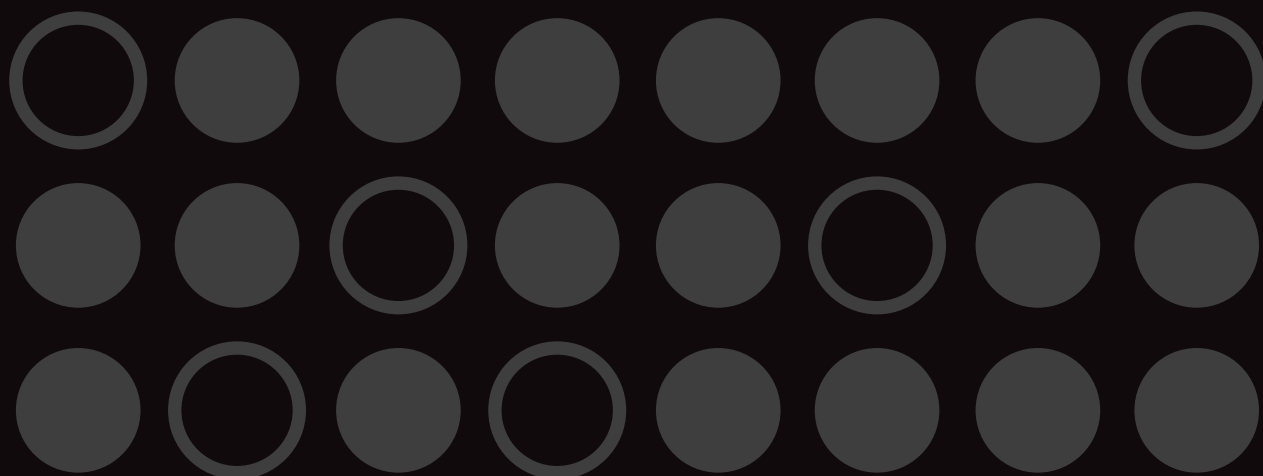# SIX ICON-OCLASTS

WHY ADAPT-ABLE DESIGN MATTERS

Adapting for the human experience

Commercial real estate leaders, designers, and general contractors are being called on to create and adapt space at an unprecedented pace. This series features six provocative perspectives from leading minds representing the fields of architecture, industrial design, research, and interior design. They share insight on how — and more importantly, why — adaptability in design is of paramount importance when creating individual and shared space.

WHEN WE LISTEN TO EACH OTHER, EMBRACE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, AND CO-CREATE SPACE THAT ENCOURAGES INDIVIDUALS TO BE THEMSELVES, THEN COLLABORATION, CREATIVITY, AND CULTURE THRIVE. AND, GREAT CONVERSATIONS FOLLOW.

— KEVIN O'MEARA, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, DIRTT

ADAPTABILITY IS KEY TO RESILIENCE

When we listen to each other, embrace diverse perspectives, and co-create space that encourages individuals to be themselves, then collaboration, creativity, and culture thrive. And, great conversations follow.

Last year, DIRTT spoke to six big thinkers who provided insight on the future of space and its impact on people. These iconoclasts shared thoughts on how the construction industry would be more efficient and sustainable if it embraced the inevitability of change by applying productization, uber flexibility, and technology to construct positive experiences and build relationships.

This installment of the Iconoclasts series features some of the brightest minds from the worlds of architecture, industrial design, research, and interior design. They share insight on how — and more importantly, why — adaptability in design is of paramount importance for everyone in our industry and critical to inviting people into spaces that are intentionally designed and purposefully constructed.

These leaders speak about the hybrid workplace and how human-centered design thinking helps organizations be more adaptable. They say culture and needs of the community are the most important context for any project getting built, and there is a pressing need for cities and their spaces to be more welcoming. They share examples of how configuration forms the foundation of design, but customization and personalization make it successful. And we hear about creating environments that amplify our humanity in a way that is inclusive, equitable, empowering, healing, and functional.

The needs and expectations of people and organizations have shifted dramatically over the past two years. We've reached a turning point where design resiliency is dependent on being adaptable, agile, and approachable.

We invite you to explore the new era of space.

— KEVIN O'MEARA, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, DIRTT

COLLABORATION, CREATIVITY, AND CULTURE THRIVE

WE'VE REACHED A TURNING POINT WHERE DESIGN RESILIENCY IS DEPENDENT ON BEING ADAPTABLE, AGILE, AND APPROACHABLE

— KEVIN O'MEARA, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DIRTT

THRIVING IN THE HYBRID ERA: BE AGILE AND INCLUSIVE

Researcher AMANDA SCHNEIDER sits in her home office in the Greater Chicago Area thinking about a word: work.

"When I say to my kids, 'I'm going to work,' it's no longer a noun — it's a verb," says Schneider, founder of design research firm ThinkLab. "And, to our kids, it looks like we all do the same thing — stare into Zoom. I'm Zooming about legal things, and he's Zooming about marketing things, and she's Zooming about product development things. Younger generations are going to have a fundamentally different view of what it even means to work."

"DESIGNING FOR THE HYBRID ERA WILL REQUIRE AGILITY"

SCHNEIDER SAYS the hybrid era began years ago, but the pandemic has dramatically accelerated and cemented it as normal.

For those who design and build space, this means rethinking what it means to work, and the purpose of the workplace in our broader lives.

"To me, office space is the driver of a lot of other spaces," Schneider says, citing examples like desks at dance studios for parents squeezing in work while waiting for rehearsals to end, or restaurants doubling as workspaces when they're not serving breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

The pressure is on for companies and, in turn, designers to rethink how space is used. "When we're freed up from a work location, just think about what that does for our quality of life," she says.

