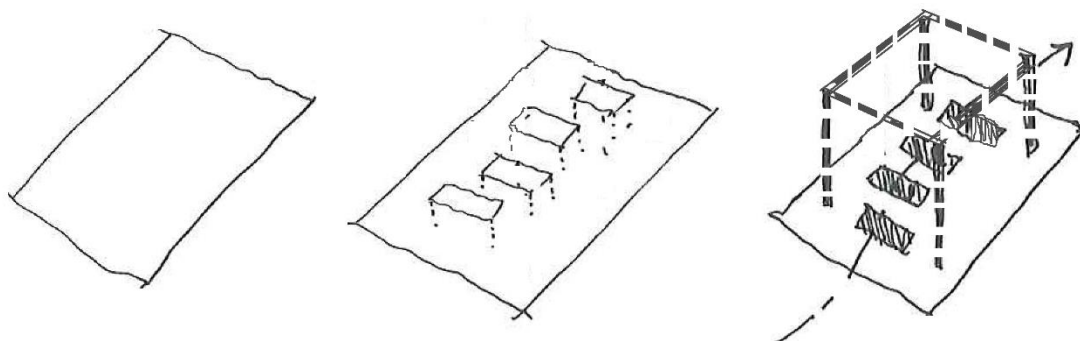
Programme

In the scenario mentioned above, covering and separating the grass by means of flat stones creates a sequence of spaces through which you can walk to get to your destination. The frequency of such rituals develops the need to create a *spatial demarcation* in which it can be performed. When rituals require a spatial demarcation, they are referred to as the *programme*.

Programmes are predetermined rituals which occur within a designated space. A kitchen, bedroom, garage and laboratory are all labels for programmes which occur within a demarcated space.

Programmes determine the amount of people who can occupy the space, the quality of the space and the usability of it.

This is perhaps one of the most fundamental concepts in Architecture and can be considered the starting point of all architectural designs. It is upon these 'stepping stones' that the other aspects of architecture are built.





REFLECT

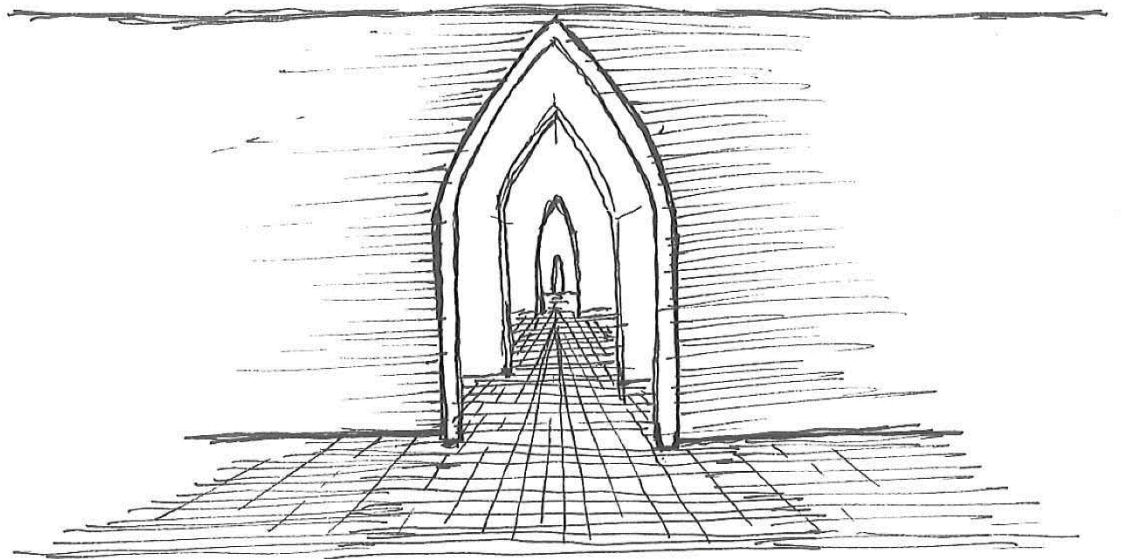
Visit StilBaai, Western Cape, to find out how man sought refuge in the Blombus caves and how they left behind the memories of their daily activities

Is there a difference between action, activity and belief? If so, how do they differ and to what degree?

