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Conversation Prompts

We encourage you to continue the conversation on elevating design in our community. These prompts are in response to the Modern In Denver magazine op-ed and Design Conversations event topic, "Modern Is Not a Style."

- What is the difference between a style and a trend? Is the propensity for boxy architecture a trending shift away from gables and traditional forms? Why is it trending if so? What does this mean for the preservation versus change of "place?"

- What does it mean to design for the times? Provide explanation—grounded in examples.

- In Englewood, most of our domestic homes are post WWII construction. For the most part, that means less square footage than newer construction. In Englewood, when a family reaches four or more, they typically move to a bigger place ... Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree, or even Littleton next door. So in an effort to give these families options in Englewood, the city is keen on scraping older homes and putting up a "McMansion." More square feet for larger families. The Economic Development makes sense but the design is UGH! Wondering about this from a design perspective, does it mean more floors below ground? Longer flatter homes? I don't know what the answer is, but maybe the materials would follow the function.

- What does it mean to be of a "place" or "contextual?" What is the most appropriate way for the new to fit into existing contexts?

- Unlike places like the Pacific Northwest, where the landscape and atmosphere inform the architecture, Denver lacks a similar sense of regionalism. On the whole, new homes within the city default to a suburban formula for space needs and aesthetic solutions. What can be done about this?

- What factors have contributed to the lack of development in building systems? What contemporary systems are available, and why aren't they being utilized in Denver?

- How does the municipal code help/hinder/speak to/drive/stifle innovation, sensitivity to place, or environmental concerns?

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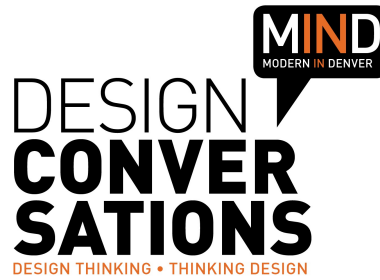
- Why is the stick frame of construction so ubiquitous? Can it / should it be overcome with novel technologies? What would that technological shift mean to contemporary design movements?

- The piece begs the question, What would a "progressive design for today" look like? Is anyone actually doing that?

- The op-ed states "to be modern is to, "be of one's time"—to be aware of history but free of its constraints." But often what we see is more of these attempts at an International style home and apartments. By that we mean an emphasis on geometric shapes, lack of ornamentation, and a combination of exterior materials—glass, steel, wood and concrete. Not only does this aesthetic seem to be very popular right now, but was historically presented as a style option for mass production. Discuss.

- Hasn't modernism been an architectural "style" for a long time? The architecture of the Bauhaus designers morphed into the corporate International Style, led by firms like mid-century U.S. firms like SOM. The social ideals of the early modernists were left behind pretty quickly. The fact is, modern IS a style and has been for quite a while. Discuss.

- Free from constraints, what would the ideal vision of Denver's mixed-use and housing developments look like?

- In thinking about industrial design, when it comes to materials, we have a hunger for authenticity, quality, and durability. What are those authentic, durable, and quality things that are truly of our time that we would add patina to?

- In many ways, Denver remains a young city with an eclectic mix of building styles and attitudes. It seems the city is continuing to grapple with a lack of consistency in both style and holistic vision. Using your words, what does it mean to be "present" while designing in Colorado today?

- Utilizing "modern" design language for new homes often seems like an excuse for poor or absent detailing. Discuss.

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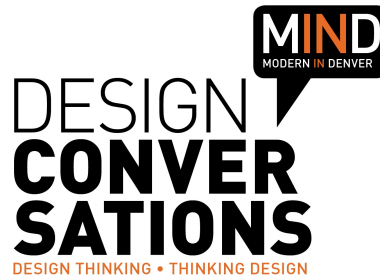
- Conversations like these are important first steps towards creating a collective consciousness and concern regarding a specific issue, but what steps and stakeholders must we engage to actually see progress in improving the quality of architectural design and development in Denver moving forward?

- What constitutes being modern?

- Buildings are designed for sale, for lease, for rent but rarely for people. This struck a chord with me, as fundamentally, as a city, what is important to us and how can there be better motivation for good design? Programs like the Federal GSA's Design Excellence program or 1% to art are nice starts, but more incentives for good design could help.

- I think developers are often easy scapegoats, but the designs are still coming from the architects and many of the bad buildings have no developer, as well. There are either a lot of bad architects out there or there is not a willingness for the architects to push clients.

- What does "authentic" architecture mean in Denver? Is this defined by a style, a lifestyle, an attitude?

- Even though modern architecture is coined "trendy" right now, there is a very limited knowledge of what good modern design is. It's an architecture light version, limited to what is on Houzz. In my opinion, Houzz has done for Architecture what KFC has done for chicken. It creates a generic palate of too many materials, no concept, no rigor, and too many Edison bulbs. Denver could use more bold designs beyond the museum district.

- Modern architecture has been romanticized and deemed successful by some, and harshly critiqued as lacking warmth and character by others. How are the strengths of a modern approach to architecture implemented in design without sacrificing a sense of identity or authenticity that some may identify as ornament or use of a richer palette of materials and textures?

- What are the current issues that are informing and shaping present-day development?

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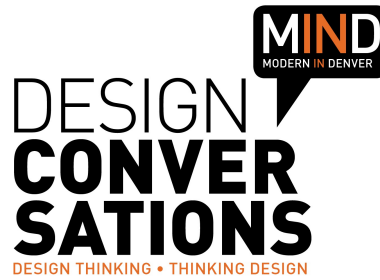
- What new functions do residential things need to perform? Sitting's not new. Eating's not new Listening/watching aren't new. Gaming's new. Maybe new physical interfaces will push homes to be reconfigured. Maybe drone deliveries will require a different kind of mud room. Then again that might go the same way as Segue parking spots. Let's say work and education continue to require less 'going to places'. Then the living space (eating, sleeping, family/partner interacting, storing things, entertaining...) takes on working and schooling on some level. So everybody needs a 'focused activity' space. And then maybe some sort of 'teaming/collaborating' space, since we'll lose our minds not interacting with people face to face. So do homes become more porous on some level, when our work mates/school mates start coming over (physically or virtually)?

- What does it mean to be of a time? What is the most appropriate design response to past, present, and future?

- What is the most appropriate response to place and time in today's global world?

- In essence, the piece differentiates between "modern architecture" and "modernism," and while their point is well taken for an architect or designer, I wonder how many individual clients would want to move away from their predetermined understanding that modernism = modern architecture.

- Denver's classic neighborhoods of brick bungalows and post-war ranches are again giving way to meaningless McMansions-more concerned with maximizing square-footage than contextual design. Greatest volume for the buck drives most new homes —whether large or small. The recession seemed to slow this trend and there was a window when living in a smaller footprint and remodeling existing homes was more viable than tearing down and building new.