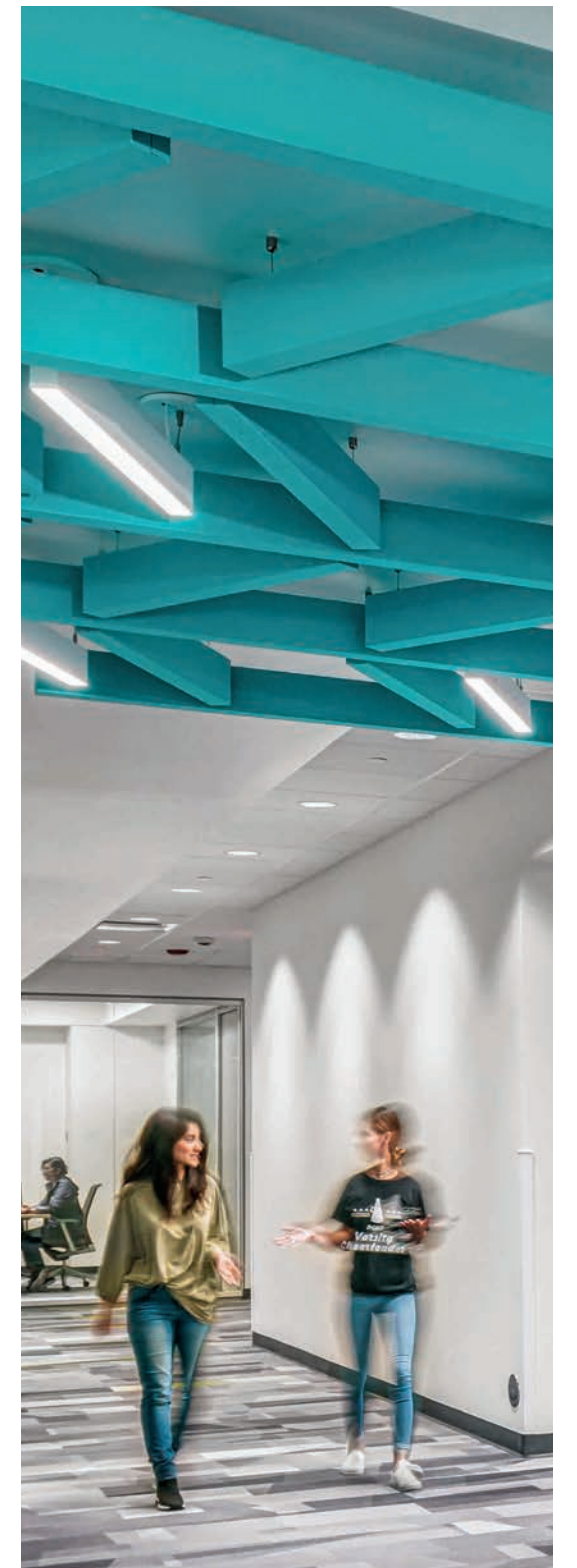"Where we work will have an effect on where we live, where we heal, where we dine, where we play, and where we learn."

Gone are the days of permanent, fixed space. Schneider believes the most important quality of space in the hybrid era will be agility.

"A SPACE CAN'T TRY TO BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE," she says. "Space now must have the agility to flex from Purpose A to Purpose B. Your space may be a café today, and then you clear out some tables and it becomes a yoga studio tomorrow. It's about extending the life of space."

For instance, Schneider's parent company SANDOW Design Group is now remote first, but they are also looking for a brick-and-mortar location in New York that can double as an event space and a coworking environment. It will have open areas, interactive space, and secondary spots used by employees who choose to meet in person. All of them will need to be designed to flex and adapt to changing needs and be built around employee motivation.

"IF PEOPLE CAN GET EVERYTHING FROM THEIR HOME OFFICE THEY CAN GET IN A WORKPLACE, WHERE IS THEIR MOTIVATION TO SHOW UP? WHY WOULD THEY WANT TO GO THERE?" Schneider asks.

"It's ironic because, as we are freed from a set work location, it actually puts more pressure on that physical location to perform."

"Hybrid is the hardest," she says, referencing a recent podcast her company did to explore company culture in the hybrid era. "It's much easier to create a fully remote model, or a fully in-person model. But companies are embarking on this hybrid era because it will be demanded by workers in an increasingly competitive labor market."

Case in point: Microsoft's 2021 Work Trend Index reported that more than 70% of workers want flexible remote work options to continue, while more than 65% are seeking more in-person time with their colleagues.

The ability to work remotely has also led to more people looking at roles within companies in other cities. In fact, the report cites a survey showing that 41% of the global workforce is currently considering leaving their employer for other options.

Hybrid work flexibility is turning into a competitive advantage for organizations that want to both attract and retain talent.

What does that mean for space? Two-thirds of business decision-makers are considering redesigning physical spaces to better accommodate hybrid work environments, the survey shows.

70% OF WORKERS WANT FLEXIBLE REMOTE WORK OPTIONS TO CONTINUE

THRIVING IN THE HYBRID ERA: BE AGILE AND INCLUSIVE

Schneider believes organizations need to act now to design agile spaces. But it's not the only piece of this puzzle. The most successful organizations in the hybrid era will be those that adopt and create flexible space now, and ensure they incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion while doing so.

"In this time of incredible change, we have an opportunity to fundamentally rethink a lot of the building blocks that are not only our workplaces, but the culture our society is built on."

DESIGNING SPACE WITH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN MIND

"As we look at the history of design, it was built around the haves and the have-nots," Schneider says. "Think about some of the historical terms we've used to describe space, such as master bedroom. That's now shifting to owner's suite. The world is becoming more aware of history and bias, as it comes out even in how we talk in the world of interior design."

Schneider wants to see that change, and says the hybrid era will bring new opportunities to explicitly design with diversity and inclusion in mind.

For instance, in a recent focus group her company ran, participants shared stories of a New York-based university campus that had a large, lavish entrance. By watching how people used the space, the university learned that students who came from lower-income neighborhoods didn't feel welcome going through the door.

"It was designed with this opulent, exclusive, country club mentality," Schneider says.

The design firm adapted the space by creating a more approachable entry experience with casual finishes that made students feel more welcome.

"The feeling of belonging can be addressed in design, but we can't do that if we don't have diverse perspectives. And we can't do that if we don't acknowledge that inequities still exist."

When it comes to the workplace, Schneider says companies need to be inclusive when developing hybrid spaces. A recent McKinsey report underscores this point. It found that while overall sentiment of employees surveyed on diversity in the workplace was positive, sentiment on inclusion was markedly worse. "Hiring diverse talent isn't enough — it's the workplace experience that shapes whether people remain and thrive," the authors wrote.

Tackling inclusivity up-front not only allows for more people to feel a sense of belonging, but proves — according to studies — it's good for business.

Management consulting firm Korn Ferry says 87% of organizations that promote diversity and inclusion are more likely to make better decisions. In addition, 75% are faster at bringing products to market, according to the Center for Talent Innovation.

To build more inclusive spaces, Schneider says more people must be at the table in the design stage, including people of color, women, and people who have a robust mix of lived experiences.

"This hybrid era is going to be one of the most important for our culture and society," Schneider says. "Every organization is working to uncover what the right approach is, but it's not one person's decision."

THIS HYBRID ERA WILL BE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR SOCIETY

EQUITABLE DESIGN AMPLIFIES THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

When **CHERYL DURST**, Executive Vice President and CEO of the International Interior Design Association (IIDA), was six years old she visited a museum with her parents. Turning a corner and coming across two divergent pathways, she asked how people know which direction to take — and was thus introduced to the concept of design.

"That was such a phenomenal moment, because it later helped me understand that design isn't accidental. That it is intentional, it is a power, it is a force, it is a thought process," Durst says. For her, this power is imbued with a sacred trust to craft moments that amplify the human experience of a space.

EQUITABLE DESIGN AMPLIFIES THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

RETHINK HOW SPACE IS USED

Image: 2021 IIDA Interior Design Competition Winner, Canopy Grand Rapids by Anderson/Miller, LTD and Valerio Dewalt Train Associates, Photographer Jim Haefner

THANKS TO HER LONG-STANDING LEADERSHIP ROLE AT THE IIDA, Durst has honed unique insights on the impact of design. "Design inherently has the power to make something better," she says. Creating deep meaning for people is what space stands for. That is its purpose, or its "why."