Are there any ways in which these words can manifest through physical actions? Write down a summary of your findings and provide sketches to illustrate your understanding,



Space and Depth



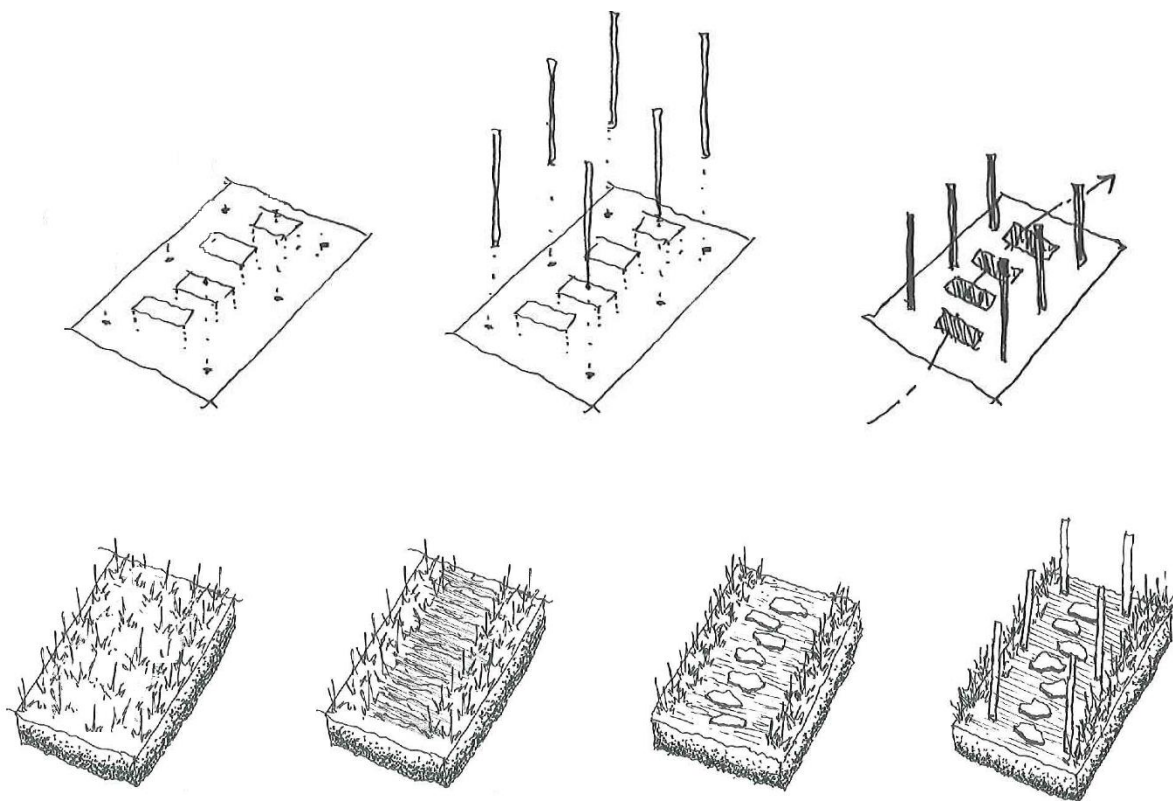
FURTHER READING: BRUNO ZEVI, *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture* • F.D.K CHING, *Architecture: Form, Space & Order*

The Idea of Space

In conjunction with ritual and programme, another concept is essential to the formation of Architecture: *space*. The idea of space acting as an essential part of Architecture is relatively old, yet simultaneously new. This idea was born out of Modernity (early 15th to late 18th century) but continued into Post Modern times (late 20th century). Space was re-evaluated for its significance by the early 20th century architects and was reinterpreted into the current day understanding of it. In the content to follow, a general understanding of space and how it plays a role in the formation of Architecture will be discussed.

In order to understand the next fundamental concept, we revisit our stepping stone analogy. After passing through the shortcut and almost at the end of your path home, you turn around to see your new creation. You notice that the longer strands of grass are falling over and are creating an obstruction on your path. To clear them out and create a more apparent and clear demarcation of your path, you erect a few broken branches and logs which you gathered from nearby. You do this so that on either side of the stepping stones, a post of wood stands a similar distance apart.

You now notice that your ritual now has a very obvious vertical presence. It stands erect from the ground and can be viewed from a distance away. It now exists in the horizontal and vertical *planes*.



