Top Five Design Mistakes Even Good Designers Make

In the website of **Design Research Connections News Letter**, there is the following article that the editors are asking people to distribute. The whole article is quoted below; it is a great topic for debating current architectural and design practices from human, cultural, behavioral, and environmental perspectives.

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TOP-5 Design MISTAKES EVEN iGOODi DESIGNERS MAKE!
. . . . and how to avoid them!

1. NOT KEEPING PEOPLE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

People feel better when they are in control of their environment. If people can reconfigure furniture, adjust the temperature, change the lighting, choose where to sit, and have options to complete tasks, they experience a place more positively.

When completing a simple task, music can increase performance, but decrease performance when the task is complex. With control, individuals can create the musical environment that works best for them. (Research Design Connections (RDC) October 2002, "Background Music: Bane or Benefit")

Customers who feel more in control when dining, because, for example, they are able to stake out a "territory" for their group, have greater feelings of pleasure and involvement in the restaurant experience. (RDC April 2003, "Food for Thought: Restaurant Design")

In office environments, people prefer to control their ambient environments, and the presence of healthy, comfortable ambient conditions has been tied to workplace satisfaction and performance. (RDC October 2003, "The Office Environment: Designing for Success")

When creating environments for dementia patients and their families, a variety of seating options gives families appropriate places to interact based on their visiting style and loved one's condition. (RDC Winter 2004, "Dementia Design: Continuing to Make a Difference")

2. NOT DESIGNING FOR ALL USERS

As good designers, we are all concerned about the experiences people have in the places we create. Unfortunately, we can forget how varied the people who will eventually inhabit and use our spaces actually are.

Acoustics is particularly important in elementary schools, because children have more difficulty differentiating words from background noise. But, did you know that children are also prone to temporary hearing loss because of middle ear infections, with some studies reporting that 13 - 15% of students in a classroom are affected by an ear infection at any one time, making great acoustics an even more important factor in school design? (RDC July 2002, "Enhanced Learning: School Acoustical Design")

Sometimes people who use buildings work in the background. Have you ever considered what truck and delivery drivers think of the design of the loading spaces and docks where they have to work? We covered building design from a truck driver's point of view. (RDC October 2002, "Truck Driver Design")

We all know about universally accessible play equipment, but what about designing play areas appropriate for young users' developmental stages? (RDC April and July 2003, "Fully Integrated, Universally Accessible Play Environments: The Next Paradigm Shift")

Different population segments have different design preferences. (RDC Winter 2004, "Generation YÂ's Design Preferences")

3. NOT THINKING COUNTER-INTUITIVELY

Every designer brings their own preconceived notions to their design projects. But designers and users can experience places differently and in ways that may be inconsistent with established design practices.

Since most right-handed people turn right at a crossing, it makes sense to put the highest-price merchandise or most interesting features on the right, correct? Not if you are designing in Great Britain. In the United Kingdom where cars travel on the left side of the road, only 45% of right-handers turned right at action decision points. (RDC April 2003, "Right Turns, Left Turns")

Open-office plans are popular and can help people work in new and different ways. Yet, a study of 13,000 office workers found that the most important design feature in an office environment, from the workers' perspectives, was being able to concentrate without distractions -- something that's not possible in most open-office spaces. (RDC April 2003, "Supporting Concentration in Work Environments")

Adding a marked crosswalk will make crossing safer for pedestrians, but only in certain situations. If not properly placed, marked crosswalks can actually increase pedestrian accidents. (RDC Spring 2004, "Pedestrian Safety: Is the Simple Solution the Right One?")

4. NOT MINING OTHER DESIGN DISCIPLINES

Design of all types deals with the core of human experience. The fundamentals of human place experience are consistent across all sorts of spaces, and there are synergies between research done in each design field. Architects can learn from landscape architects, landscape architects can learn from architects, industrial designers can learn from interior designers, interior designers can learn from architects, and so on.

What researchers have learned about navigation can be applied indoors and outdoors. (RDC July 2002, "Wayfinding Principles: Indoors and Out")

Accessibility design does not begin or end at the building door. Creating accessible places means considering best-practices across disciplines, including designing functional approaches and entrances for a full range of weather conditions, even for those with mobility problems. (RDC, April 2003, "Welcoming Places for All: Thinking Beyond ADA Guidelines")

Interior and exterior place design can both have a significant impact on crime control. (RDC January 2003, "Controlling Crime Through Design")

Environmental psychologists and ergonomists have spent a lot of energy developing optimum operating room designs and other disciplines can learn from their experiences. (RDC July 2003, "Lessons from Operating Rooms")

Place experiences happen everywhere. Shopping malls are designed as entertainment destinations -- and so can parks, zoos, museums, and urban downtowns. (RDC Spring 2004, "Shopping as Entertainment: The Mall as a Happening Place")

5. IGNORING THE TOTAL PLACE EXPERIENCE

We do not experience places one sense at a time, but holistically -- all of our sensory mechanisms are continuously employed. Each sense can be used to augment or reduce the impression being created by the other senses.

Scents and sounds can enhance a healing environment (RDC April 2003, "Hospital Designers Become 'Sense Aware'"; October 2002, "Lemon Scent Reduces Agitation") and scents can easily be introduced into a variety of environments with diffusers.

The right sort of background music can increase the money spent in restaurants (RDC October 2003, "Classical Music Increases Money Spent in Restaurants") and stores. (RDC Winter 2004, "Retail Design 1-2-3")

Just as scientists have shown that scents can relax, they have also been shown to affect task performance. (RDC Spring 2004, "Peppermint Odor Improves Performance of Tedious Tasks")

Colors of maximum saturation attract the most attention when paired with any background color and colors with maximum saturation and brightness are most preferred. (RDC Summer 2004, "Color: Attention-Getting and Emotional Responses")

BONUS - UNDERESTIMATING THE VALUE OF NATURE

People need to take mental breaks continuously during the course of the day. Positive distractions and access to nature can provide just the sort of refreshing nudge people need for optimum place experience and performance.

Housing complexes with more trees and grass present have been linked to lower violence levels (RDC January 2002, "Designing with Nature to Reduce Crime") and supportive environments with natural elements can be used to reduce attention deficit symptoms in children. (RDC April 2002, "ADD Children: Nature's Helping Hand")

Plants improve the health and comfort of office workers (RDC April 2002, "Plants Increasing Health and Well-Being") and leafy plants in indoor environments have been linked to increased creativity (RDC January 2003, "Leafy Plants May Enhance Creativity") as have outdoor views. (RDC October 2003, "Designing Laboratory Workplaces".)

Aquariums have repeatedly been shown to positively influence state of mind, with the general population and with special populations, such as Alzheimer's patients. (RDC October 2003, "More Evidence of the Positive Influence of Aquariums")

Sunlight has well publicized influences on human experience, but more subtle influences as well. (RDC Spring 2004. "Less Pain Medicine Required in Sunlit Spaces")

AND. . . designers can't ignore the value of learning from others' experience by reading post-occupancy evaluations and by keeping up with current research information.