"The more that design can craft adaptable spaces, but also spaces where the purpose is clear, the better," she says.

When she talks to designers, she asks: "Is your consideration of space broad enough so that the built environment is inclusive of purpose, inclusive of the people who will encounter that space?"

Inclusivity begins with an investment in the diversity and training of designers themselves, says Durst. Then, armed with a broader understanding of the world, designers should invite multidisciplinary voices to take a seat at their table — working together to create spaces with meaning that reflect the people using them.

Ultimately, design teams can function as community activists, explaining to others why an environment was designed a certain way and amplifying their experience with it.

"In the realm of design, there has always been the desire to create equitable spaces," says Durst. But the industry has to face some internal discomfort to access a wider and deeper understanding of how people from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences regard and engage with built environments.

EQUITABLE DESIGN AMPLIFIES THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

DIVERSITY SHOULD BEGIN WITHIN THE PROFESSION ITSELF, SHE EXPLAINS.

As social justice movements shine a spotlight on the need for widespread equality, design firms are looking inward and taking stock of who their professionals are, asking, "Are there people of color? Are there people of different abilities? Are there people from different disciplines who are part of that team?" she says.

This responsibility extends beyond diverse identities and perspectives to formal education as well, says Durst.

Designers should be trained to be culturally competent and coherent and to seek a more expansive view of the world. "I'm sure there are some design programs that incorporate a "worldview", but there

is an urgent need for more. An inclusive design curriculum should involve key learnings about how all cultures — not just the traditional majority — but all Black, Indigenous and people of color's cultures craft and express their lives through the physical environment," she says.

Durst refers to this broader expertise as "life literacy." She believes that in addition to design skills, young professionals must understand time and money, become strong visual and verbal communicators, and even "certified sensualists." Essentially, they need to understand all aspects of human behavior.

"YOU CAN'T DESIGN FOR THE WORLD IF YOU'RE NOT OF THE WORLD," she says.

Crafting more inclusive environments should not be the burden of design alone, though. Durst believes that design needs to look beyond its own borders and studios to bring in experts that will help maximize and amplify the people who are set to inhabit a space.

"There is a larger awareness among designers that they aren't just designing for, but they're designing with," says Durst. Experts with diverse perspectives must be invited to join the design process early on, so they can open multiple "windows" through which to view and understand humanity.

EQUITABLE DESIGN STARTS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Image: 2020 IIDA Best of Asia Pacific Design Awards, Showroom and Exhibit Space Winner, Vista by Karv One Design, photo courtesy of Karv One Design

EQUITABLE DESIGN AMPLIFIES
THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

"DESIGNERS SHOULDN'T JUST BE SITTING IN A ROOM WITH THEIR C-SUITE CLIENT. HR SHOULD BE IN THAT ROOM. IF IT IS A PUBLIC PROJECT, COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE IN THE ROOM AS WELL," says Durst.

She provides examples of how this multidisciplinary approach could play out in the real world. For example, on a healthcare project, social workers, experts in nursing or in critical care, can be invited to voice their knowledge of the experiential needs a space might fulfill.

"To be an active participant of design doesn't mean that you're only a practitioner of design. It's anyone who is invested in amplifying the human condition," Durst says.

So what about the end users of a built environment? They develop connection and appreciation of a space not just by understanding its function, but also the ingrained purpose as it relates directly to them.

Durst says that is when they realize "I was considered in the design of this place, and this place has made me better, or this place has made me comfortable, or this place has amplified who I am or what I'm doing."

INCLUSION IS INHERENTLY
MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Image: 2021 IIDA Interior Design Competition Best of Competition Winner, Kirkkonummi Library 'Fyyri' by JKMM Architects, Photographer: Tuomas Uusheimo

EQUITABLE DESIGN AMPLIFIES THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Making people aware of why a space was designed a certain way is actually community activism, says Durst. "Design is just as powerful an educator as it is anything else," she explains.

Durst believes her industry is obligated to communicate the goal of design — explaining to a community not just the facts of a new structure, like a library, workspace, or health center — but the purpose a space fulfills, and the meaning they can create through engagement of that environment.

Because when someone realizes a place was crafted with them in mind, it changes their relationship with it, says Durst.

"Human beings are innately hardwired for a sense of place. When we can't quite figure out what a place is supposed to be, or what we're supposed to do in that place, we are inherently uncomfortable. And so, the ability for design to ... clearly articulate what is supposed to happen in that place, that is all part of inclusion," she says.

Design is often regarded as a luxury by the general public and some clients and end-users, says Durst. But an inclusive design process can reveal to people — designers and inhabitants of a space alike — how it is a necessary, vital, and essential element of being human.

THROUGH EDUCATION, DESIGN IS ACTIVISM

Top image: 2020 IIDA Best of Asia Pacific Design Awards, Showroom and Exhibit Space Winner, Vista by Karv One Design, photo courtesy of Karv One Design. Left image: IIDA Headquarters, Photographer Eric Laignel

THE GREAT CITY RETHINK — DESIGNERS ADVOCATE TO MAKE CITY SPACE MORE INVITING

At 1,450 feet tall and 110 stories high, Chicago's Willis Tower is one of the world's tallest buildings and a symbol of engineering excellence. But as decades passed, the building began to feel exclusive, and not in a good way, says **BENJY WARD**, a principal at architecture and design firm Gensler.

"The Willis Tower was originally built on a podium that became a fortress that kept the rest of the city out," says Ward.

THE GREAT CITY RETHINK —
DESIGNERS ADVOCATE TO MAKE
CITY SPACE MORE INVITING

Constructed in the 1970s when large parts of the population were leaving cities for the suburbs, the Willis Tower was designed to house office workers and deter anyone else from entering the building. Ward says fear of rising crime rates in the '70s, as well as unwanted foot traffic, led the tower to be designed to wall itself off from the surrounding neighborhood.

"The base of the building was made from big granite walls that kept people out," Ward says. "Nobody ever felt welcome going into the building unless there was a purpose for being there."

Ward, who is also the design principal in charge of the recent repositioning of the iconic building, says the redesign changes that.

"THE WHOLE IDEA IS FOR IT TO BE AS INCLUSIVE AS POSSIBLE TO DRIVE AS MUCH FOOT TRAFFIC AS POSSIBLE," he says of the project named "Catalog," an homage to the building's original tenant, the Sears Roebuck Company.

Building owner Blackstone invested $500 million to transform the 47-year-old skyscraper to add more than 300,000 square feet of new retail, dining, and entertainment space at the base of the tower; 150,000 square feet of new tenant amenity spaces; and a 30,000 square-foot outdoor deck and garden.

The reimagined base of the building will "dissolve the borders between work and life," according to Gensler, and "foster a collaborative, warm atmosphere."

It's one of a handful of projects Ward and the team at Gensler Chicago have been working on — including the transformation of Chicago's long-vacant 2.8 million square foot Post Office building into a hub for business and commerce — to help revive Chicago's city core for modern times.

