

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, – Esteemed guests. Adv Toto Fuduli, Registrar at SACAP, also from SACAP - Architect Charles Nduku . From our tertiary institutions – Prof Chrisna Du Plessis Head of Department at Tuks and – Tharina Gaum, Head of Architecture Department at TUT.

A special welcome to all the participatory architects and their families, co-workers and team members.

The Pretoria Institute for Architecture is a voluntary association that promotes and supports our city's architecture and Architectural profession and serves our member's interests. And tonight, we are here to support and celebrate our's city's Architects!

This season we received 33 entries – It should be noted that the projects entered into this season's awards was all projects that happened either just before or then ultimately during the covid period. I believe that the architecture industry was not influenced in a lesser way than any other industry during the Covid pandemic, but yet we have been the one industry, looking at this evening and the works on display, that was somehow still able to forge a way forward and still managed to imagine, conceptualise, realise and finalise into physical structures. In a sense each one of these projects that we see, becomes a monument in itself of the resilience we as an industry had to show during this time in history, and becomes physical monuments that symbolises the power to overcome hardships and should be celebrated as we do this evening!

I want to congratulate each one of you for your monumental effort – we as your fellow architects see you and thank you for the inspiration and example you set for the Profession and the City.

Apart from Covid over the past few years we have also inevitably entered the era of AI and augmented reality and I believe that as architects we will also see and experience a swift and dramatic change within our industry within the coming months, if not days. As with all change, it brings uncertainty with the opportunity.

I have turned to Chat GPT with a simple question – What is an Architect?

“An architect is a trained and licensed professional who designs and plans buildings and other structures. Their role encompasses both the artistic and technical aspects of creating structures that are functional, safe, and aesthetically pleasing”.

I think this is a very typical AI answer – A 100% correct one. I cannot find fault with the statement, but I do believe that my non-humanoid reflex really really would like to challenge Chat GPT's answer on “what is an Architect”

In July of this year, PIA President Clair McCusker addressed the City of Tshwane's political decision makers during a Council Meeting to enhance the crucial role architects and the construction industry play in unlocking economic and social development within our City.

Making the decision as a Local Authorities Committee to step into the political boxing ring was a highly contested one and well deliberated – It meant that we had to associate ourselves for the day with a specific political affiliation in order to gain the opportunity to speak.

I cannot really say that we have seen any positive outcome or positive change for our industry within City of Tshwane's building control, but what I have realized is that we as architects can and should play a key role within society and non-party politics.

Shortly after the speech, the City entered into a 10 week crippling and violent strike. Somehow this strike enhanced our plea to council even more: Our city needs its architects now more than ever. We are the ones with a skillset to translate society and to transcend the spirit of the moment.

An architect has the ability to shape people's being and seeing in this world, how people will react in these spaces and more importantly how we will live together.

I want to go as far as to say that an Architect, in theory, is the epitome of a model citizen.

But how does one citizen?

Baratunde Thurston's movement "How to Citizen" sets 4 pillars to being a citizen:

Number 1- "To citizen" is to show up. Showing up in this city of ours, in these communities - We need to assume there's something for us to do, and we don't always know what that is, but we have an orientation toward, "Put me in. I don't have to lead, but I must be a part of the thing."

Number 2 - "To citizen" is to invest in relationships with yourself, with others, and with the planet around you. We have inherited a story of separation of all these things, and everything is all one.

Number 3 - And for me the most deep hitting one – "To citizen" is to understand power and all the different ways we have it. Eric Lou - founder of Citizen University said: "power is just the ability to get somebody to do what you want them to do." And we have different ways of doing that. Physical force is obvious. Money, especially in this society, is pretty obvious. Ideas, sharing them – is powerful. We are very powerful as an Architect. Putting our attention on something, we give power to what we give attention to, and we can choose, within default settings and design incentives, but we have the power to choose what we give our power to with our attention.

Fourth principal: "To citizen" is to value the collective. We do all these things out of a sense of collective self-interest, not just personal, individual self-interest. We live in a country where the stories of self-interest make the headlines and we rarely tell the stories of the collective. I cannot recall that part of my education and later self-awareness as an architect focused on anything else than the collective and the value add that an architect should bring.

- 1 Show-up
- 2 Invest in relationships,
- 3 Understand your power,
- 4 Value the collective

Building up a bit of confidence in training AI on a possible better definition of an Architect, I ventured out to ask Chat GPT a second question –

How does one design an award-winning building.

It turns out that one can do so by following 15 key steps.

Designing an award-winning building is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a combination of creativity, innovation, and attention to detail. Here are some key steps and considerations for designing a building that may earn accolades and awards:

1. Define a Clear Purpose:

Start by understanding the purpose and function of the building. Is it a residential, commercial, cultural, or public space? Understanding the building's purpose is crucial in shaping the design.