Space

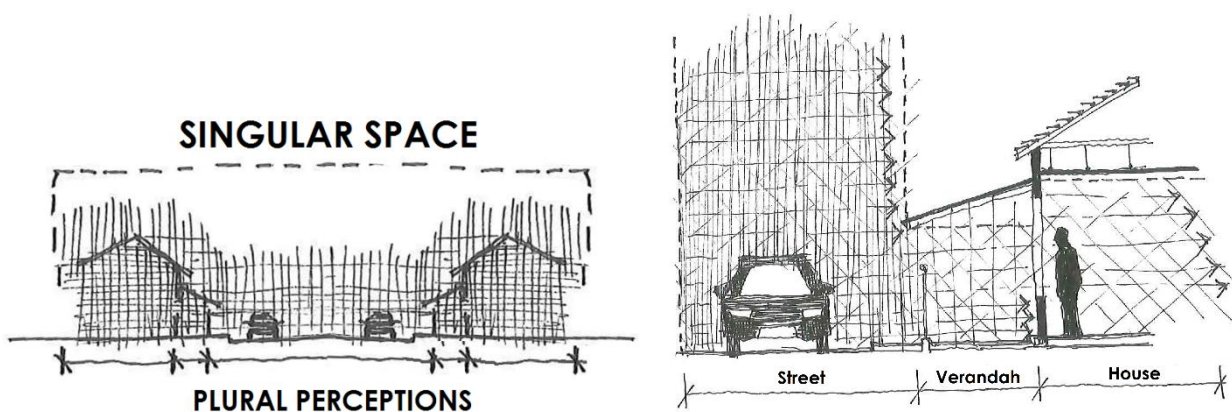
Upon observing the physical world, one becomes aware that objects exist in 3 dimensions: objects have a length, width and depth. These dimensions can be understood by us as surfaces which we are able to see, feel and touch. In Architecture, surfaces which have a larger scale in relation to us are referred to as *planes*.

The world around us can be simply understood in terms of four planes: the lower plane upon which we are grounded to by gravity; the two side planes within which our bodies are enclosed, our sight obstructed and movement restricted, and lastly the overhead plane which seals our bodies within the side planes by covering us.

This encapsulation or enclosure of the human body creates a *defined space*. It is important to note that *space cannot be created – it has always existed*. All one can do is merely utilise, manipulate or enhance the perception of it. When one of the planes is removed or reduced in coverage, we find that a space opens up and suggests that surrounding spaces flow into or out of the once enclosed space. This can be understood as the *fluidity of space*. In this sense, space can be understood as being *static or dynamic*, where the well-defined space is static and the flowing space is dynamic.

It is contemporary architectural thought to think of space as fluid and dynamic, where the space of the highways flow to streets, and from the streets to the verandas and from the verandas into buildings. This concept of fluid space is essential to understanding that the nature of space is *plural*.

The *plurality* of space implies that all space is connected and continuous, and within it are different perceptions of light, mass, colour, sound, temperature, texture and taste. The manner in which we shape and connect spaces together results in better experiences, social interaction and the quality of life.

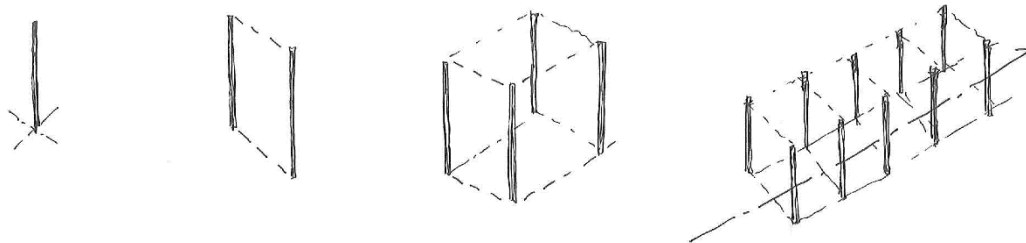


Depth

To understand the next term, we return to our analogy...

After placing several posts in position, you look down at a stretch of straight path and notice a pattern. You perceive a sense of distance between yourself and the end of a series of posts positioned a uniform distance away from each other. This perception of distance within space is referred to as *depth*.