"We're taking these huge iconic buildings and completely rethinking how they work for a more contemporary lifestyle … and transforming them to be more flexible in the future," he says.

Images: Willis Tower. Courtesy of Gensler

THE URGENT NEED TO MAKE CITIES MORE INVITING AND INCLUSIVE

The Willis Tower and Post Office projects are examples of how cities — and the companies that help them thrive — are working to be more inviting.

It's a much bigger challenge in the hybrid workplace era where millions of downtown office workers across the country will opt to continue working from home, which could reshape the defining characteristics of a vibrant city core.

While 2020 was about leaving the office and urban centers, 2022 is expected to bring people back to those places and spaces. At least that's the hope. Designers and architects will be called on to help rethink how space is built to make it a new, more inclusive experience in every sense of the word.

"THE PANDEMIC HAS ACCELERATED EVERYONE'S URGENCY AROUND SPACE, AROUND THE ENVIRONMENT, AS WELL AS CULTURE AND INCLUSION," Ward says. "It makes a lot more sense for buildings to be more inclusive."

Ward believes cities are more inclusive today and that infrastructure and architecture firms that build space need to reflect that. Inclusive design must start with the realization that you need the right people in the room.

"Architecture has historically been a very white profession. We're working hard to change that," says Ward. "We won't have truly inclusive architecture as a society until those in this profession are more representative of the population of people who are out there experiencing these buildings."
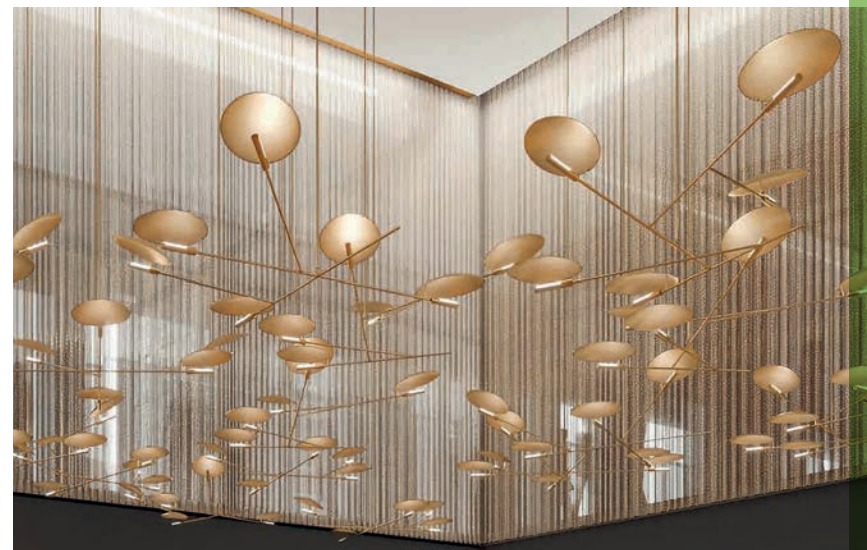
Image: Willis Tower. Courtesy of Gensler

HOW TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE METROPOLITAN SPACES

The post-pandemic revitalization of cities will require designers and architects to create places and spaces where people want to come — even if they no longer need to.

It will start with the reinvention of the workplace. "We're at a weird crossroads, where we have to figure out the office," Ward says. He envisions the workplace will become more like a showroom or a "brand beacon" for employees to connect with each other and their clients.

"You might have 40% of your staff working in an office, and maybe offices get smaller, but they can have more space for client meetings, larger events, venues for things that are more public, and things that you can't do at home," Ward says. "You can really push the idea of brand, which is something I don't think you can do online because everything done online is branded Zoom. Physical space can be branded in a way that reminds people [where they work], and creates an affiliation with the company."

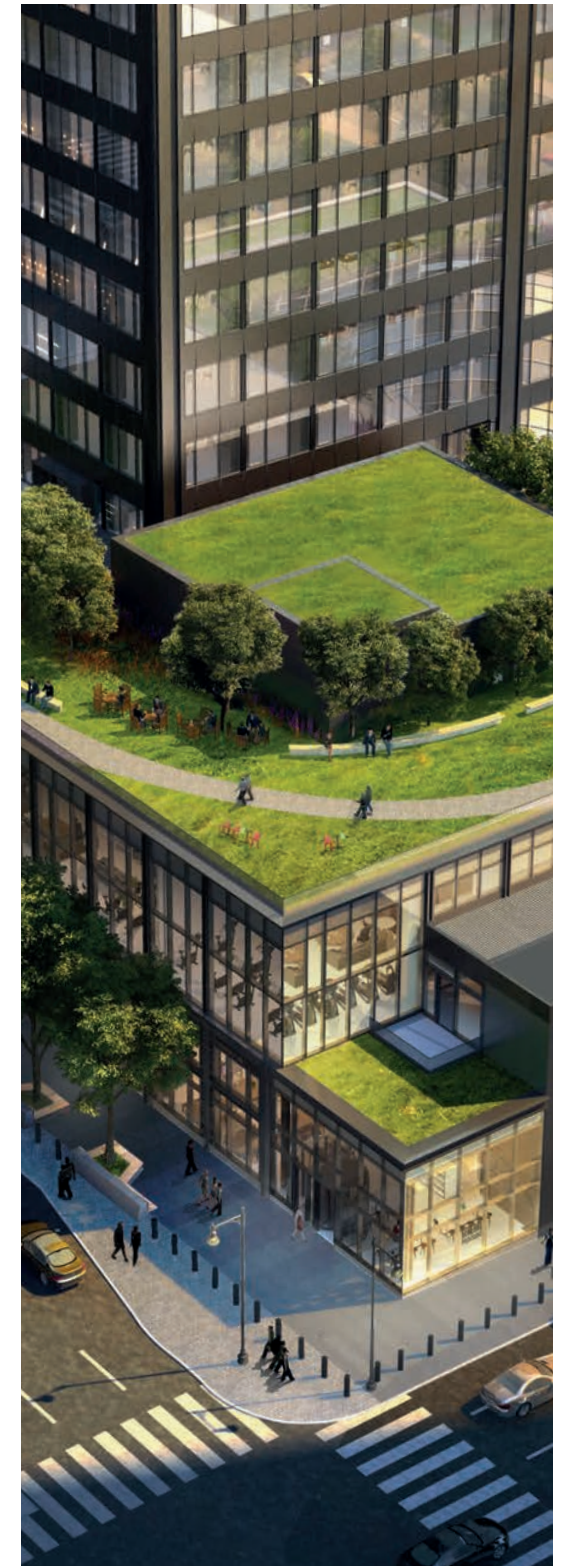Image: Willis Tower. Courtesy of EQ Office

When strategically designed, workplaces will highlight modifications brought on by the hybrid era and act as an experience rather than a space to do work. Buildings will also house a wider range of businesses and activities, from work to events to entertainment.

"THE IDEA OF CREATING SPACES THAT INCLUDE AMENITIES THAT ARE OUTDOORS, AND ALLOWING PEOPLE TO WORK ANYWHERE, ARE THINGS WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT FOR YEARS," SAYS WARD. "BUT NOW, PEOPLE ARE REALLY PAYING ATTENTION."

