

INTO THE MILLENNIAL: WHY WEIRDOS WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

BY JAMIE KWAN, M.D.M.

It's another long weekend, three days away from the architectural grind, and all I see on my Twitter and Facebook feeds are announcements of my friends' travels, both far and near. As I write this, I'm sitting in seat 43K on my flight to Vancouver.

The Millennial generation is a unique set of humans. One of our distinguishing characteristics is the way we travel. My parents, both considered Boomers, have a very different perspective on trips and holidays. (Why spend money on travel when you can spend some quality time at home, in the backyard on a late summer's cool evening?) And when they travel (plans are usually made way in advance), it's to escape from daily life—just to go somewhere else. Millennials, on the other hand, are constantly monitoring digital alerts for last-minute flight deals, as we frantically try to arrange a holiday, to visit friends all around the world whose couches we can sleep on at a moment's notice. We're a connected generation, and want to experience everything first-hand.

As a millennial myself, I can safely say that the impact of globalization is far different for us than for any previous generation. And it's largely due to our upbringing. I'm part of a generation that grew up having supercomputers in our pockets and on our wrists before we turned 25. During our formative years, we had unprecedented access to information, any time we needed it. We crave learning about and experiencing diverse cultures and outlooks, fearlessly forming our own opinions and sharing them with an internet audience (three billion, give or take). We want to learn about everything, and we have the means to do it very quickly.

If you need proof, just glance at a millennial's Facebook feed, and you'll see how connected to information we really are.

The architectural profession is at an interesting place as we approach Canada's 150th birthday. With Boomers soon retiring, and Millennials (which some refer to as "Echo Boomers") just entering the field, we're experiencing a transformative time within every profession, as the concept of "doing meaningful, passionate, significant work" is vastly changing. Predicting what the next 50 years might be like for architecture is a daunting, impossible task. But that's what Millennials do best: embrace moments, and embrace ambiguity. We welcome differences and uniqueness far more than any other generation, and we question why the world is the way it is.

We entered higher education on a path toward a well-defined profession, but we often ended up doing something completely different, as a career or on the side. I always wanted to be an architect, but I discovered my passion for designing with digital media, and have returned to working in an architectural office in a very different role. We might be defined by a job title, but most importantly, we're embracing the fact that we are what creative recruiter Maria Scillepi refers to as "wonderful weirdos."

With our constant access to information, we haven't necessarily become experts in everything, but we've come pretty close to knowing a *lot* about a diverse range of topics. We've gained an ability to communicate, understand, and collaborate with other kinds of people with other kinds of interests. That's not to say we're the only group that's eager to learn. However, Millennials have

become the generation of "weirdos" because we have such a wide range of interests that affect our outlook on the industry and on our career paths.

What do the next 50 years hold for the architectural profession? As with any other industry, I think there's going to be an embrace of us wonderful weirdos, and a generation of new leaders who know how to collaborate with diverse groups will emerge: technologists working in city planning, biologists working in architecture, even play and toy designers working in urban design. Architects will no longer just be architects. Interests will bring a unique spin to every single "master builder," and unconventional interdisciplinary practices will become, well, conventional, resulting in more inclusive, more accessible, and more valued architecture. In the short time I've been in this profession, I've already worked with groups (artists, scientists, educators, "wonderful weirdos") who impact architecture and cities, but whose creative activities and education lie far from the profession. That said, if we define creativity as the ability to connect disconnected things, then we're definitely going to start to achieve a new level of creativity.

Next time you talk to a Millennial, ask them honestly what are they passionate about outside their careers. What do they want to do with their lives? You might hear an answer you weren't expecting, and you might even get a glimpse of the future.

JAMIE KWAN is an interdisciplinary experience designer working with FORREC in Toronto.

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