When a series of elements are lined next to each other, one becomes more cognisant of how near or far away objects are relative to each other, and in relation to oneself. When the space between objects is regulated or uniform, it is referred to as *rhythm*.



Rhythm is our minds' mathematical way of understanding the depth of space. A rhythm of elements such as posts can be arranged in such a way that it helps one understand how deep a space is. This is particularly evident when the objects composing a building exist in the vertical axis, for example posts and columns. A colonnade is a typical instance of how a sense of depth is perceived when experienced with vertical elements.

The depth of a space can express what functions may occur within it. In the history of Architecture, depth is used in many artful ways to contribute to the utilization, splendour and magnificence of a building. Mosques, churches and temples best exemplify the use of depth in a functional, meaningful and artful way.

Depth is also tool which helps the mind understand where spaces are relative to each other. Have you noticed how easy it is to create a mental map of places we visit regularly? This is a device in human navigation which allows us to map spaces in our mind so we can locate ourselves within our surroundings.

The definition of spaces which in turn creates the perception of depth in a functional, meaningful and artful way is another fundamental aspect in creating Architecture. It stimulates the mind by providing places of significance where all types of activity can occur and allows people to locate themselves within a larger context.





REFLECT

Visit Zaha Hadid's The World (89 Degrees) to experience the dynamic, unrestricted nature of space...

What is a place? And how is it different to space? How then, is space different to volume?

Illustrate the relationship between volume, space and depth. Then, write down a summary of your understanding and provide sketches of examples around you.





Thank you for reading the sample e-book!

Interested in the full version?

Contact An Architect

Content which seeks to understand, explore and gain a deeper insight into Architecture is available as e-books, articles and courses on:
www.anarchitectproduc.wixsite.com/anarchitectproducts

For more information on products and services provided as well as queries, complaints and comments, feel free to contact An Architect on:
anarchitect.eproducts@gmail.com

Or find us at:



The author of *What is Architecture? : Understanding Architecture* is:



Akheel Khan is an architectural designer by day and dedicated writer by night, currently residing in South Africa.

With over a decade of combined academic and working experience in the discipline of design and the field of architecture, he shares his knowledge through an online platform called *An Architect*, which he founded in 2018. Akheel is determined to encourage the awareness and appreciation of Architecture's significance in society through the aid of technology.

In his spare time, you can probably find him engaging in sometimes- recreational-mostly-constructive conversations with family or friends, and sampling interesting foods while charting unknown territories with his wife.

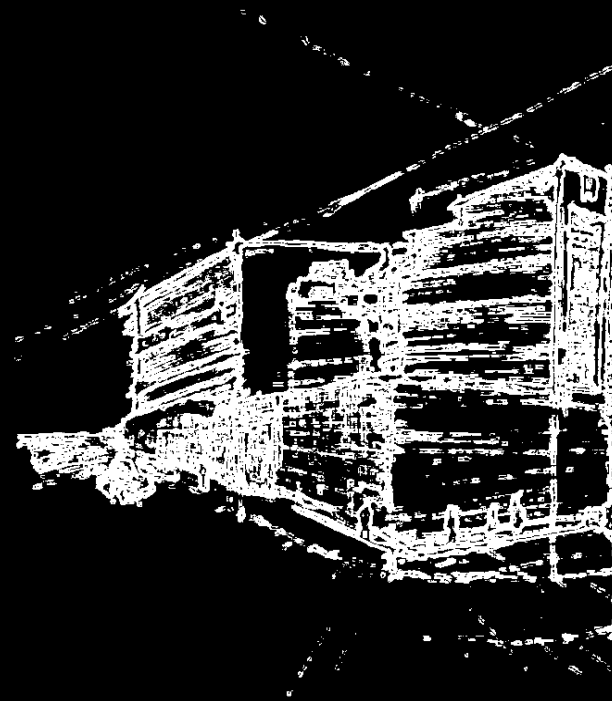
At other times, you can find him scanning articles on socio-economic topics in the country or mapping out an undefined thought process in one of his several journals.

If you are fortunate, you might just find a moment where he remains reserved and idle. However, not many are known to have witnessed this rare event.

Other titles in the series coming soon:

***What is Architecture? : Observing
Architecture***

***What is Architecture? : Creating
Architecture***



For the architectural student,

Or a curious individual,

Anyone and

Everyone

Asking the question:

What is Architecture?