Workplaces will remain hubs of idea exchanges, and by creating space that is less structured to enable creativity, many believe the workplace can become a destination rather than an obligation.

Cities will need to follow suit, offering a compelling range of attractions for workers in their off-hours, as well as tourists — everything from arts and culture to retail, parks, and other public spaces.

Images: Willis Tower. Left image courtesy of EQ Office, right image courtesy of Gensler

THE GREAT CITY RETHINK —
DESIGNERS ADVOCATE TO MAKE
CITY SPACE MORE INVITING

Image: Willis Tower. Courtesy of EQ Office

"Just as offices need amenities to get workers out of pajamas to drive or take the train downtown to hang out with co-workers, cities will need to build parks and other spaces filled with great art and lots of people," Ward says.

As Mary Daly, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco says, that would create "work-life integration" rather than "balance."

No matter how the post-pandemic era reshapes our cities, Ward believes they will survive and be sustainable if the right choices are made today.

"I DON'T THINK CITIES ARE GOING AWAY," WARD SAYS. "THEY'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO TRANSFORM TO GET THE DENSITY THAT THEY NEED TO BE EFFECTIVE."

The challenge for designers, architects, and other decision-makers is to reimagine the city of the future that can adapt no matter what global disruption is thrown at it next.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS THE FOUNDATION OF EQUITABLE, BUILT SPACE

When self-described recovering architect RICO QUIRINDONGO talks about creating enriched built spaces, he frames the conversation — and his design solutions — around the people who will inhabit them.

Throughout his 27 years practicing architecture, and now in his role as interim director at the City of Seattle's Office of Planning and Community Development, Quirindongo bases his approach to design on the incorporation of community-based perspectives.

Image: Mike Nakamura Photography

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS THE FOUNDATION OF EQUITABLE, BUILT SPACE

"CULTURE AND NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTEXTS FOR ANY PROJECT GETTING BUILT," Quirindongo says.

Generally, during a design process, there's not enough engagement with communities to identify their needs. This missing insight is often subconsciously embedded in people's cultural experiences and backgrounds, and can reveal what a community requires of a space.

Quirindongo's goal in this scenario is to help draw that knowledge to the surface, so people become aware of, and understand, the impact that built environments have on them. Once others better understand the requirements of a built environment, they can then influence the design process by asking for specific needs to be met. Quirindongo believes this collaborative process is integral to framing equitable design choices and directions.

An empowered community engagement process does lead to the creation of environments where "your product, your office space, or your project will be more well embraced and more well utilized because of that input," he says.

But productivity should not be the key metric by which we gauge the value of a built environment, says Quirindongo. Rather, through advocacy, he foresees a future where buildings are the consequence of "a decision-making process that's about personal wellness, family well-being, and community health."

DRAW KNOWLEDGE TO THE SURFACE

Project images: Lake Union Partners

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS THE FOUNDATION OF EQUITABLE, BUILT SPACE

Quirindongo's community-centric approach to design is not focused on revenue or profit-related outcomes, "but more on the social determinants of health and individual and community wellness," he says.

So, how does he discern and incorporate these considerations? **AS A CONTEXTUALIST ARCHITECT, HE DESIGNS A BUILDING'S SHAPE AND FORM IN RESPONSE TO THE BUILT AND NATURAL COMPONENTS OF AN ENVIRONMENT. TWO KEY CONSIDERATIONS ARE HISTORY AND CULTURE.**

When understood — thanks to a stakeholder engagement process — Quirindongo says history and culture provide a detailed, contextual map of the racial and social demographics that impact a project. With this insight, he can craft a more equitable design approach that reflects the specific cultural needs and well-being of those set to use the space.

Quirindongo says architects and designers should ask themselves several questions throughout the community engagement process: Where am I? Whom am I serving? Whom should I be talking with? What do they need? What is their context? Where did they come from? What are they projecting their needs to be for the future?

Methods of engagement range from surveys and face-to-face interactions or interviews, to public open houses and even gamified consultations.

From there, Quirindongo combines the discovered foundational cultural knowledge with his own research on the history of a place. And, throughout the process, he checks in to ask stakeholders the following: "Did I get that right?"

The process is not meant to be a one-sided, fact-finding mission for the sole benefit of designers, though. Quirindongo says it's a chance for all parties to learn the value of, and advocate for, a space that enhances well-being, as well as to inspire respect for an environment's culture, history, and place.

CREATE AN EMPOWERED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Alongside jobs, living wages, and housing access, Quirindongo lists the "quality of a built environment" as an equally important barometer of human health and wellness.

It's just not greatly understood as a need, he says, which is why community engagement must connect the dots between quality of life and the way space is accessed. Armed with this awareness, inhabitants will have the "tools to explore manipulation of their environment and how their environment can change, and then empower them to take actions to make those changes for their own betterment," he says.

But he doesn't think the general public should be responsible for making those initial connections on their own. Through the act of public engagement, **ARCHITECTS "HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE A BRIDGE AND TO GIVE PEOPLE A REASON TO WANT TO KNOW MORE,"** says Quirindongo.

Of course, they aren't the only part of this puzzle. He notes that an investment in design centered on health and well-being requires buy-in from corporate entities like real estate developers, property owners, and employers.

While the design community can't directly incentivize these industries to adopt a contextualist approach, "we can advocate for — or provide case study examples of — how we're able to create more enriched environments," Quirindongo says.

"My job has always been to push on comfort," he continues. It can be challenging for companies to adapt and change the way they engage with spaces, but, increasingly, employees and neighborhoods are asking them to do just that.

People are starting to realize they have choices and don't have to put up with living circumstances or workspaces they aren't happy with, says Quirindongo.

"Over time, we'll see more of a demand and a need for place-based decision-making, community-based decision-making, crowdsourcing of information, a need to understand the history of community and people, and then how that informs what our investments are," he says.

FOR QUIRINDONGO, THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF A REVOLUTION.

ADAPTABLE ORGANIZATIONS INVEST IN EMPOWERED COLLABORATION

When it comes to the open office floor plan, there are typically two types of people: Those who enjoy working in big, open spaces with the opportunity to bump into colleagues and make small talk, and those that hate every second of it.

The fact that there will be differing opinions is an important consideration, says **DIANA RHOTEN**. As an organizational design and innovation strategist, Rhoten says it's important to look at people's behaviors to understand how to design and adapt the workplace.

In a world where adaptability is a key ingredient of resiliency, companies need agile environments and teams who are deeply collaborative.

Workplace design can be the make-or-break factor.

ADAPTABLE ORGANIZATIONS INVEST IN EMPOWERED COLLABORATION

With an open office floor plan, a common misconception is that "if we have open space work environments, people will naturally bump into each other and suddenly will have serendipitous, simultaneous explosions of innovation. It just does not work that way," Rhoten explains.