2. Concept Development:

Develop a strong design concept or idea that sets the tone and direction for the entire project. The concept should be unique, relevant, and resonate with the building's purpose and context.

3. Site Analysis:

Carefully analyze the site, its surroundings, and the local environment. Consider factors such as climate, topography, views, and cultural context, as these can inform the design.

4. Sustainability:

Incorporate sustainable design principles from the beginning. Green building practices not only help the environment but also often receive recognition from awards programs. Features like energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, and sustainable materials can make a difference.

5. Functionality and User Experience:

Ensure that the building is functional and user-friendly. Consider the needs and comfort of the building's occupants or users. Efficient space planning and a thoughtful layout are crucial.

6. Innovative Design:

Innovation and creativity often play a significant role in winning awards. Think outside the box and explore unique architectural elements, materials, and design solutions.

7. Cultural and Historical Context:

Respect the cultural and historical context of the location. Your design should be sensitive to the local heritage and community.

8. Material Selection:

Choose materials that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also durable, sustainable, and appropriate for the project's function.

9. Collaboration:

Work closely with a team of skilled professionals, including architects, engineers, interior designers, and landscape architects. Effective collaboration can lead to a well-rounded design.

10. Technology and Building Systems:

Stay updated with the latest technological advancements in building systems, construction methods, and digital design tools. Utilizing advanced technology can enhance the building's efficiency and aesthetics.

11. Sustainability Certifications:

Consider seeking certifications like Green Building Accreditation and 5 Star rating.

12. Budget Management:

Effective budget management is crucial. You can create an award-winning building without excessive costs by focusing on design innovation, efficiency, and value.

13. Community Engagement:

Involve the local community in the design process, when appropriate. Public input can help build support for the project and lead to a more successful design.

14. Presentation and Storytelling:

When submitting your project for awards, a compelling presentation is key. Showcase the design concept, the problem-solving process, and the unique aspects of the project. Tell a compelling story about the building's significance.

15. Enter Award Competitions:

Submit your project to relevant award competitions, whether at a local, national, or international level. Different organizations and institutions offer various design awards.

According to this matrix how well did you Architect on the AI scale? – In my office we have completed close to 375 AI matrix - award winning projects over the past 28 months of its existence without doing any award winning work! But obviously some of you have fared better than others for this is what brought us together this evening.

But luckily - The little bot is learning fast and added at the bottom of the list:

“Remember that winning awards in the field of architecture often depends on the recognition and appreciation of your peers and industry experts. Be open to constructive criticism and continuous improvement, and be prepared for competition. Not every well-designed building will win awards, but the process of striving for excellence can lead to meaningful and impactful architectural projects.

Citizen-Architect – I ask you – Where are you going to show up, what or who will your relationships be with, what will your power enable? What will the collective be that that you serve in creating meaningful and impactful projects?

The PIA values fairness, justice, and human rights,

We stand for architecture that strengthens our communities,

We stand for a sustainable future,

We stand for protecting communities from the impact of climate change,

We stand for economic opportunity,

We stand for investing in the future,

We speak up, and policymakers listen.

In closing:

Herewith a piece of advice I received and reworked slightly -

Maybe you have never entered a project, maybe this year was your first shot at it, some of you will win once again, some of you might not receive anything — “If you’re just starting out or restarting, try a lot of things; try at least five things, make sure one of them is something you never thought you’d be interested in. Exposure leads to growth. Not everything pans out into a project, money, accolades, or respect, but there’s usually something worth learning, even in the pursuit of something you don’t like.

Expose yourself to variety. In this City that we have created for ourselves, nothing is stable; nothing stands still except our garbage bins” “You can’t just know a thing, master it, and then rest on your degree. You could be great at something today that won’t exist tomorrow. Things are crumbling around us, and new things are emerging. There’s a level of flexibility that should be built into whatever it is that we’re doing, and constant exposure to things that are new, different, occasionally distasteful, or not obviously interesting is important.”

A last question to Ai – Will AI replace the architect?

AI has the potential to significantly impact the field of architecture, but it is unlikely to completely replace architects in the foreseeable future and then list 5 reasons as to why not.

In summary, AI can be a valuable tool for architects, aiding in tasks like generative design, data analysis, and project optimization. However, the creative and human aspects of architecture are challenging for AI to replicate entirely, and the profession is more likely to evolve with AI as a supportive tool rather than being replaced by it. Architects will continue to play a crucial role in shaping the built environment, with AI complementing their skills and capabilities.

I invite you to come and citizen-architect with me – for AI will be completely lost without all of us!