Instead, many people wear headphones or walk the long way around an open space office, rather than take a direct route that might require engagement with colleagues. Rhoten says this is the opposite effect of what an adaptable workplace seeks to achieve, which is a confluence of social, technological, and physical conditions that inspire collaboration.

Collaboration, as she outlines it, is more than working together to achieve a common goal. It's a non-siloed engagement process that empowers people to take collective ownership of their work — and the workspaces they inhabit.

"EMPLOYEES SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE THEIR FUTURE. THAT'S WHERE ENLIGHTENED ORGANIZATIONS ARE HEADED. THEY'RE ASKING THEIR PEOPLE WHAT THEY NEED AND WANT. THEN THEY'RE WORKING WITH THEM TO CO-CREATE IT," she says.

### DESIGNING FOR COLLABORATION AND ADAPTABILITY

As important as co-creation of adaptable environments and processes is, it can be challenging for workers to articulate exactly what they need or want from a space, Rhoten says.

She recommends collaborating with employees through conversation and observation to determine how workplaces might best serve everyone — a fitting approach considering 87% of employees actually list building relationships and collaboration with team members as their top-rated needs for the office, according to a 2021 survey from PwC.

Employee behavior and feedback should be what drives the spatial design of an office, she says. Everything needs to be flexible and allow for many different modes of working. Options could include spots in the office for relaxed one-on-one work, intense, heads-down spaces, and areas for larger groups to convene.

There are a few key characteristics of adaptable spaces that can act as a starting point for consideration, says Rhoten.

For instance, ensuring employees have access to different, flexible workspace zones that are dependent on the type of work they're doing. Ask yourself and your team, "Do you have enough quiet space. Do you have enough collaborative space?"
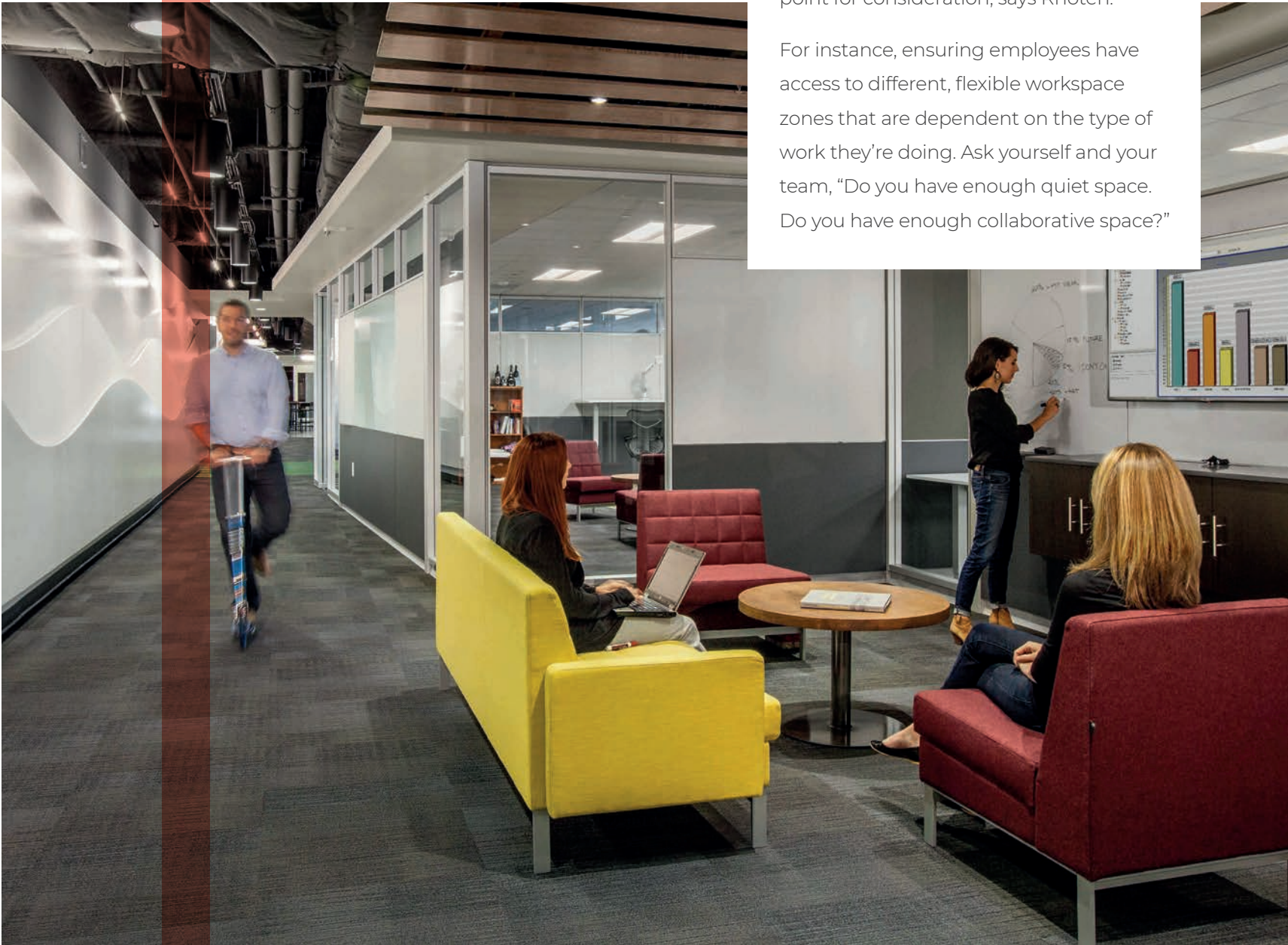
EMPLOYEES SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE THEIR FUTURE

ADAPTABLE ORGANIZATIONS INVEST IN EMPOWERED COLLABORATION

THERE IS NO ONE DESIGN SOLUTION

A SECOND CHARACTERISTIC IS MODULARITY. "Do you have the ability to configure and reconfigure not just for what we know today, but for what we might learn tomorrow?" Rhoten asks. "This includes being able to close off spaces, open up spaces, enlarge spaces, and being able to actually reshape them altogether."

These options should not only be provided to professional service and knowledge workers, she cautions. Experiences of more hands-on employees need to be equally considered.

"Reconfigure what was the traditional organizational chart into more of a networks-and teams-based model. By doing that — if you have teams of folks that are working across functions — you can actually design the work day so that flexibility and hybridity is applicable and distributed across the whole organization's culture, structure, and space."

By definition, there is no one design solution for adaptive spaces, Rhoten notes. That said, there are some overarching, human-centered design characteristics that can be employed by organizations to help them be more adaptive, including shifting from a conventional, hierarchical model to one that is more highly distributed and cross-functional.

In her two decades of helping organizations be both disruptive and resilient, Rhoten says success comes from being purpose-driven with a focus on customer needs and aspirations.

ADAPTABLE ORGANIZATIONS INVEST IN EMPOWERED COLLABORATION

"If we anchor on the customer's needs there is something constant in a world of flux. It doesn't mean we don't need to change, but we know what we're tracking against," she says.

Employees — and, by extension, their workspaces — play an integral role in fulfilling an organization's purpose. Increasingly, leaders know they can't foster productive, resilient work environments without actively engaging their teams in the process.

"Really adaptive organizations are based on teams and networks that flex and mix and mingle, largely based on what the customer and the environment is demanding from the organization," says Rhoten. This structure embraces the "bottom-up power" of employees, empowering them to better deliver on an organization's purpose and performance in an environment facilitated by more collaborative, flexible approaches to both space and management.

Rhoten believes that multidisciplinary integration and insight can accelerate an organization's journey toward resilience. She suggests organizational designers work hand in hand with architects, engineers, and interior designers to combine their varied perspectives, in order to craft highly intentional spaces that are adaptable in both physical and social ways.

Not surprisingly, the application of a framework or process that invites employees to shape their work environments — and also encourages cross-collaboration among various design and change management professions — leads to built space solutions that diverge from the status quo, Rhoten says. That includes a move away from traditional workplace design and toward flexible environments that reflect the varied needs of teams across an organization.

Finally, Rhoten highlights the tremendous value of designing for wellness, which 84% of employees now expect of their work environment, according to a recent Armstrong World Industries, Inc. report. **"WHAT TYPES OF RESPITE OPPORTUNITIES AND PHYSICAL LOCATIONS ARE YOU PROVIDING PEOPLE TO CLOSE THEIR EYES, TO MEDITATE, TO BREASTFEED IF THEY NEED TO?** People want those moments; they need those moments. This is not always designed into our offices right now and really must be key elements going forward."

As companies move forward, collaborating to create adaptive organizational structures and workspaces that will in turn further incentivize connection and agility, Rhoten reminds designers and business leaders of a maxim from Stewart Brand, author of How Buildings Learn. "Resilience is not because some designer has a brilliant prediction of the future. It's just because they know how to design for the inevitability that change will happen," she says.

FOCUSING ON PURPOSE AND WELLNESS

DESIGNING FOR THE MODERN HUMAN

Designing for the modern human? Personalize, customize, and make it sustainable.

When **BRET RECOR** was brought in by Away to design a new suitcase, he wanted it to be more than mini storage on wheels. To Recor, the founder and creative director of San Francisco-based design firm Box Clever, the product also needed to be functional for living as a human on the move in our modern world.

DESIGNING FOR THE MODERN HUMAN

Image: Box Clever. Away

In 2015, with the help of Recor and his team, Away launched a line of luggage that was not only sleek and durable but included portable power for charging mobile devices and lockable flat-fold zippers. It addressed two critical needs for travelers — staying connected and secure.

Since its launch, Away has become one of the most successful modern luggage brands on the market, achieving unicorn status — a term given to companies that reach valuations over $1 billion — by the end of the following year.

"WE DIDN'T TRY TO REINVENT THE SUITCASE," RECOR SAYS OF HIS COMPANY'S WORK WITH AWAY. "IT WAS MORE ABOUT LOOKING AT WHAT THE NEEDS ARE TODAY AND ADAPTING."

That's the lesson for companies of all sizes and across all industries. Consider the changing needs and behaviors of end users — whether it's a customer, client, or employee — and design products, services, and spaces to adapt.

Flexibility has become especially critical in an era where work, home, and play are more intertwined than ever before. Designers are now being called on to create products and spaces that can be both customized and personalized for today's modern demands.

CONSIDER THE CHANGING NEEDS AND BEHAVIORS OF END USERS

DESIGNING FOR THE MODERN HUMAN

WHY CONFIGURATION WILL BE CRITICAL

Recor's firm operates at the intersection of industrial design, brand strategy, and investment. Much of his work has been designing products, but his award-winning design agency has also undertaken projects in furniture, lighting, brand experiences, structural design, and a range of digital initiatives.

The pandemic forced people to think more about their surroundings: Doing a cardio workout in the living room or hosting a work video conference in the garage has given people a new perspective on how to use their space.

As a designer, Recor is interested in that balance of work and life, and believes space plays a significant role. He says configuration and flexible work settings will be increasingly important for people who spend the majority of their day in a workplace environment.

"A lot of it has to do with being able to perform in a wide range of environments," Recor says. "That's where we're seeing a need to have more hyper-flexible configuration. Once you make a rigid structure, unless you're constantly monitoring and trying to fine-tune it, it gets difficult for employees to flow and evolve and modify for certain activities, like teamwork or isolated work."

Configuration options are also key to improving user experience. In 2020, Recor's business-to-consumer design company launched the July air conditioner. The window-mounted unit can be adapted to fit different window sizes, and comes with changing faceplates to hide the mechanics and match a user's home decor.

THE DESIGN SOLUTION MADE A TRADITIONALLY CUMBERSOME PRODUCT ADAPTABLE TO BE BEAUTIFULLY AND SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATED INTO PEOPLE'S HOMES.

"We wanted to take an inactive object and turn it into something that is more of a celebrated piece of decor," says Recor. "With July, we said, 'You have to have this thing in your window, so how do we improve the experience?' We improved the installation ... and made the front face interchangeable so that you could put whatever material or color you want on it so you're not looking at vents in the middle of your precious space. For us, it was not just trying to solve a problem, but instead thinking about how it could be made to live with you better."

Images: BoxClever. July. Photographer: Jesse Recor

THE PUSH FOR PERSONALIZATION

Configuration may be the foundation of designing a product or space today, but personalization makes it successful and sustainable. It's about giving people what they want and the ability to change when they want.

Recor says the challenge designers have is bringing personalization into their work to provide a high-quality experience and build customer loyalty over time.

"You don't just design a solution; you design a relationship," he says. "It starts with a product or service, but it's going to grow over time. And that's how you succeed. You have to continue to move the relationship forward."

Consider retail as an example, says Recor. When customers buy a product that eventually needs support, how the brand plans their support engagement dictates the overall product experience. In cases where companies automate help using robotic dial-in options that are difficult to use, the relationship with the product changes because the customer can't speak up and feel heard. Organizations should think about the entire lifecycle of a product or space, and think about every touchpoint a person has with it.

Recor is bullish on opportunities with the workplace and suggests it's time to rethink how things have been done historically.

"Take what direct-to-consumer brands are doing with customer engagement and flip it on its head with the office," he says. "If the product is flexible, rather than buying it, maybe you subscribe to it as a service. Then when you want to change something out, or something breaks, it becomes a little bit more circular."

For designers, that means really understanding what gets used and what doesn't in a space, and then swapping components in and out on the fly. "Maybe you need more storage and fewer chairs because people are standing more," he says. "Or maybe you need more lounge areas because a lot of people want to sit, but you didn't originally configure it that way from the onset. You should get more active engagement versus hearing 'I hope we get this order right and everyone likes it, and if they don't, we'll tear it out in a year and do it over again.'"

RECOR SAYS GLOBAL ISSUES LIKE THE PANDEMIC AND CLIMATE CHANGE — AND THE NEED FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO RESPOND — ARE A CALL TO ACTION FOR DESIGNERS TO CREATE PRODUCTS AND SPACES THAT ARE BOTH FUNCTIONAL AND SUSTAINABLE.

"Designers, in general, want to figure out how to make things better," he says. "With everything that's happening in the world lately, it's pushed us to rethink a lot of things at once. It's given us a lot of freedom to make larger strides. I think what we're seeing here is the beginning questioning of established methods and the lifestyle that we've had for a long time. It's pushing people to rethink and to try to find ways to solve different problems."

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Image: Box Clever. Veil
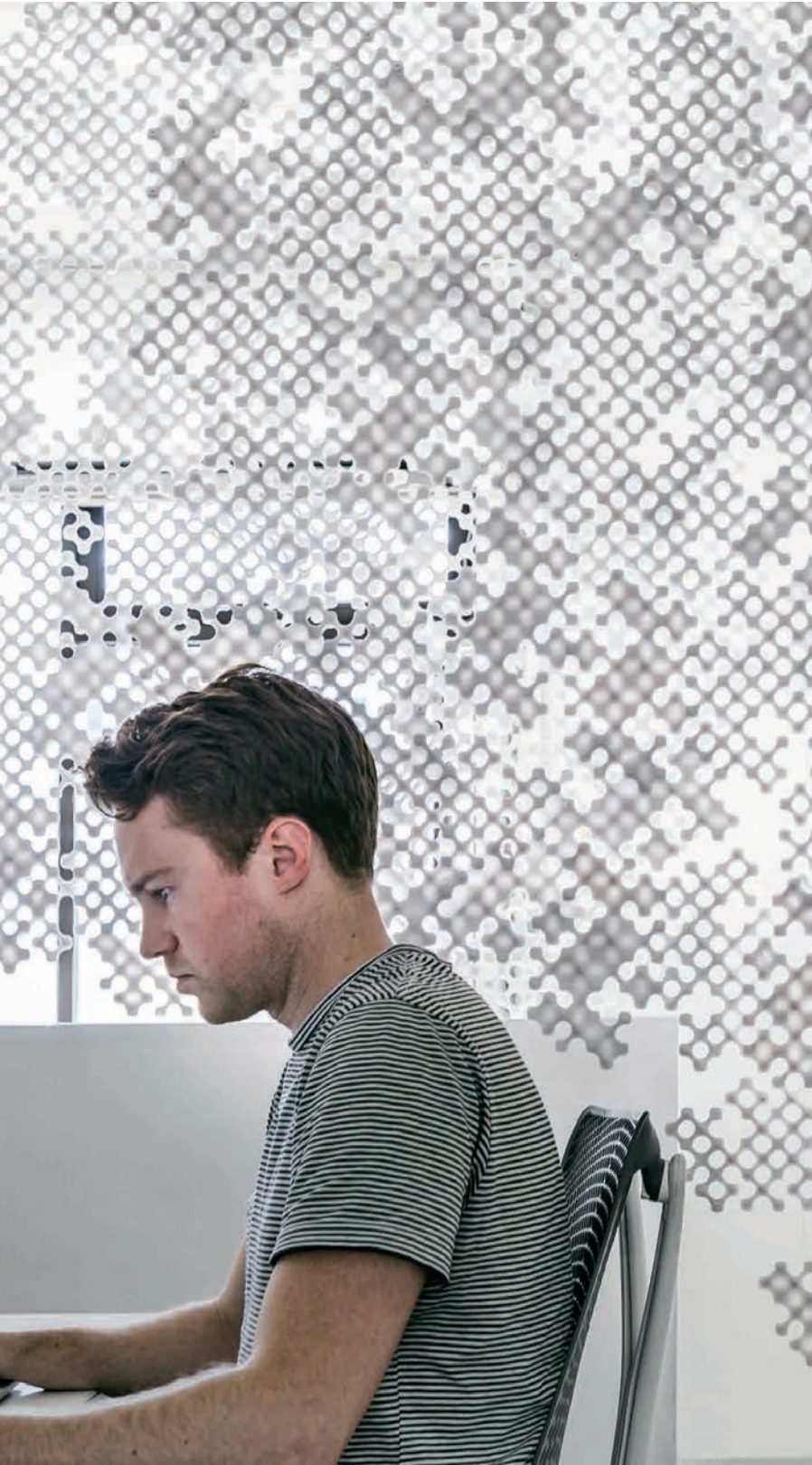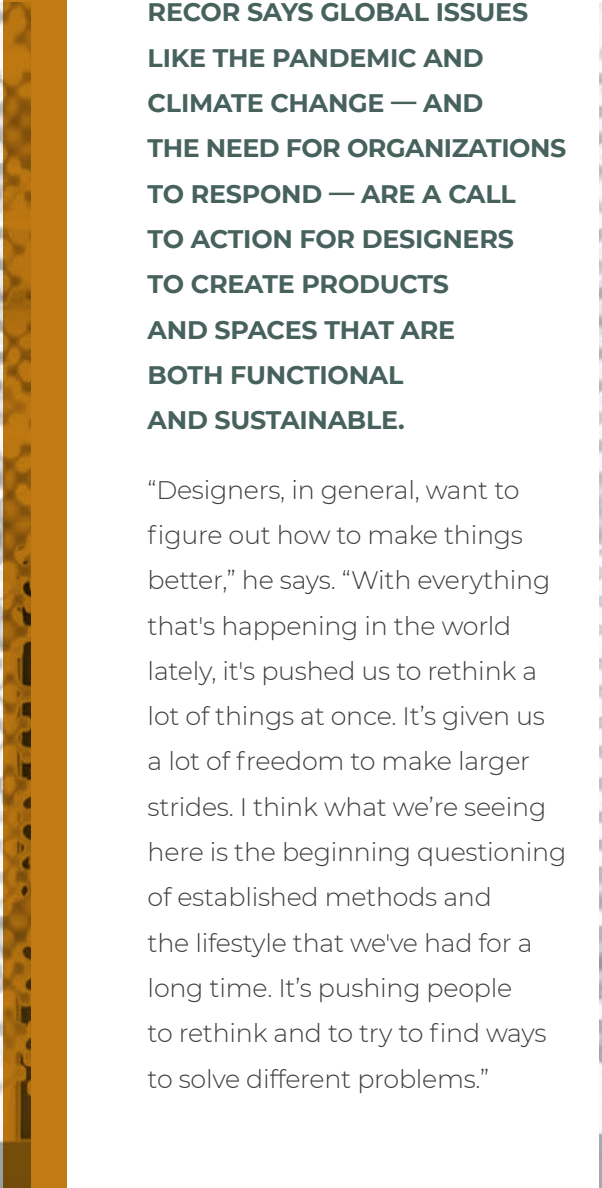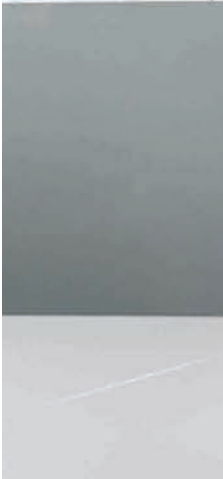
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